Interview
David Smit

Articles
Sketchbook of **John U. Abrahamson**, **plus** we interview **Amanita Design!**

The Gallery
Soheil Danesh, Alex Broeckel and **Andreas Rocha,** plus more!

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IMPROVING YOUR
ENVIRONMENTS
FROM BEGINNERS GUIDES TO ADVANCED CUSTOM BRUSHES

Abandoned Factory
Serg Souleiman transforms a simple Google SketchUp render into an abandoned factory in our **Using 3D as a Base for 2D Painting** tutorial series

New!!! Painting the Undead
Richard Tilbury takes on the undead as he kicks off our new tutorial series; with a steak in hand and a garlic necklace, his first battle is with ... a vampire!

Custom Brushes: Trees, Leaves & Branches
Roberto F · Castro shows us how to create credible looking vegetation in the final installment of our Custom Brushes series. Free brushes ahoy!!

Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting
Nykolai Aleksander wraps up this extensive series and covers such things as finishing touches, filters, the Unsharpen Mask and saving out your PS work

Editorial

Welcome to a superbly packed issue of 2DArtist, and in marking the end of another year we'll be checking out the final chapters of three of our current tutorial series', in preparation for three brand new ones starting in January for a fresh and sparkly 2010!

We've gone environment friendly this month with three tutorials dedicated to creating stunning environments! First up, Serg Souleiman is here to teach us his techniques when using a 3D base, created in Google SketchUp, to concept an industrial scene. With this series we've been giving artists free reign in terms of the genre of work they create, and it's been a great experience to watch as they've all created and submitted such wildly different scenes. I think we have certainly proved a point with this series: that simple 3D can in fact improve your painting workflow and help you face some of those tricky perspective, scale and depth issues! So be afraid no more: 3D is your friend – embrace it!

Our second environment tutorial comes in the form of Roberto F. Castro's Custom Brushes lesson, in which he shows us how to master the art of creating brushes to paint leaves and trees for environments (p.70). If you've ever had problems painting trees for your scenes, then you'll want to check this out: Roberto takes us from scratch through the entire brush creation process, showing us how to create the trunk and add the different layers of leaves using different custom-made brushes to get a wholly believable-looking end result!

And to wrap up the environment painting craze we have happily stumbled into this month, Nykolai Aleksander brings us the final installment of her Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting tutorial series for Photoshop, where she's making all those final adjustments and saving the image out for various needs (p.88). If you've been following this series then you'll no doubt be a Nykolai fan by now; she has brought us honest and light-hearted tutorials filled with information that you can only get from an artist who has been painting every day (sometimes without sleeping) in Photoshop for the past 7 years! This is someone who has very kindly and selflessly offered us her complete knowledge, and you'd be a fool not to take her advice on board. So get studying and paint, paint, paint!

Bringing something new to the table this month is Richard Tilbury, with his first chapter of our new Painting the Undead series. This month: painting a vampire! Avoiding clichés and wanting to make his own mark on the subject, Richard takes us right from the thumbnailing stage and through the entire concepting and painting process, so get your oversized cape on and fly over to p.80 for your first fix of some ghoulish painting fun!

Our interviews this month feature the charismatic and openly honest artist, David Smit, as well as the geniuses behind the immensely successful – and downright fun – Flash game, Machinarium. David Smit was with us last month to conclude our Dynamic Characters tutorial series, and we had such fun working with him that we wanted to know more, and thought you all should, too! David is not only well traveled in a global sense, but has also worked for various game companies and has an impressive educational CV to boot. To find out why he seeks to do what those will not expect, and how Lego helped to forge his creative career, check out p.6. Jakub Dvorský & Adolf Lachman then talk to us on behalf of Amanita Design on about

the adorable and hugely addictive, Machinarium. For a behind the scenes look, turn to p.30.

Our Sketchbook this month has shaped up to be a deep and curious look into John U. Abrahamson's sketches for his upcoming exhibition in California, Flesh and Blood. Using an automatic drawing process, John uncovers strong feelings and issues that come to light when he puts pencil to paper, often associated with his abandonment by his mother as a child, as well as past relationships and the inspirational beauty he sees when he's out and about in the world. Seeing the world through another's eyes can really open your own to what's around you, so be sure to talk a walk today, fill your lungs with some fresh air, and breathe in some inspiration!

We'll be seeing you in 2010. Have a very happy Christmas and a creative New Year! Ed.

Contents

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1. Open the magazine in Reader;

2. Go to the **View** menu, then **Page display**;

3. Select **Two-up Continuous**, making sure that **Show Cover Page** is also selected.

David Smit

When not traveling or working overseas, David resides in Amsterdam, freelancing in concept art, illustration and art direction jobs. It's only when he sleeps that he's not busy! He is always on the search for great projects, opportunities, stories, good music, and a nice cold beer.

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Contributing Artists

Every month many artists around the world contribute to **3DCreative** and **2DArtist** magazines. Here you can find out a bit more about them! If you would like to be a part of **3DCreative** or **2DArtist** magazine, please contact: lynette@3dtotal.com

Nykolai Aleksander

Born in Germany in 1978, Nykolai moved to England in 1999, and currently lives in South Africa with her husband. She's been painting digitally since 2002, and works as a freelance illustrator for both private clients and companies.

www.admemento.com

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John U. Abrahamson

Born in a suburb of Chicago in 1962, Abrahamson was introduced to religion at a very young age, acquiring the religious visual vocabulary that would later play so heavily in his work. He attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His artistic inspirations include: his religious upbringing, his first wife's physical disability, and the urban decay of Chicago's neighborhoods.

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Richard Tilbury

Has had a passion for drawing since being a couple of feet tall. He studied fine art and was eventually led into the realm of computers several years ago. His brushes have slowly been dissolving in white spirit since the late 90s, and now his graphics tablet has become their successor. He still sketches regularly, balancing his time between 2D and 3D.

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rich@3dtotal.com
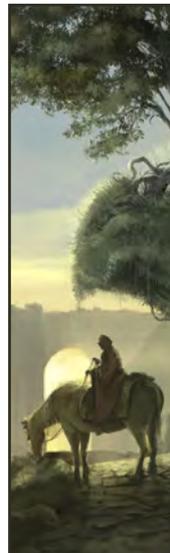
Roberto F·Castro

An architect and visual artist; Roberto has won awards in architecture and design and is the author of several architectural projects. As a visual artist he uses both traditional and digital techniques alike, and he develops works incorporating digital painting, concept art and animation. A great part of his work is focused on architectural environments, futuristic design, and character/creature design.

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Amanita Design

A small independent game developing studio established in 2003, located in the Czech Republic. Amongst their most popular projects are the games, *Samorost1*, *Samorost2*, *Questionaut* and *Machinarium*.

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Branko Bistrovic

Color Supervisor in an animation studio by day, and a dark and handsome doodler by night. He hopes to one day achieve the coveted status of concept artist, but for the moment is happy with bringing to life his own imaginings for himself, as well as some contract work on the side, of course.

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Amanita Design

"I still want everything, to do everything, see everything, and make everything... my goal now is to keep working at the places where work is not a job, but a passion."

David Smit

David Smit, 12 months into his travels around the world whilst freelancing and working as an art director to fund his way, gives us a few moments from his enviable life in our latest *2DArtist* interview. He tells us a bit about his childhood inspiration, his journey through and experience at various games companies, and also shares with us some of his loves and hates when it comes to community challenges. This is a frank and honest interview with an artist who knows his mind and seeks to do what people won't expect of him. So join us for some laughs, some serious bits, and above all a stunning portfolio. Enjoy!

Interview with David Smit

Hi David, and welcome back to *2DArtist* for our 48th issue interview – that's four years' worth of interviews, would you believe? Where do we find you all, hey? [Winks]. So let's get down to some of that Q&A good stuff! Can you kick us off with a bit of background info about yourself?

Four years and this is the first time you interview me? What took you so long! [Winks]. Hey, the usual boring who am I and where do I come from stuff? It's probably easier to read my resume [Laughs]. No, but really, isn't this interview to get more background info about me? It would make the whole thing quite short if I just tell you everything here!

"It really got me ready for the big, bad games world, I guess."

[Laughs] Well, when you put it like that! OK, let me be more specific then: You've been working as a concept artist since 2006 for various companies, as well as freelancing, so can you tell us a little about your experience working in the games industry over the last three years? How have things changed since you first started out? (For those who want to check out the resume, go to: **www.davidsmit.com/cv.html**)

OK, well it all started a long, long time ago in a place far, far from here ... at my internship at W!Games, Amsterdam. That was the first time I actually had a job in the games industry – at least the first time in the serious, *paying* games industry and not one of those everlasting never-really-getting-anywhere-in-the-next-30-years-but-you'll-get-paid-when-the-money-comes-in projects. I had an amazing time there; I learned so much. When I think back about that time I get that craving, nostalgic feeling where everything in the past used to be better [Laughs]! No, but really, I had great artists around me, an amazing art director, fantastic projects, and the company atmosphere was open and creative. It really got me ready for the big, bad games world, I guess.

I walked in a very green wannabe artist and walked out... well, still quite green, but at least with the confidence that I had made it to the paying-drawing-pictures group. I crossed the barrier... which is a bit weird when I think back to it; I always had this uncertain "am I ever going to be good enough to get paid?" feeling, and before I knew it there was no escaping the industry. So that's where it started. Not a bad place, in my opinion. It's for that reason that I

went back to work there on several occasions, both during and after my studies.

At a certain point I got asked to work for Guerrilla Games. They where looking for a character artist, so I jumped in there and worked on *Killzone 2*. That was quite a different experience from W!Games; a big company, owned by Sony, working on a project of an incredible size and joining at a late stage of

development. All very different from what I was used to, but all very good experience – great people and an amazing project!

I realised there, though, that I like to be a bit freer in terms of creativity. I like to be more involved in the core of the whole thing. Of course, I joined when the game was well into its development, so opting for purple-clad girls amongst gray hellghast soldiers wasn't going to work. Anyhow, during all this I did some freelancing as well. And then at one point I decided to combine freelancing with travel around the world for a bit – for about 12 months so far. It's been great fun touring in a small van through the mountains of New Zealand, enjoying a beer in the jungle at Byron Bay, Australia, while freelancing to pay for the next day. And then there was an email from a friend from my studies asking me if I wanted to work in Vietnam as an Art Director. I thought: Why not? That's the best motto ever by the way; it works for just about everything! It was something different. Setting up a whole project – and team

– and having all the freedom. If only I could understand my team though, that would make things a lot easier [Smiles].

> ## "Building the concept was the most fun! That's where the whole "creating concepts" thing started for me, I think."

So that's a bit about my work experience, so far. What changed? Well, two things for me: one, on a more industry level, I think over the last few years there has been a sudden realization all over the industry that there are a lot of game companies and games being made. And with that comes the commercial side of safety – in other words: no cojones!

For me, I think I'm a bit more confident and sure about what I want and don't want. I still want everything, to do everything, see everything, and make everything. But I know now that there are places where I'm doing work filled with

passion and motivation, and there are places where I'm doing a job, just a job. So my goal now is to keep working at the places where work is not a job, but a passion.

Wow, I think you may have just become a hero to many! As a fellow child of the 80s, what inspired you as a child growing up through the 90s and into the noughties, where you emerged as a young adult, fresh-faced and ready to face the art world?
Good year, obviously! Phew. That's a hard question to answer… What laid the foundation, and inspired me in the younger years? In one word: LEGO! Since you're from the same year there's a good chance you are also a Lego child. Am I right? Don't deny it!

I love Lego; it allowed me to do whatever I wanted. When I was younger I always used to build my concepts: trap doors on a deserted island with marbles rolling down the hill; if you pushed something, ropes and wheels would start moving and turning. Great fun to build! I

made up all kinds of stories for the adventurers walking around down there… Of course, once I'd built it and it turned out to work, I destroyed it. Building the concept was the most fun! That's where the whole "creating concepts" thing started for me, I think.

During high school and the teen frustration years I left Lego behind – most of the time – and the creations came about more in the shape of theories about life and death. Actual drawing

didn't start until much later, somewhere around 15 or 16, I think. At that age I actually wanted to become a 3D artist… I've never been very good at sticking to plans.

Yep, you're right; my parents would often find me under the dining table playing with Lego, fighting my brother for the best pieces! If you were to get all your retro Lego back out right now, and let your mind and building blocks go crazy, what would you build, and why?

Are we actually talking about Lego? [Laughs]. When we were talking about doing this interview I would never have imagined we'd go there!

What I would make now…? I had three huge boxes full of normal Lego, one and a half of technical Lego, and some other Lego-like stuff. I had a *lot*! So if I had that now, what would I make...? It would, without any doubt, be something completely over the top! I think I would build the robot I'm working on now for the

project in Vietnam. I can't say too much about it, but it's not your typical serious mech. I would try to make it actually walkable (and probably pink – if I have any pink blocks). And once I have that one, I would make the whole environment, and then the other robots, and then the sewers underneath, and then the robot-rats living in the sewers, and then the ground around the sewers, and then the robot-dino bones in the ground, and then an underground civilization, unknown to mankind. And then... oh boy, where's the Lego?! I would pretty much just go concepting with it. Before finishing one thing I would start breaking it down for the next idea. You got me all excited... I'm not sure if they know about Lego here in Vietnam? Hmm, I might have a look for some tomorrow.

Err, yeah, sorry, we love Lego – we were just saying the other day it would be cool to get some Lego sets as extra prizes for some of our forum competitions! [Grins]. Ok, so moving on, you've got a very impressive educational background – graphic design, game design and development, art history, and art in European media are all proudly sitting on your CV, waving at me. In your eight years of art education, what have been the most notable experiences, and how useful have each of these courses been in helping you to find your path as an artist in this fast-paced craziness we call our world?
Hey, when you sum it up like that it does sound

like a lot! [Smiles]. The thing is with all those qualifications and studies, they interested me at the time, but in my mind they were not "perfect" in terms of education. I chose to do them anyway because I felt that they where closest to what I wanted to do, or at least had the potential to send me in the right direction. So they were all sort of interesting, but not quite exactly what I really wanted. In hindsight though, they were all fundamental building blocks for where I am today – and I quite like where I am!

> **"But for concept art and design, it's much more about getting the mindset and developing your creativity."**

See, for all that education, I actually had very little *art* education. Let me try to explain that a bit… Graphic design was mainly multimedia, typography etc. I went to art school to study game design and development; art history was just text, and my MA in European media was research. So out of all those studies, I perhaps only had three classes over a few weeks of proper art training – meaning how to hold a pencil! As an "artist" that leaves me very uneducated in the formal trainings of the arts, but very versatile and broadly educated in terms of tools, techniques, management, development and mindset. And for the position where I am

now – concept artist/illustrator/art director – that is very important. Most of the actual drawing techniques, I had to learn myself. Unfortunately that makes me not suitable to be the world's best artist, but hopefully it does put me on a path to create some very interesting projects – games, movies, comics, cereal boxes, you name it!

It all sort of fits together in the end, I guess. Or maybe I should say "it all fits together in the beginning", because I'm just getting started!

Indeed you are! I think it's quite common for people to find that they don't quite get the hands on art training they really need during their art studies – I think I had only four life drawing classes over a three-year fine art degree! Pretty crazy, really! I'm sure there are people out there who are also trying to learn art skills independently, so can you tell us a little about how you motivated yourself, and where you went to source your information, research etc? Well first of all I think it's mainly that people think they are not getting the art training that they *think* they need. It depends on who and what you want to do of course. If you are aiming to be the best artist in the world in terms of rendering as much detail as possible, as close to realism as possible, preferably as fast as possible, then maybe some hands on art training would be useful. But for concept art and design, it's much

more about getting the mindset and developing your creativity. That means that you are going to get less training (normally, at least) in holding a pencil or drawing muscles exactly right, but more in generating ideas across a broad spectrum of fields.

"It's even better to surround yourself with people who are better than you are. Much, much better!"

Of course, hands on art training is very good to have. It's just common for students or ex-students to neglect all the mindset, creativity and methodology training they get over the years and only focus on the simple, measurable "drawing" skills. But then again, it feels nowadays that the industry is going more and more towards a massive request of beautiful – but the same – images. And that, unfortunately, is now considered concept art. So getting really good at rendering might actually be the key for a lot of people.

Eh, oh yeah, let's stay on topic. Err, well I don't really learn independently, because that means sitting in your room with no windows and

internet and figuring everything out yourself… The internet and the collectives that offer knowledge are such amazing tools right now. I mean, the internet offers all the information from the best sources (for you) in the world! The whole world! And it gets checked and cross-referenced by everybody to see if it's correct. If you study traditionally, you're only as good as your teachers. And trust me: teachers can be wrong. Yes, just like your parents, and once you admit that to yourself the world is much less fun! The only thing is that people now, learning without an art academy to tell them what to do, often skip all the boring parts. But those boring parts are the fundamentals of your whole art future. That is important to realize. And people tend to have a really short horizon if self-educated, because they only look at things they already like and know. So I do think getting some education, even if it's not art, is very, *very* valuable for an artist.

Next to that is to find a crowd of people who share the same interests, but don't exactly like what you like. So your horizon broadens. And it's even better to surround yourself with people who are better than you are. Much, much better! Get an internship, go train with a traditional

artist, and go to workshops. Any and every bit of information that I could grab, I did. Since nobody laid the important information out for me, I just went with the "any information is good information" route. It's the same for any form of training, and I think competitions are a great way to get a way of working down, to motivate you to make things, and build up a portfolio. They push you creatively – well, sort of – and give you a deadline.

So let's talk portfolios! And what a portfolio?! Browsing through your work it's clear to see you know your stuff when it comes to composition, framing, and lighting. Really great skill throughout! I also love how you render your human skin tones – you have such a beautiful way of capturing life in your characters through your brushwork. Could you perhaps give us a little walkthrough on how you would create your palette and paint your skins?

Thank you for that! My palette tends to change quite a lot, from black and white to full on Disney. It's always about the bigger concept. I always try to choose a palette that fits the general feel of the image. It also really depends on what inspires me at that time, so there isn't really a clear answer for that palette question.

David Smit.com

For me, faces are the most interesting part of a whole illustration. They say it all. At least 50% of the time spent creating an image is just on the face, or faces. Getting the eyes and mouth right is somehow very important for me. When I paint a face, or a tree for that matter, I see it more as sculpting: I'm constantly pushing things back and pulling things forward. And one of the important things I find when painting faces is to keep things moving. Especially because skin is never really just one color or value. And if you keep pushing things around you get variation! So painting my skins usually takes some time; I prefer to use big brushes because they give such a nice direction to your strokes. It keeps things moving and dynamic.

Sure, you certainly have a very diverse portfolio – I meant the palette question for the skin tones, but guess I didn't ask the question just right. Sorry about that! So you mentioned before you originally wanted to be a 3D artist, and you tell us that you see painting almost as sculpting, so do you currently do any 3D right now? Dabbled in ZBrush at all? Any plans to do so, if not already?
I actually do use 3D a little bit now and then, but mainly for concepting. It's a really good way to show people exactly what you mean in 3D, especially with difficult curves, shapes and details that are composition- or design-wise very important, but hard to grasp from a 2D picture. Another way of producing concept art, I guess.

Funnily enough, I'm still used to the old school low poly modeling. I probably could get used to the likes of ZBrush and Mudbox, but I'm afraid I'll like it too much and spend all my free time doing that instead!

Aww, I guess it's the classic case of not enough time in the day for everything we'd love to do, hey! We've noticed in the past that you've been quite keen on entering community challenges; what is it about these that get you excited? Is there a particular kind of brief that really gets your Wacom going, or are you pretty much up for any challenge, whatever the topic? How do you find these challenges help you as an artist?
Sharp observation! I guess I just want to win one [Smiles]. I am pretty much up for any topic

and brief, really. I think challenges are a great way to keep working on new things and refining your skills. You could do the same without those challenges I guess, but then the possibilities are endless and so nothing comes out. It's scary, just like an empty, white sheet of paper. So in a way, I need those challenges to set borders for me, to give me focus.

But I wouldn't say that they particularly get me really excited. I like to make illustrations for those competitions but the choice of topics and briefs get me annoyed sometimes. It's always something like, "create a dark knight fighting a horde of undead orcs with his glowing super power sword". Or the exact opposite which doesn't say anything except, "imply epicness". I

hate those topics! What the hell am I supposed to do with that? Create the exact same orc as the other guys, just rendered slightly differently?

See, although I really would like to win a challenge, I don't see it happening soon. I always try to find the edges of the assignment, to do exactly that what they won't expect – mainly to take the subject and the whole design/ painting topic not too seriously. But that makes my chances of winning very low. I don't know, I guess I'm just one of those people that will always do the opposite to the majority!

And oh, oh, oh, I've just seen that the results of the last Secret Agent competition are in ... Oh! Hmm … nothing! No win, not even a mention

in the honorable mentions. Ah well, I saw it coming. At least I created another image for my portfolio, though [Wry smile].

Sorry about the challenge; you won us over with your image anyway! [Grins]. Sounds to me like you're a true artist – that's what it's all about, right? Pushing the boundaries and finding the opportunities to draw on the unexpected is what makes it so much fun! Who wants to be part of the herd anyway? [Winks]. So my final question: If you could write any brief for any art challenge, what would it be, and what would you answer the brief with if you were to create an entry? [Laughs] A true artist… Most people who meet me and don't know what I do don't even guess I'm anything like an artist. So in the public eye

I'm not really a weird arty guy. But in the core of my being, the center of my person, I don't really care if I'm an artist or a programmer. I'll do what I'll do.

That question's got me thinking a lot though, about a good competition brief. I think I'd try to push people out of their boxes, make it hard on them – maybe something like the next fantasy or imaginary world? Something like a steampunk world, since that's what people like! And of course, you need people to get a competition going. But anything that includes or even resembles steampunk, elves, orcs, dragons, any form of traditional Tolkien or Warhammer fantasy, space marines, space ships, typical speed painting, superheroes, dinosaurs, ninjas, or pirates – eh, no, on second thoughts pirates are allowed – will be disqualified. There will be a separate page with all the disqualified works on there, and a top 10 of the most cliché ones!

I think the world needs some new creative worlds so people can start copying that into

eternity instead of the same, age-old stuff. Of course, I'm not going to say what I'll do, because I don't know [Laughs]. Such a brief is made so that people have to think for a bit, and not just speed paint their way through it. It's a tough one, I think, especially when I would be the judge.

Blimey, a steampunk world without steampunk – that'll be a tough one! But I like your way of thinking in terms of wanting to push people to think outside the box. Told you: true artist! We can tell you are at heart anyway, even if you

don't appear to be on the outside. And on that note, it's been great chatting to you David, even if I'm a little unsure how much of this interview is tinged with sarcasm [Winks]. Thanks again, I'll talk to you soon. Take care!

David Smit

For more work by this artist please visit:
http://www.davidsmit.com
Or contact them at:
david@davidsmit.com
Interviewed by: Lynette Clee

"I FOUND IT INTERESTING HOW THINGS IN THE BACK OF MY MIND WOULD BE PULLED FORWARD BY LOOKING DEEP INTO SOMETHING THAT I DREW WITH MY EYES CLOSED!"

SKETCHBOOK
OF JOHN U. ABRAHAMSON

John U. Abrahamson's sketches have been intriguing us for quite some time now, so we've invited him along to share his sketchbook pages with a much wider audience, as he fast approaches an upcoming exhibition due at the Bert Green Fine Art in Los Angeles in March. John shares with us his innermost thoughts, some of which may be disturbing for our younger readers, and gives us an insight into his automatic sketching techniques that unravel the issues and unconscious feelings that feed his works.

SKETCHBOOK OF
JOHN U. ABRAHAMSON

PROCESS

This article is based on sketches created for a series of works which have come to be collectively known as "Flesh and Blood".

In my previous work I've used limited sketching as a way to flesh out what I had already envisioned in my head. I had thought out every detail of the painting ahead of sketching, primarily working from source material such as photographs from books, magazines, and ads that I would gather before I began a new series. I would pour over the images until a direction presented itself; I would do rough sketches to work out composition and other visual problems, doing the finished sketch on the canvas itself…

from this primordial soup of lines and scratches were laced with the aforementioned encounters.

The entire series is built upon what I was able to pull from automatism exercises filtered through my emotions and life experiences. Once a figure was developed in this manner, I would push and pull the concept in as many directions as possible. At the end of a session I would find the images that spoke with the loudest and most precise voice. The end result was a more liberated and more successful series. This process of using nothing but sketches as the basis for the work allowed for a more freeform association, resulting in a world populated with creatures that carried with them the very essence of myself.

SKETCHES

Cigarette Burns

This started with a scribbled circle which developed into a stomach and breasts (**Fig.01**). A quick curved slash to show gesture turned into the tube emanating from the crotch. Shading scratches developed into the spikes in the arms, or the "cigarette burns" when I translated it to paint. The automatic drawing base suggested to me a painful period in my life when I was going through a divorce and had a lot of inner guilt which I turned to self-mutilation, such as cigarette burning.

For the "Flesh and Blood" series I chose to take a whole new approach to the process of creating. I started with some base parameters that formed the framework that I would build upon. This framework was a product of several experiences that happened as I began Flesh and Blood.

The first happened at the De Young Art Museum in Golden Gate Park of San Francisco. The place was packed with people. I was hoping to get some spark of inspiration from their collection. When passing by all the patrons buying tickets, I saw a stunningly beautiful woman; both her arms had been amputated mid bicep with exposed bone protruding from the end of the tapered muscle. She was in a wheelchair and having a seemingly wonderful time with her friends. I found her to be both perfect and transcendent.

The other defining visual was at Filoli, a marvelous mansion from the 1800s which is now a museum in the San Francisco area. In the gardens of Filoli we came across some apple and pear trees that had been trellised when they were mere saplings. Throughout the many years they stood as the flesh of the trees grew around the armature. Metal polls protruded from the flesh of the trees like arms; this, to me, was reminiscent of the woman at the De Young.

The sketches for Flesh and Blood began with automatic drawing. I filled page after page with nothing but automatic drawings. The figures that slowly began to emerge

Fig.01

Angles of Death

Angels of Death

With the birth of my son and my ever aging body, my own mortality is always very close to the surface. In one session of automatism exercises, these two figures came out of the chaos of scribbles (**Fig.02**); the lower representing cancer, and the top figure liver damage (the latter developed into the painting now known as "Damage"). I suppose these are two possible ways that I will meet my demise. I found it interesting how things in the back of my mind would be pulled forward by looking deep into something that I drew with my eyes closed!

Ghost of a ...

Fig.02

Mother Issues

My mother disappeared when I was seven and my sister was five; we didn't know if she was alive or dead. No one said anything about her and she faded from memory. I found her when I was 18. This issue is repeated through every series I have ever done. I will say that this sketch was more intentioned than the others; I did set out to do a portrait of dear old mom. The body head and spikes were well established vocabulary by the time I did this sketch. This is probably the most from-the-gut-and-accurate portrait I have done of her (Fig.03).

> "I OFTEN FEEL THAT THE DRAWING LEADS ME, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND."

Portrait of my Ex wife

This was a more freeform drawing – automatic drawing developed out and elaborated upon. The first image was my ex-wife. She was disabled and addicted to Morphine. The head started as a pincer like head, but it developed to have more sexual connotations. The most important thing about this sketch is the flow of the development of an idea, as shown when read from left to right (**Fig.04**).
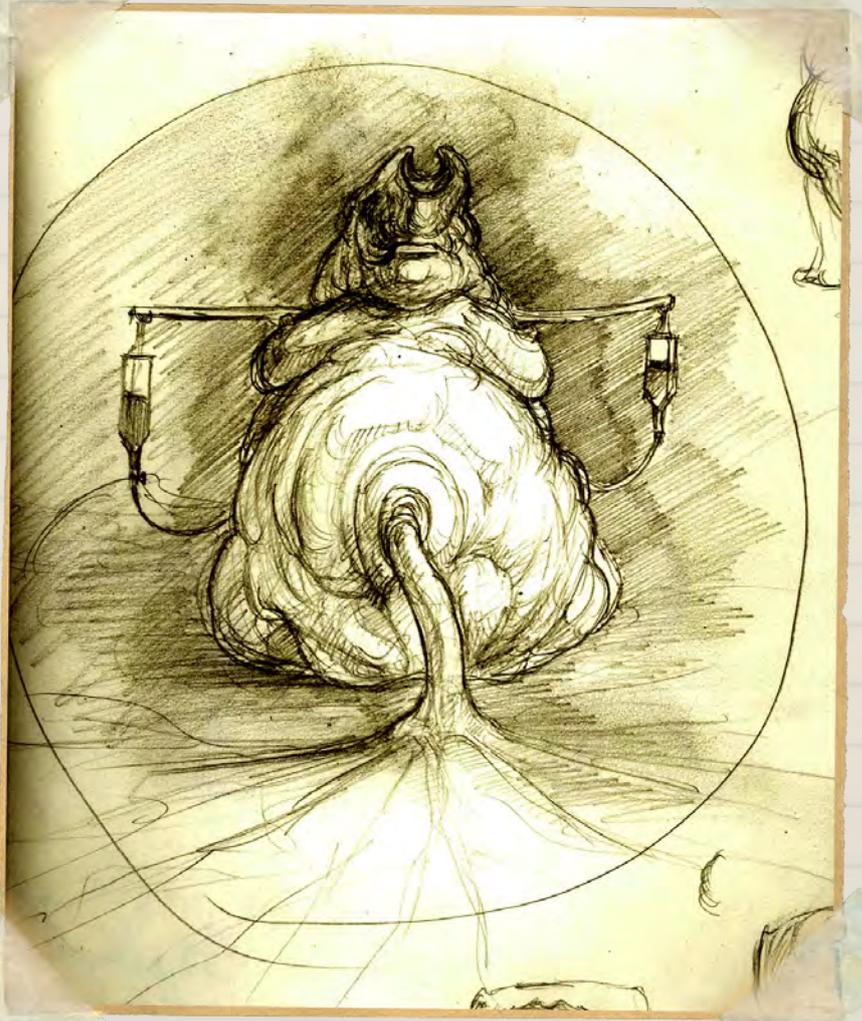
Fig.03
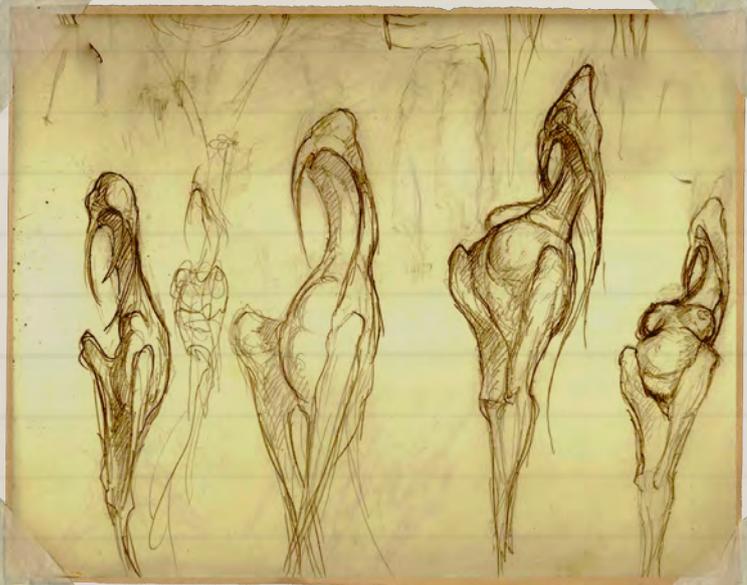
Fig.04

The female figure suggested the male figure (Fig.05); I did not intend to do a couple, one development simply led to the next. I find this an invaluable tool: looking at the lines, intended or not, and seeing what they suggest. I often feel that the drawing leads me, not the other way around.

Fig.05

At the Altar of Needles

This is an interesting sketch for me because the finished painting varied more from the sketch than any other painting I did (**Fig.06**); usually the painting was an exact reproduction of the sketch. An entire birthing apparatus was added after I painted the sketch as it appeared in my sketchbook. I don't know this for fact but I believe my subconscious was pushing dear old mom in front again.

Fig.06
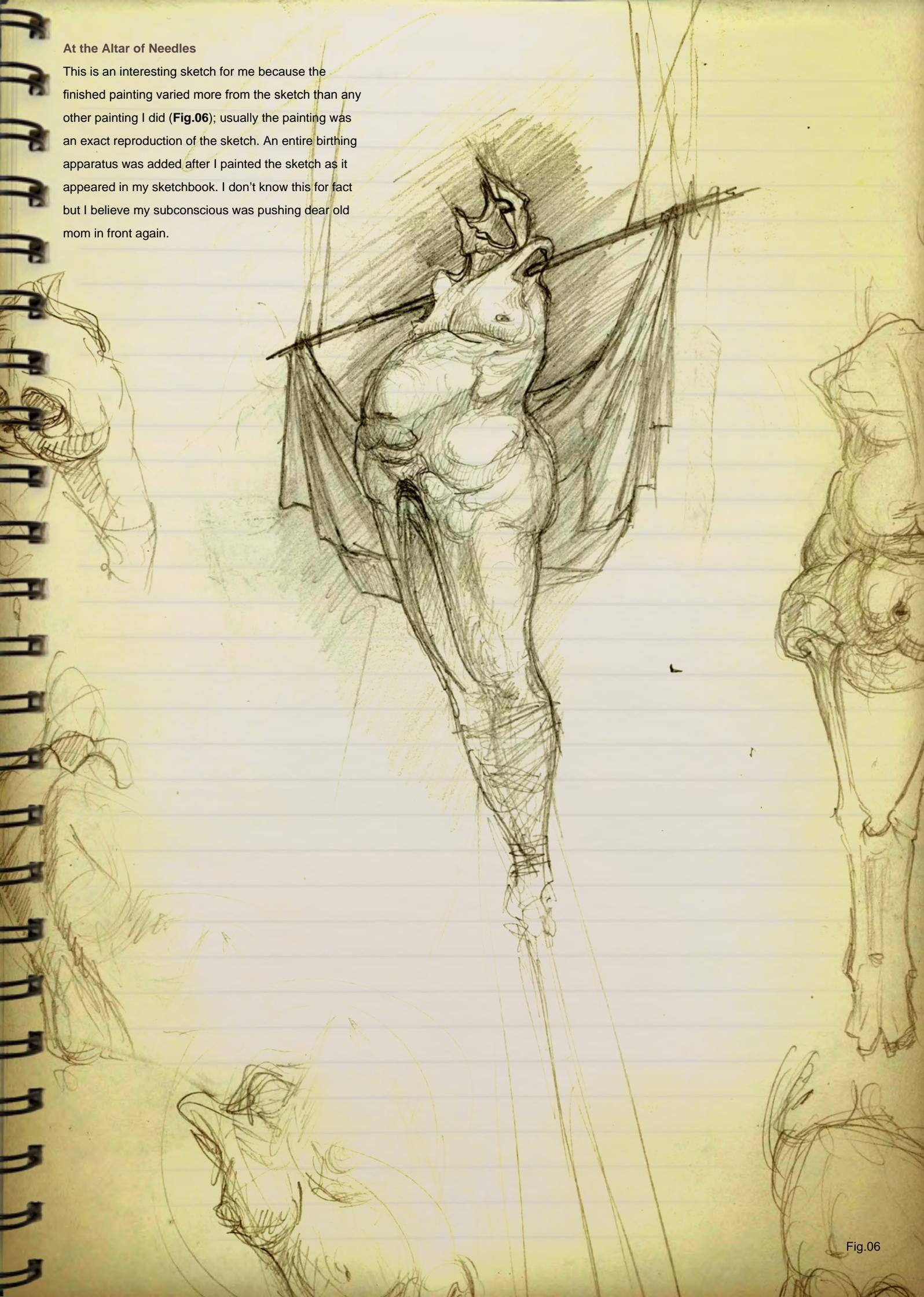
Untitled

This sketch was never used as a painting, but it's important in so far as it was the first time a prevalent image came into the work (**Fig.07**). The legs transforming into stilt-like apparatus was, I believe, born out of my natural tendency to make cruciform. The image continued to show up in the work even when this was not the effect the stilts had. I associate with an idea or image and sometimes it can be years after the fact that I will look at a drawing or painting and see the intent behind it – something I was not consciously aware of at the time of creation!
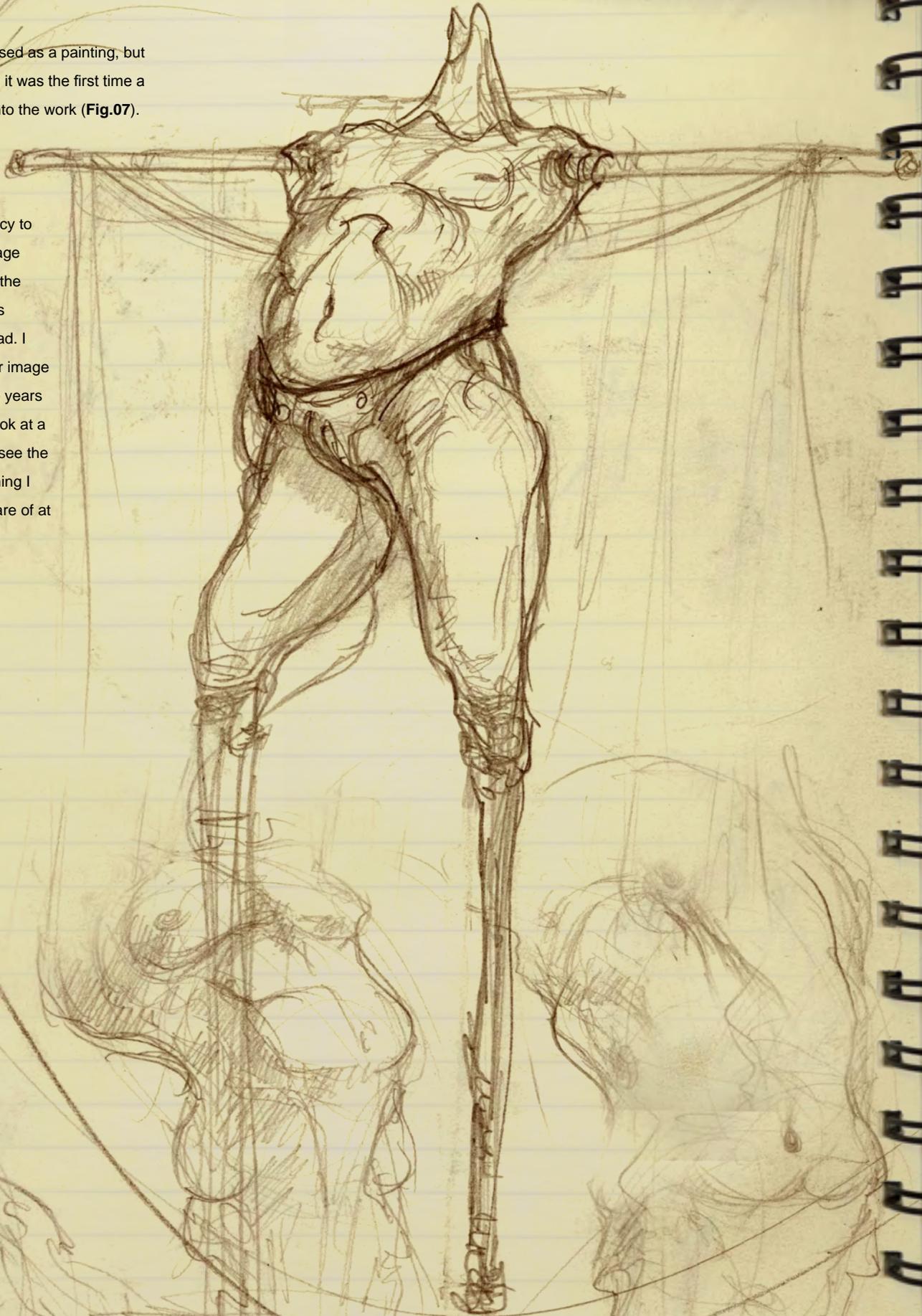
Fig.07
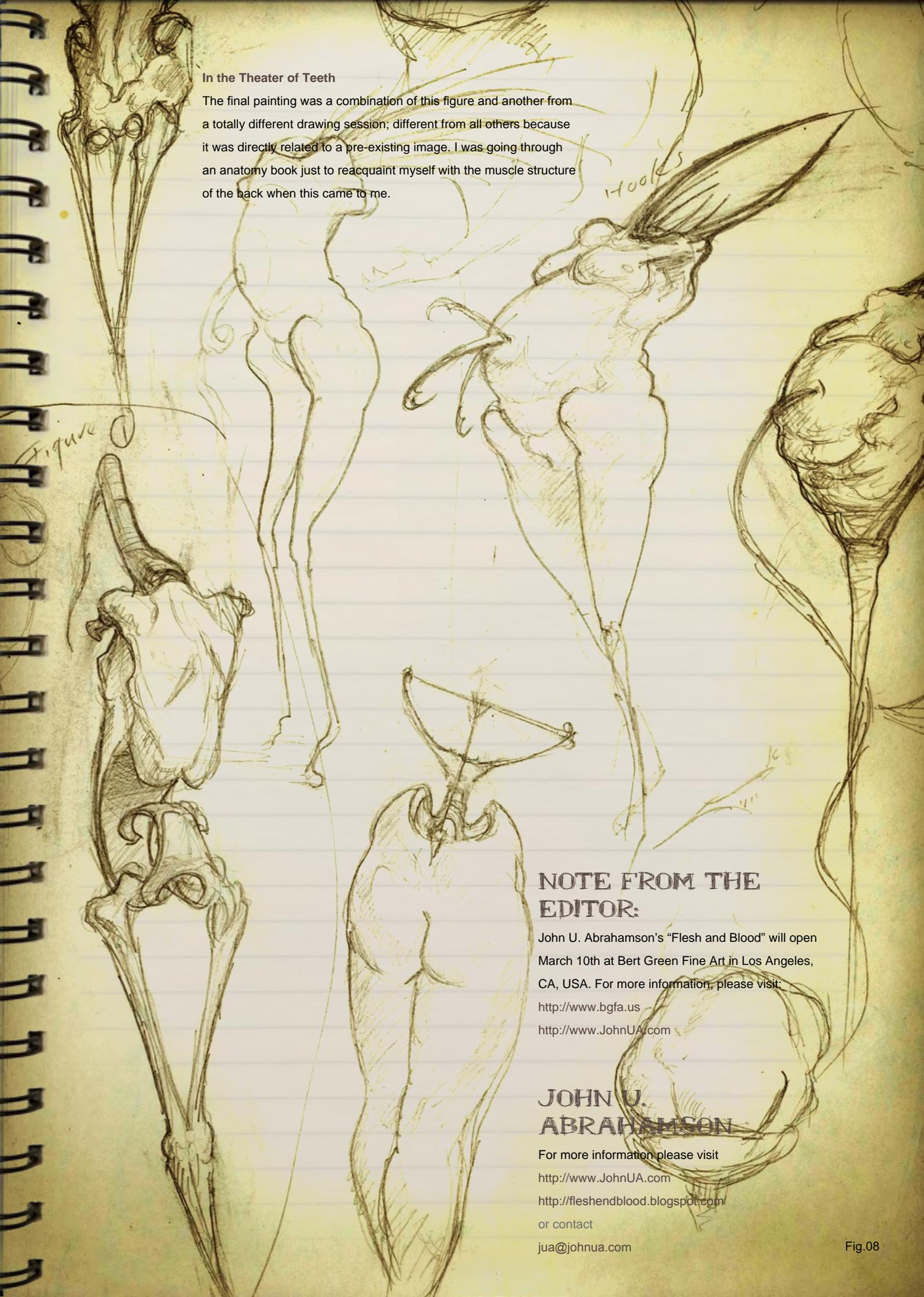
In the Theater of Teeth

The final painting was a combination of this figure and another from
a totally different drawing session; different from all others because
it was directly related to a pre-existing image. I was going through
an anatomy book just to reacquaint myself with the muscle structure
of the back when this came to me.

Fig.08

"We had to invent the art style quite precisely: the pictures were going to be hand-drawn by pencil to make them feel really hand-made. Adolf is very precise, which was a bit problem because we wanted more relaxed drawings. I told him many times that he shouldn't draw too perfectly so he started to draw with his clumsier left hand!"

machinarium

Amanita Design are a small, independent game development studio located somewhere in the Czech Republic. Since the company first formed in 2003, they've managed to stock-pile an impressive list of accolades and awards, the latest being for their first full-length flash game, *Machinarium*, which won the Excellence in Visual Art award at the 2009 Independent Games Festival. We recently got the chance to catch up with this up-and-coming company and find out more about what makes them tick and why their website has been overrun by mushrooms...

Amanita Design

Machinarium - Interview with Amanita Design

Can you tell us a little bit of history about Amanita Design? Where did it all begin and how has it evolved since?

Amanita Design started in 2003 when I graduated from the Academy of Arts in Prague with a free online flash game called *Samorost* as my thesis project. In 2005 I was joined by the studio animator Vaclav Blin and *Samorost2* was created. Since then we have found several excellent collaborators - musician Tomas "Floex" Dvorak, programmer David Oliva, painter Adolf Lachman, sound maker Tomas "Pif" Dvorak and animator Jaromir Plachy. Besides independent and commissioned flash games (*Samorost1*, *Samorost2*, *The Quest For The Rest*, *Rocketman VC*, *Questionaut*) the studio has also created a couple of music videos (Plantage, Na tu svatbu), websites, animations, illustrations and production designs. Now we are focused mainly on games, but most of us also have some side projects. Vaclav Blin is preparing a very strange interactive music video, I'm working on production design for an animated feature film, Adolf Lachman is a freelance painter and sculptor etc.

> "We want to keep the team small and mainly based on friendship and very close collaboration."

It sounds like you have an awesome core team, each bringing their unique skills. Are you planning to expand further? Do you have any big ambitions or dreams of what you would like to achieve with your studio?

If we do expand, then it will only be a little, or very slowly. We want to keep the team small and mainly based on friendship and very close collaboration. As for our ambitions, we are not heading towards some huge AAA titles; we want to make smaller projects and experiment more with game design, storytelling and the visual form.

Now then, from all at 3DTotal - congratulations! *Machinarium* (**http://machinarium.net/**) has received so much fantastic praise, backed up with awards and top reviews … how does it all make you feel?

The reviews and direct feedback from players

"I was strongly inspired by old rusty machines, abandoned factories and industrial buildings."

are really awesome. It's much better than we hoped for and of course we are happy. It also gives us more self-confidence to continue in games development and try to experiment more with some gameplay mechanics and design decisions.

Will you always stick to the PC format? Have you considered other very popular upcoming platforms, such as the iphone?

Of course we are also interested in other platforms, especially consoles which have their own unique motion controllers like the Wii. Xbox will have Natal soon and Playstation are also planning a new controller, so there's plenty of keep us busy. Mobile devices are also quite nice, but we are not sure which way to go yet.

With a game like *Machinarium*, how many people work on it, what are their roles and how long does it take?

The development from first sketches to finished game took us almost three years and it's the work of seven people. I was the designer and director, Vaclav Blin was the main animator, the backgrounds painter was Adolf Lachman, the music composer Tomas 'Floex' Dvorak, the sound maker Tomas 'Pif' Dvorak, the programmer David Oliva and the second animator was Jara Plachy.
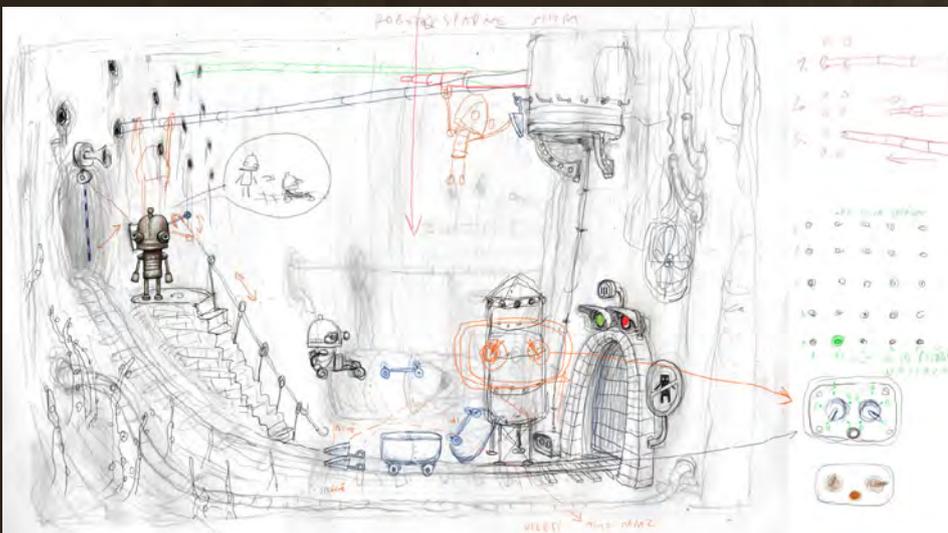
Okay, onto *Machinarium's* visuals - which are simply stunning, emotive and fascinating by the way! Where does all the inspiration come from?

When I was designing the *Machinarium* world I was strongly inspired by old rusty machines, abandoned factories and industrial

buildings. Of course besides this direct inspiration I was influenced by many artists, filmmakers and also writers (Yuri Norstein, Karel Zeman, Stanislav Lem, Jules Verne, Leonardo da Vinci, Max Ernst and many many others).

Do you think you will continue this style into future games or go off in a different direction?
I think we will continue in the similar direction, but of course we want to be as innovative as possible and so our style may evolve into something else.

"It's a nice mushroom and when ingested it's also hallucinogenic and visionary!"

What software was used to produce the visuals and do you have any tips and tricks you would like to reveal to the readers?
The backgrounds were hand-drawn by pencil on paper, then scanned, colored and finished in Photoshop. I don't think we used any special secret tricks however there are several important things. First of all we had to invent the art style quite precisely: the pictures were going to be hand-drawn by pencil to make them feel really hand-made. Adolf is very precise, which was a bit problem because we wanted more relaxed drawings. I told him many times that he shouldn't draw too perfectly so he started to draw with his clumsier left hand! Maybe that was the magic trick, because then it started to be much more suitable for our needs.

CLICK HERE TO WATCH MOVIE
(Please note, this is a YouTube movie so it will open up in a new window)

CLICK HERE TO WATCH MOVIE
(Please note, this is a YouTube movie so it will open up in a new window)

Of course we also wanted many tiny details in the final pictures, so we added textures to the drawings. The textures were usually photos from collections that myself of Adolf had gathered over the years.

I think you are absolutely right and the style you have finished with adds a lot to the game. I think the style also has a childlike innocence to it, is this what you had intended?
Yeah, definitely. The story is a little naive so it's one world and

one style - everything has to work together well to produce the final experience.

Changing the subject slightly: what's the deal with the toadstools? They seem to pop-up quite a lot on your company's site **http://www. amanitadesign.com/**
Yeah, we love them! *Amanita muscaria* is the Latin name for that red toadstool (fly agaric). It's a nice mushroom and when ingested it's also hallucinogenic and visionary!

What would you do if one day you were walking in the woods and you found a giant mushroom that was as big as a house and living inside it were little inquisitive goblin-type people?
Then I would say to myself "I shouldn't eat that

DEEP ROOM

DEEP ROOM

DEEP ROOM

DEEP ROOM

HIGH END MODEL

A5

SPZ

AKD·707

BATERIA

NEW

BILLBOARD
NA NOVY HOUSING PRO ROBOTY
KLINIKY S BATERKAMA
ZELEZARNA PRO ROBOTY
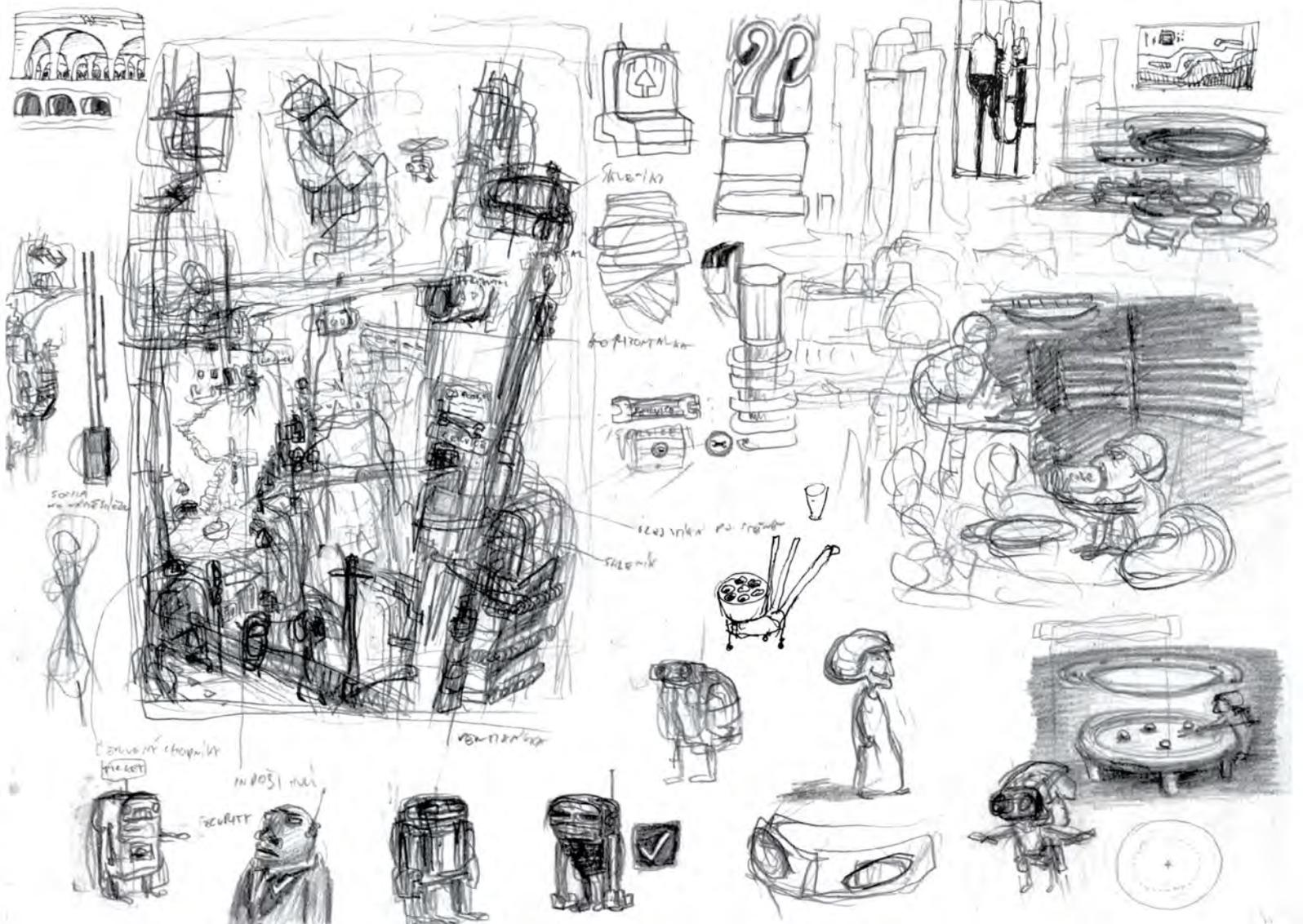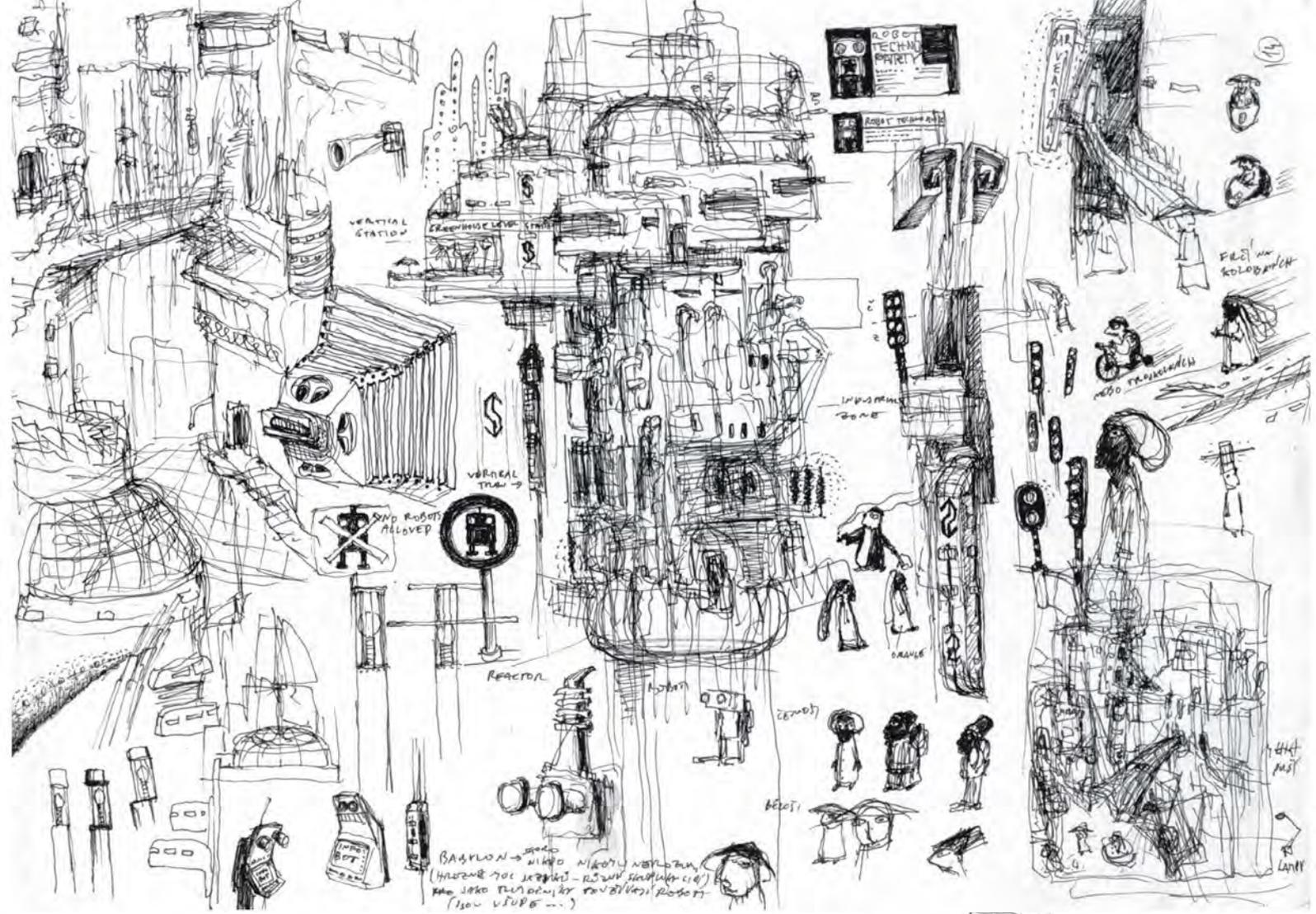
many mushrooms next time" [Laughs]. However I would be absolutely happy and go in for a cup of tea with the goblins.

Are you taking some time out after *Machinarium*? What about future projects; what can we look forward to next?

Some vacation would be really nice, but it's still impossible to find free time these days. We have some general ideas for the next game, but it's still too soon to tell what it will be and when we will start working on it.

Well whatever you guys come up with next all the team here at 3DTotal can't wait to see it! Thanks for your time Jakub, it's been a pleasure chatting to you.

Amanita Design
Jakub Dvorský & Adolf Lachman

For more information please visit:

http://www.amanitadesign.com

http://machinarium.net/demo/

Or contact:

contact@amanitadesign.com

Article courtesy: Tom Greenway

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THE GALLERY

Peaceful Day

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The Confrontation

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(Below)

The Force

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theForce by Alex Broeckel   WWW.ALEXBROECKEL.COM

Lachin
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Just a daydream
Hatice Bayramoglu
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3d2dizayn@gmail.com
(Left)

The Beast

Jama Jurabaev

http://jamajurabaev.daportfolio.com

http://jamajurabaev.deviantart.com

jama_art@tag.tj
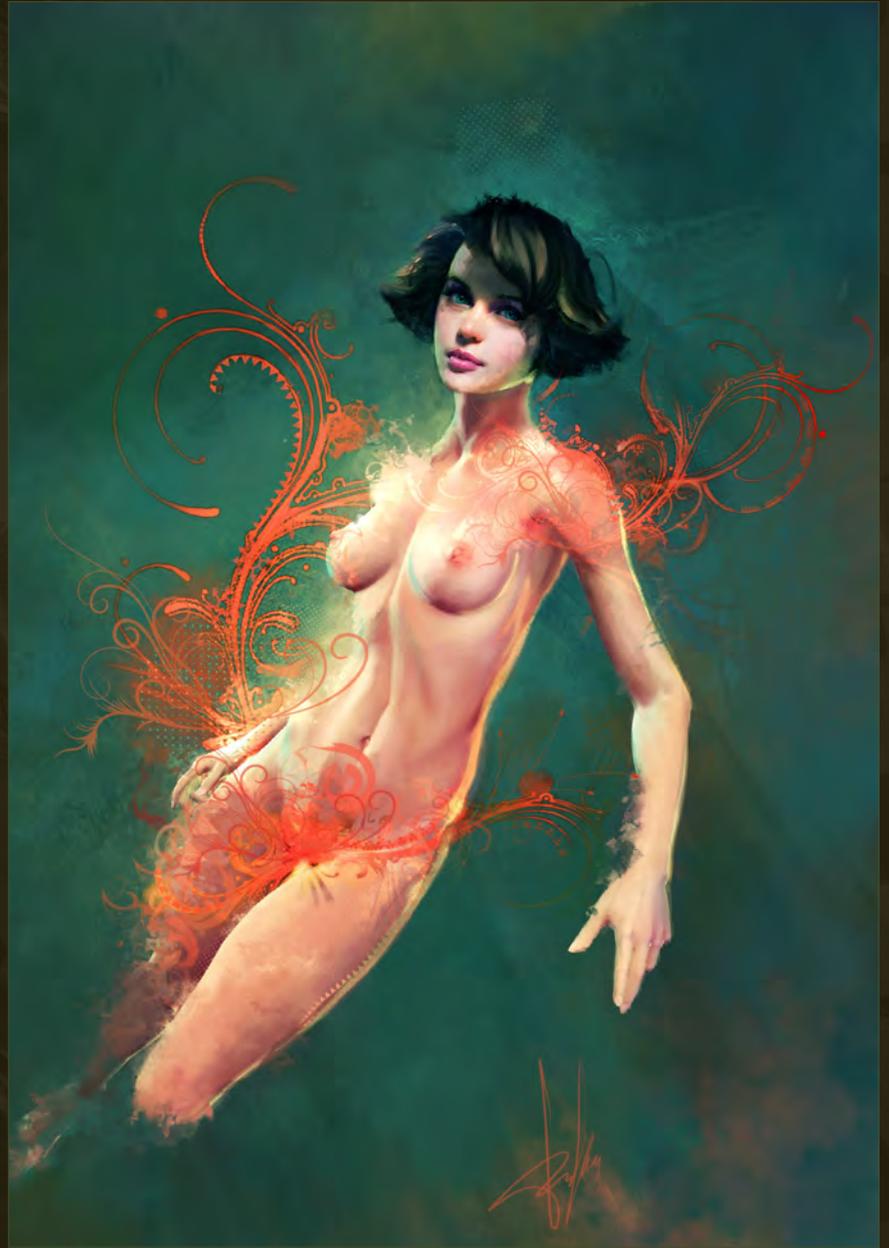
Hyper Dream
Alex Negrea
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(Above)

In Red and Green
Vlad "Duke" Kuprienko
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DOWNLOAD RESOURCES

• Free Base Image

USING 3D
AS A BASE FOR
2D PAINTING

This tutorial series will revolve around the use of 3d as a starting point for digital painting. In particular we will explore the value of Google SketchUp, a free program enabling users to quickly build 3d environments using a set of intuitive tools.

This technique is used by many contemporary artists and is used as a quick and effective way of establishing correct perspective as well as offering a moveable camera in order to experiment with compositions.

As a 3d package SketchUp is easy to learn and does not require hours of training and as an artist wishing to draw complicated scenes, this approach can prove a valuable starting point for producing a template on which to paint over.

## Using Google SketchUp as a base for Digital Painting

Why use SketchUp?

Google SketchUp is a free programme enabling users to quickly and effectively build 3D environments using a number of intuitive tools. Unlike most 3D packages it is very easy to learn and does not require hours of training before decent results are achievable. It is very versatile and with regards to digital painting can prove an invaluable tool in swiftly establishing a correct perspective, as well as offering a moveable camera in order to experiment with alternative viewpoints and compositions.

An object can be made and then duplicated any number of times, so if a structural element is repeated throughout your concept then this package can quickly and accurately create such arrays. It also has a simple-to-use lighting system that enables placement of the sun according to the month and time of day by way of slider bars, thus determining physically correct shadows that can be turned on or off at the click of a button. These functions mean that as an artist wishing to draw detailed or tricky scenes, one can use SketchUp as a valuable starting point to establish a "guide template" on which to paint over.

Installation

In order to install SketchUp, click on the link below and go to Downloads on the left hand menu. Select the free version which is currently

Fig.05
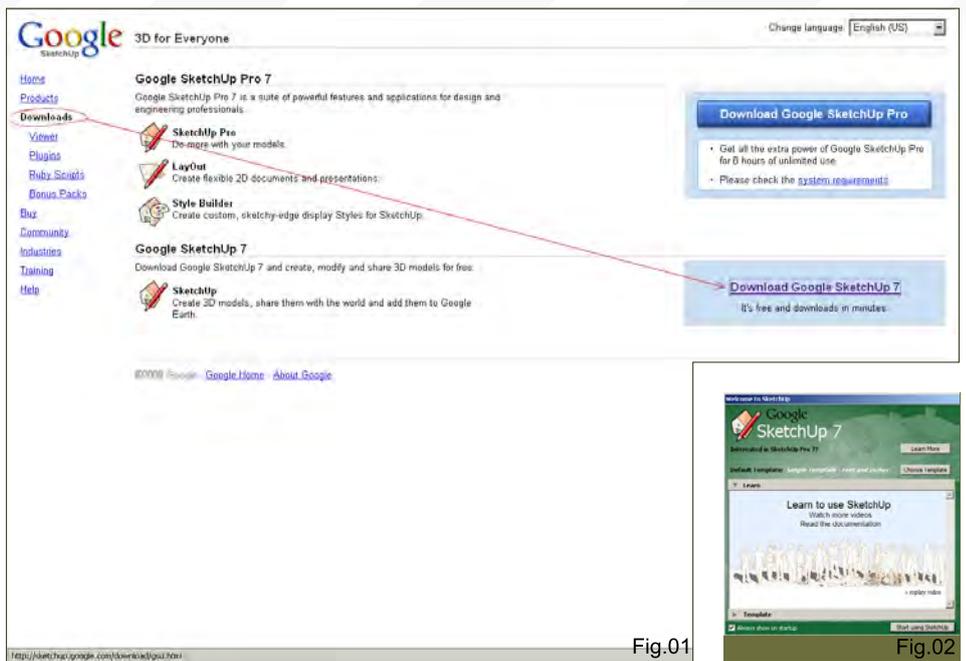
Fig.01

Fig.02
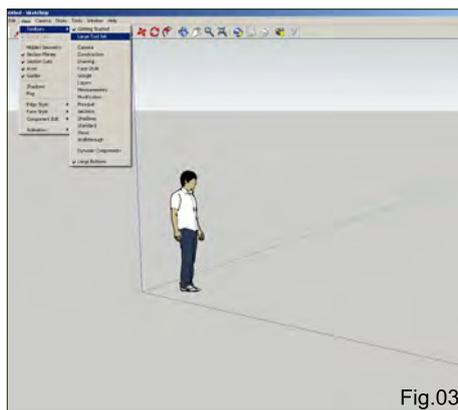
Fig.03

Fig.04

version 7 (**Fig.01**). Choose your operating system and then follow the instructions.

http://sketchup.google.com/

Once installed, click on the application shortcut and you will be prompted with the following dialogue box in which you are asked to choose a template (**Fig.02**). The scale and type of your scene will determine which you choose, but for the purposes of this tutorial we will select **Architectural Design – Feet and Inches.**

Toolbars and Menus

When SketchUp starts you will see a screen resembling **Fig.03**. From the main menu click on View > Toolbars > Large Tool Set; this will access more tools which will appear down the left margin. To change the display mode of the

objects in the scene click on View > Face Style; this will show a number of options, as seen in **Fig.04**.

If you also check Views under View > Toolbars you will see six small house icons appear below your toolbar (**Fig.05**). These will provide quick access to orthographic views, as well as isometric. You will notice that I have also checked Face Style in the list (highlighted in green), which has added some cube icons to represent the display modes.

This is basically where you can customise your workspace and add toolsets to speed up your workflow. For additional help go to Window > Instructor; this will open a window providing useful information on whichever tool you have currently selected.
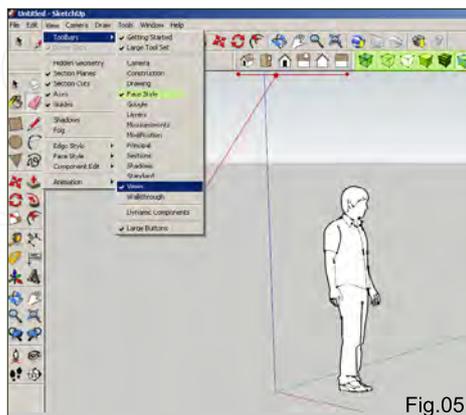
Fig.06

Basic Navigation

The key orientation tools you will use to navigate in your scene are Orbit, Pan and Zoom, which you will find on the top toolbar and whose shortcut keys are represented by O (Orbit), H (Pan) and Z (zoom). These can be seen in **Fig.06**.

The main tools used to directly manipulate your objects are Move (M), Rotate (Q) and Scale (S). The Scale tool appears on the left hand toolbar which you will see highlighted if you press S on your keyboard.
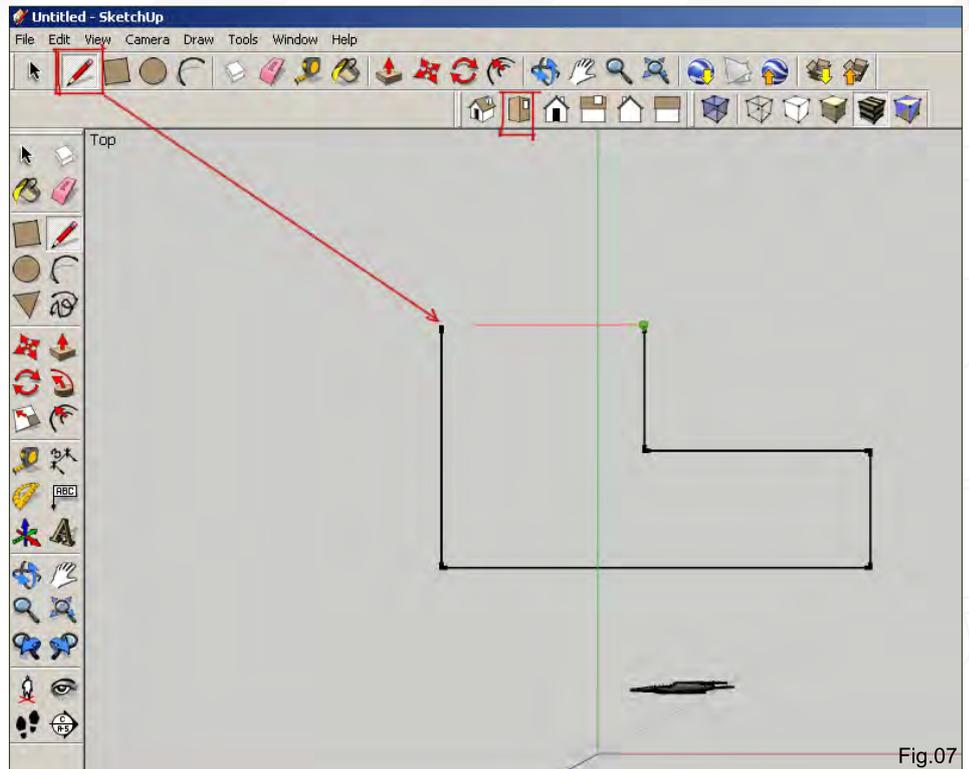
Drawing Shapes

One way of using SketchUp is to create two-dimensional shapes from which you can extrude three-dimensional objects. Select the top view and then the Line tool (**Fig.07**) and left-click in the viewport to begin drawing. You will notice that as you do so, the points will snap to the

Fig.07

green and red axes, thus easily enabling the creation of right-angled structures.

When you finally close the shape by clicking on the initial point you will notice the shape turns blue, indicating a surface has been made; once a shape has become closed you can still edit

it, however. Using the Line tool, add an internal rectangle (see top diagram in **Fig.08**). To now make this edge become part of the exterior shape click on the Eraser tool and then on the outside edge shown in red.

You can continue to cut into your shape or alternatively extend it outwards and then erase the necessary lines by using the Line tool (**Fig.09**). Here I have added a walkway and also a curved section using the Arc tool. You can also draw more organic shapes using the Freehand tool (**Fig.10**).
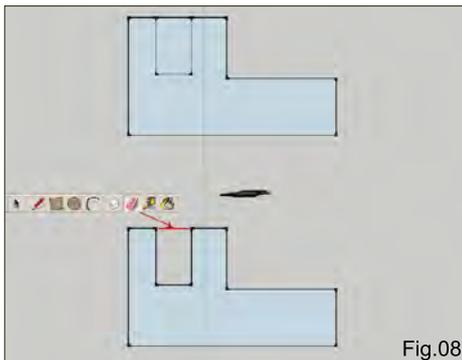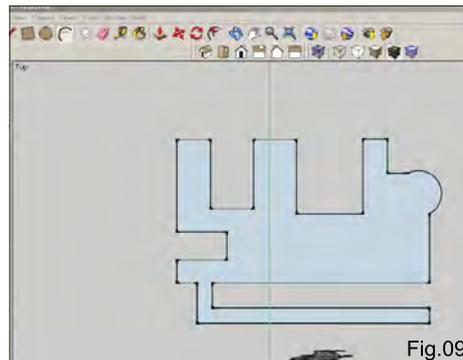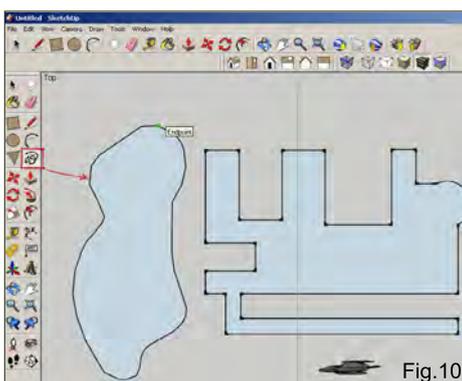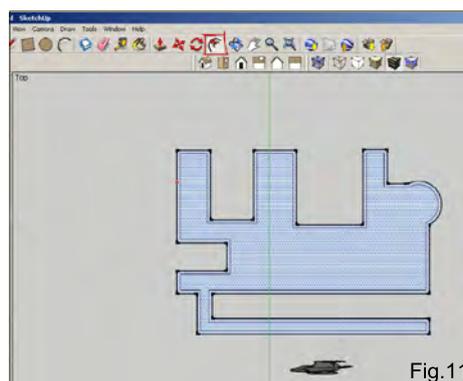
One other useful function, especially for architectural structures, is the Offset tool which is situated next to the Rotate tool. This enables a shape to be duplicated in order to create depth – perfect for drawing walls in a building, for example (**Fig.11**).

With an exterior wall depth, click on the large internal shape using the Select tool (black arrow on Toolbar) and hit delete. You can then select the Push/Pull tool and then click on the wall and raise it vertically (**Fig.12**). You will notice I have edited the section where the walkway adjoins

Fig.08

Fig.09

Fig.10

Fig.11

the building using the Line and Eraser tools so that this was not raised along with the outer wall.

Three Dimensions

When a shape has been converted into 3D it can be edited further by using a combination of the Line and Push/Pull tools. If you move the Line tool along an edge it will snap to the midpoint between opposing edges (**Fig.13**). You can then make equally spaced cuts, as shown. These new shapes can be pushed inward or pulled outward, or alternatively a new shape can be drawn and this can then be manipulated.

In **Fig.14** I have used the Offset tool to create a window shape in the far left rectangle. To create the same proportioned window in the other sections simply select the Offset tool and double-click in each rectangle. To create the arches use the Arc tool and then erase the horizontal join shown by the dotted line. To create windows use the Push/Pull tool to move the shapes inwards beyond the inner wall surface or until they disappear.

Using a combination of the tools mentioned so far you will have the means through which to create and edit a wide range of forms and design detailed scenes.

Atmospherics & Lighting

You can add atmospheric perspective in the form of fog to your scene. Go to View and check Fog, as seen in **Fig.15**. You will notice that the edges on my building have also been switched off, which you can control in the menu under Edge Style > Display Edges.

To add lighting effects check Shadows which
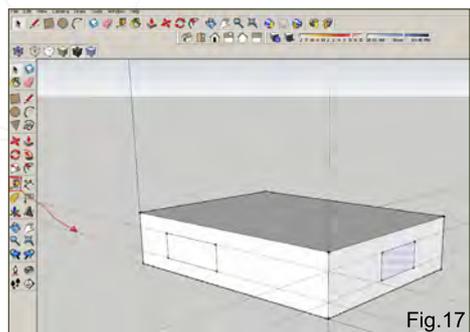
Fig.12

Fig.13

Fig.14

Fig.15

Fig.16

Fig.17
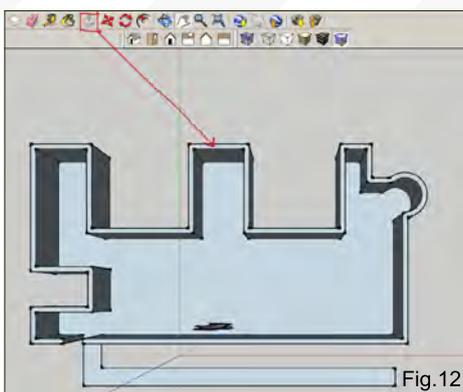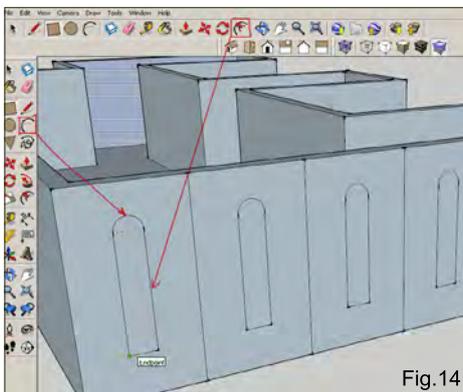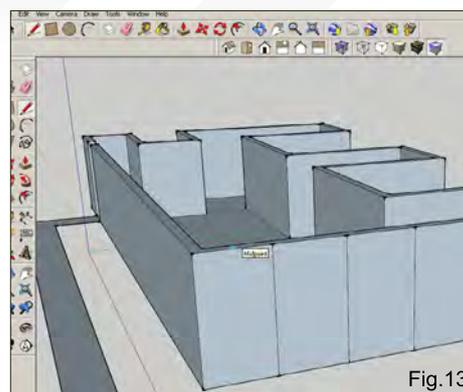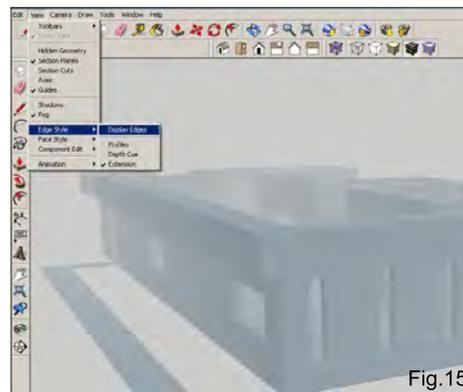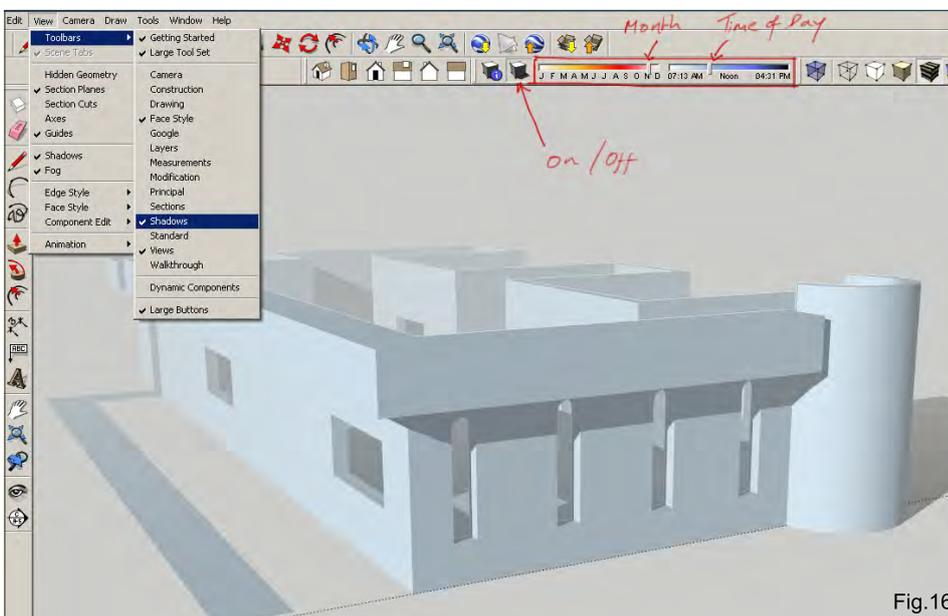
is above the Fog label, and to get more control over this function go to View > Toolbars > Shadows. This will place two slider bars on your toolbar which denote the month and time of day. By adjusting these you can control the position of the sun and direction of the shadows (**Fig.16**). There is a little icon to switch the lighting on or off, and besides this there is also another icon which opens up some extra parameters that alter the tonal range of the shading. You can

also control whether this affects just the object itself or the ground along with it and vice versa.

Additional Tools

A few other useful tools worth mentioning are the Tape Measure, Protractor and Dimension. The Tape Measure is used to draw guidelines which can then be traced over with the Line tool. In **Fig.17** you can see that the tape measure has created the dotted lines which can be

used as a guide to draw the windows an equal distance from the top and bottom of the block. To delete the lines simply use the Eraser tool. The Protractor is used to create accurate angles. Move the tool to the point at which you wish to start the angle and you will see how it snaps to the three axes. Click to establish the correct plane and then click to begin the angle along the appropriate edge. Now you can set the angle using the guideline. In **Fig.18** I have used the near corner as the starting point, which I will mirror on the opposite corner.

Once the guidelines are drawn, trace them using the Line tool, as with the Tape Measure. In **Fig.19** you can see that the two angles have been drawn and then the Push/Pull tool was used to extrude a roof shape across the base block.

The Dimension tool simply adds a label to your scene, showing the distance between two points. Click and drag from A to B and then drag up or down to set your dimensions, once again using the Eraser tool to delete when necessary (F**ig.20**).

Cameras

The camera in SketchUp is initially placed at an average eye level height, so for example when you click on the Position Camera tool it will zoom in and appear around head height from the ground. In this sense scale is an important factor in your scene.

In **Fig.21** you can see a cross where I intend to position the camera, after which the viewpoint will resemble the inset image. The character has been placed in the scene to demonstrate the relationship between the scale of a character and the initial camera height. To adjust your camera, use the Look Around tool represented by the eye icon.

One final tool which may prove useful is the Section Plane tool which allows a view of a cross-section of your object. To use this click

Fig.18

Fig.19

Fig.20

Fig.21
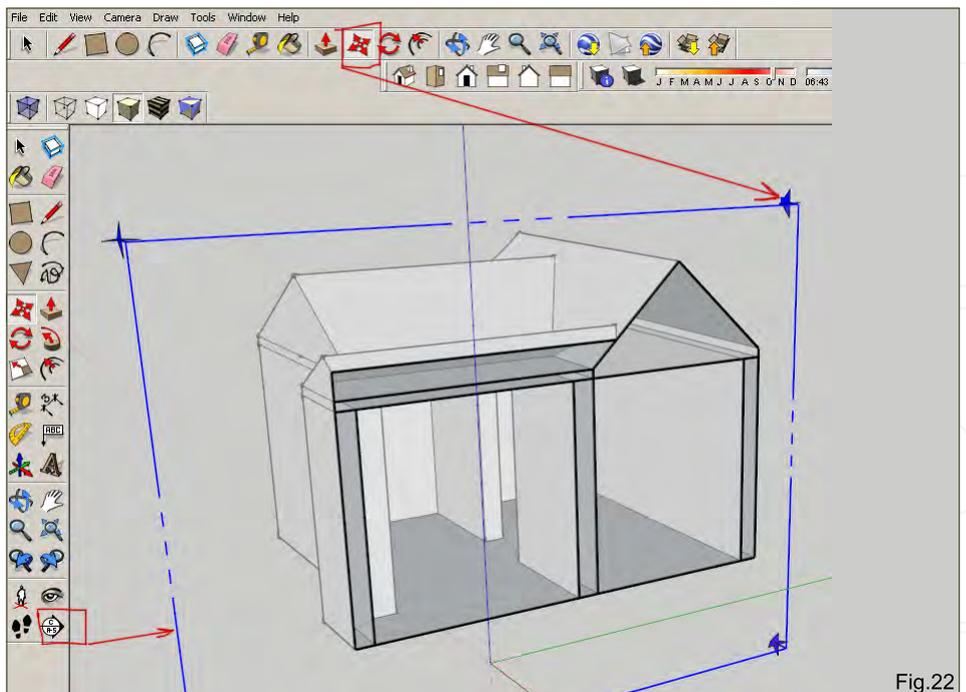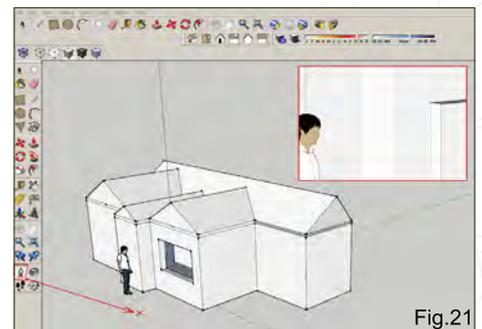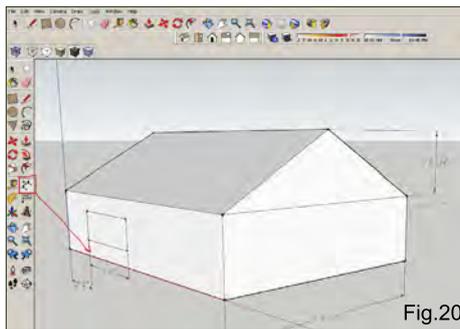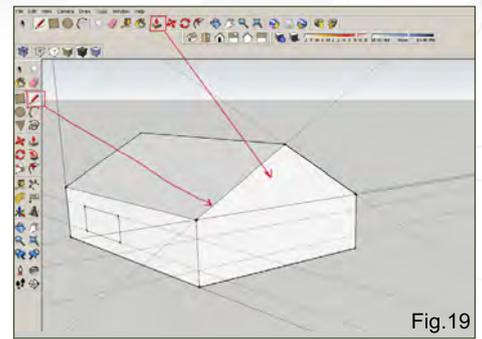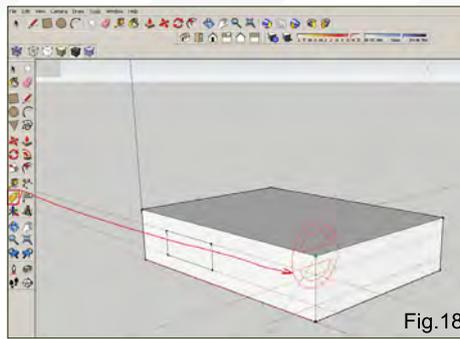
Fig.22

on the tool and then align the green icon to the corresponding plane or angle you wish to view. Then select the Move tool and click on one of the corner arrows and drag in the relevant direction (**Fig.22**).

This concludes our overview which I hope has at least introduced the main tools and their functions. There are of course further lessons to learn along with other tools and techniques, such as applying materials, but the main aim

here is to introduce the interface and value of the software in terms of building a simple 3D environment which can then be used in digital painting.

Richard Tilbury

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Using 3D as a base for 2D Painting

Software Used: Google SketchUp and Photoshop

I start out with a simple 3D block-in using Google SketchUp, setting the camera to an extreme angle to give it more depth. After exporting the 3D model as a JPG, I open it up in Photoshop and resize it to around 150-200 dpi (**Fig.00**).

In Photoshop I then create two new layers for the left and right vanishing points. With the use of the Line Tool, set to Fill Pixels (**Fig.01**), I find the vanishing points of the architecture.
To find the vanishing points of the architecture, you first of all need to find your horizon line. The horizon line is basically your eye level in the image, or of what you're looking at. In my image, I've left a little gap between the two cylinders to make this quicker for the eye to find.

This is the where the Rulers come in handy: press Ctrl + R to turn them on and off. With the
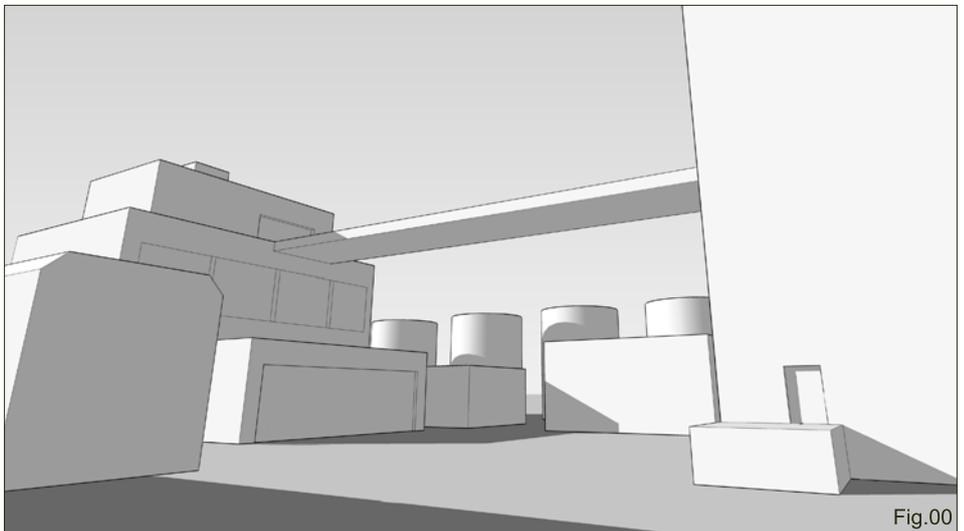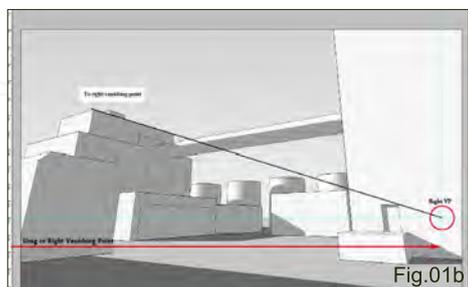
Fig.00
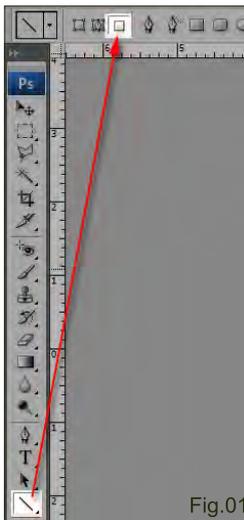
Fig.01
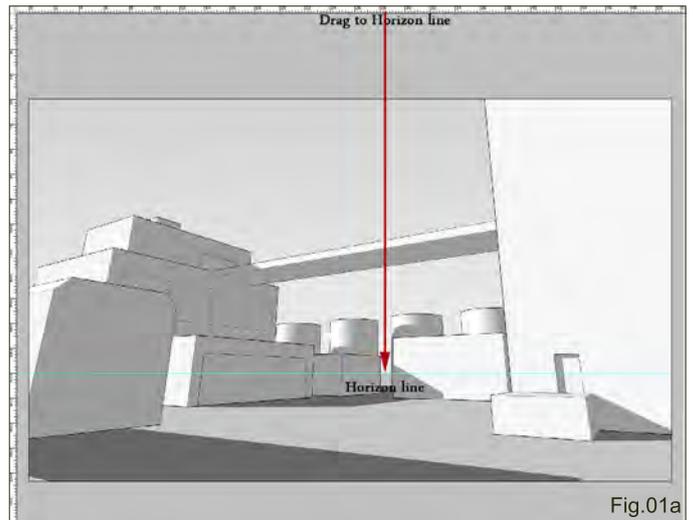
Fig.01a

Fig.01b

Rulers turned on, click-and-drag on the top ruler guide to pull down a line guide onto the horizon line (**Fig.01a**).

With the horizon line now marked out, you need to find where your two vanishing points will fall

points on it. To do this, use the Line Tool and follow along one corner of the structure. Where your line meets the horizon line is your right-hand vanishing point. Mark this with a vertical ruler guide (**Fig.01b**).
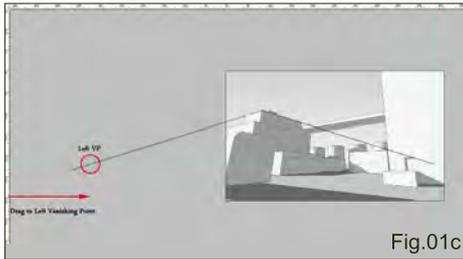
Fig.01c

The same thing goes for the left vanishing point – in my image this one is off the canvas. To find it, you need to zoom out and find where your Line Tool meets the horizon line (**Fig.01c**).
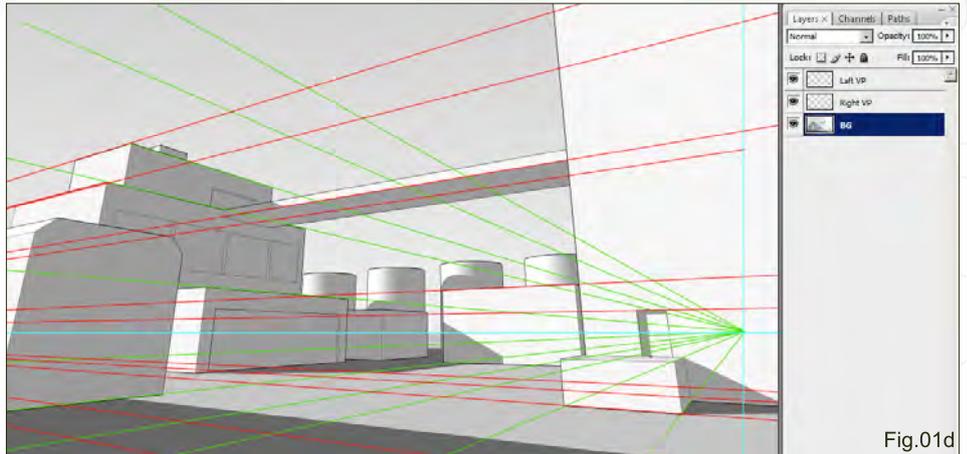
Now that you have your two vanishing points, use the same Line Tool to draw lines radiating from the left vanishing point (**Fig.01d** – shown in red), and the right vanishing point (shown in green). Each vanishing point needs to be on its own layer.

The next step is to block in the shadowed sides with red using the Selection Tool and filling them on a separate layer. Do the same with the side that is facing the light, also on its own layer (**Fig.02**). I've used these specific colors just because it's easier to see them, and when I need to select a side I can simply hold Ctrl and click the layer for an instant selection.
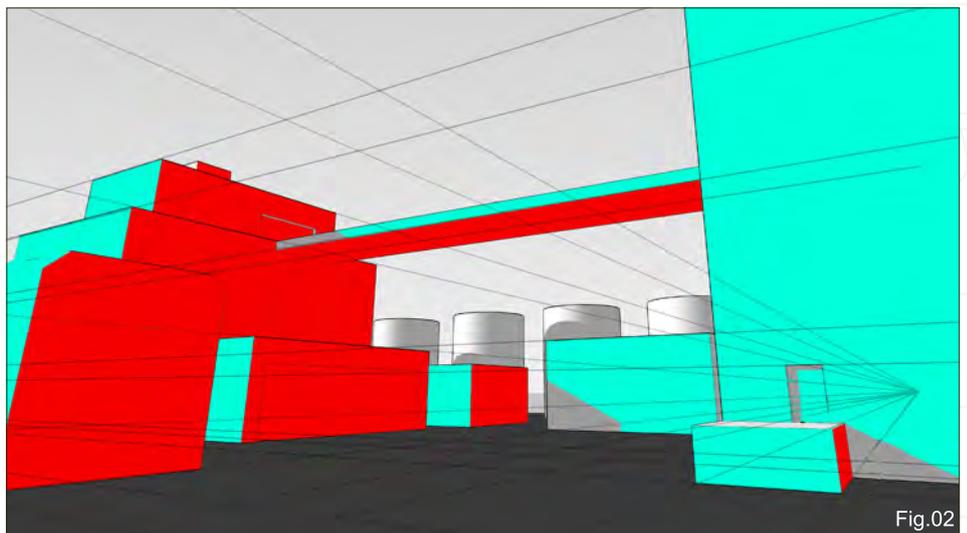
I now have five layers: the 3D base image, two layers for the vanishing points, and two for the shadowed/light-facing sides (**Fig.03**).

Fig.01d

Fig.02

I hide the all the layers here, except for the two vanishing point ones. On a new layer I then start sketching in some ideas (**Fig.04**). At this point it's a good idea to start thinking and looking for some textures to use (Editor's tip: check
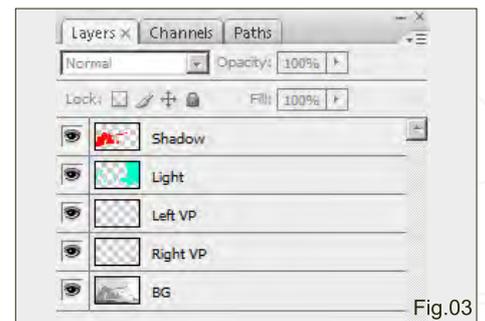
Fig.03

out 3DTotal's new free texture and reference image library for royalty-free textures: http://freetextures.3dtotal.com).

I hide the sketch layer, and on a new layer set to Color I lay down some basic color and texture with a texture brush, just to get rid of those grays and to start setting the mood of the piece (**Fig.05**).

After gathering textures it's a good idea to then resize them to keep a sense of scale; for

Fig.04
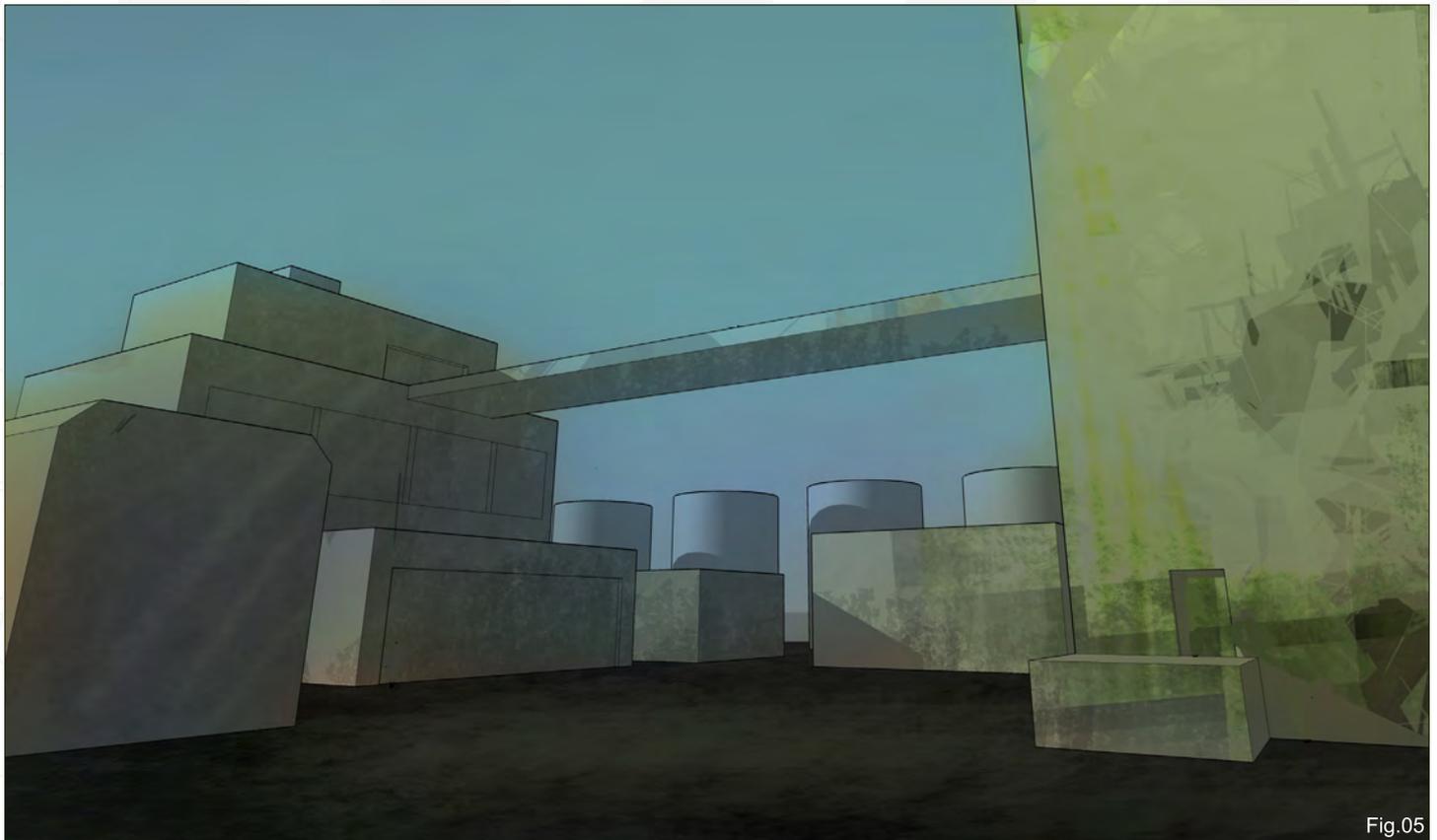
Fig.05

example, you'll need to ensure that the windows and doors of a texture are not too small – or too big! – for your scene, and likewise always avoid making bricks look like they're about five feet long!

So I'm starting to lay down the textures on the building surfaces now, using the Transform Tool (Ctrl + T). Right-click and set it to Distort (**Fig.06**).
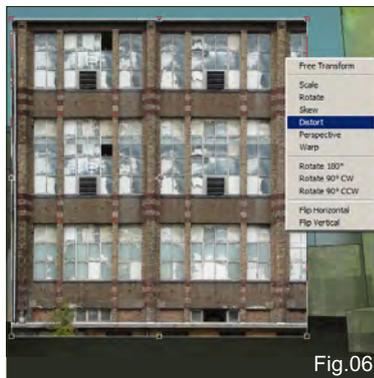
Fig.06
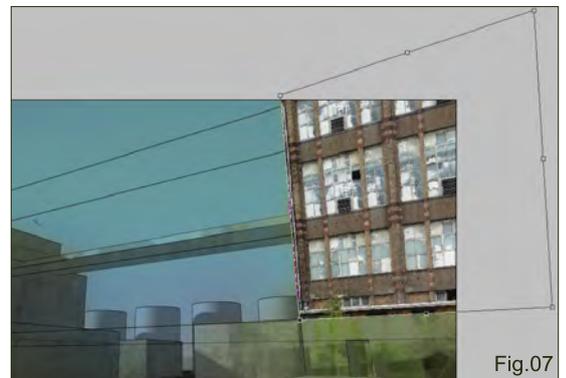
Fig.07

I now want to place the texture on the surface and pull the corners of it to fit my vanishing points (**Fig.07**).

I continue to lay down textures on the rest of the buildings now, still using the Transform Tool to fit them in the correct perspective. I'm also using a rock textured brush over the textures to unify them (**Fig.08**). I'm trying not to worry about painting over my textures; they can always be reapplied or replaced if necessary.

With most of the texture down now, I can start to add more color with the help of a new Color layer. I flip and re-crop the image here to take a

Fig.08

Fig.09

little off the left and bring more of the train on the right into view (**Fig.09**). I've found a texture on CGTextures.com which is very useful for the old train; and while looking for the train texture I also came across a great factory reference image which I have decided to incorporate into my background, as well – also from CGTextures. com. I've had to adjust the factory to fit the vertical vanishing point using the Transform Tool.

I flip the image, and on a new layer I add some atmospheric fog over the distant factory buildings, as well as applying a few other textures to the walls and ground to bring out more detail (**Fig.10** – **11**).

LAYER SET TO SOFT LIGHT

Fig.10

Fig.11

In the final steps now, I add some haze to the image, along with the kind of light ray you might see coming through the clouds on a cloudy day when the sun is strong! I have done this by simply adding a new layer, painting in my ray of light with a large soft brush, and setting the layer to Screen or overlay to achieve the right effect (**Fig.12**). This little trick adds more intensity to the focal area!

I tend to flatten the image at this point so I don't get overwhelmed with all the layers. It also helps to make it feel like everything is coming together. And with the image flattened, I can now go in and add detail on a new layer. I'm

Fig.12

pretty happy with the right side of the image, but I find the left to be lacking in variation, so I darken the entire wall on the left with the Burn Tool, and add some additional broken glass, as well as lightening up the windows. This all helps to balance the image, with the train on the right, and the building on the left (**Fig.13** – final).

At this stage, it's all about how much detail you want to put in; you can keep adding textures or painting until you're content with how things look and want to call it done. I'm happy with how things are working with this image now, so I'm calling it "final" and leaving it there. Thanks for reading!

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• Free Base Image

Fig.13

"The creation of adequate brushes is not the solution to a bad drawing technique, but the use of them will make our work faster and more effective."

DOWNLOAD RESOURCES

- Free Brushes

CUSTOM BRUSHES

An artist's brushes have always been a vital part of any painter's set of tools, and remain the single asset that links paint with canvas. As such, they are crucial to how we view and interpret an artwork, and they afford the artist with a means through which to convey an idea or feeling. This has always been true throughout the history of art, and is no less important within a digital context. Software such as Photoshop and Painter essentially combine and fuse paint, canvas and brushes into a single tool. However, within this complex set of "tools", brushes retain certain autonomy with their own, distinct set of parameters and presets, offering artists the freedom to affect and vary the way paint is applied. This principle of customizing brushes forms the focus of this set of tutorials, and aims to show how individual artists exploit these techniques to achieve some interesting results!

Custom Brushes - Trees, Leaves and Branches

Software Used: Photoshop

Introduction

Drawing any type of vegetation is not an easy task! One of the main problems many artists face is the creation of credible trees and brushes for their paintings. The best way to win this battle is to carefully observe the vegetation around us, and to create a set of brushes that will create a good effect on our canvas.

All you need to make a good tree is your graphics tablet, your pen, and this tutorial! I'm sure that advanced painters will find some tips and tricks here, whilst beginners should not fear any of this either! So let's get started.

Life drawing – painting vegetation

Trees and vegetation have been one of the more difficult things for artists to draw and paint. And the reason for this is simple: Like animals or humans, trees have an organic and random structure that can't be easily assimilated. Most of the time, trees in a scene are in the middle or far distance. It's for this reason that I'm going to focus this tutorial on painting trees and vegetation that will not appear too close to the observer.

It is important to understand that leaves, branches and the trunk are all parts of the same element: the tree. In some way, painting foliage is not far from painting clouds or cotton-shaped materials; the leaves gather together to shape "clouds" of leaves. It may sound very poetic, but keep this in mind as it will be useful for this tutorial.

Digital art provides artists with a useful weapon: brushes. The creation of adequate brushes is not the solution to a bad drawing technique, but the use of them will make our work faster and more effective. First of all, trust in your head;

Fig.01

Fig.02

Fig.03

when you have a clear idea of what you want to paint, use the tools available. These kinds of tutorials are perfect for designing useful tools for your work!

As an example to illustrate this tutorial, I've selected one of my images called "Citadel", which has a great combination of different types of vegetation elements. I've also selected this particular painting because the tree is one of the main elements of the composition. Moreover, we can see a far-off forest at the bottom of the image, as well as some examples of ground leaves and grass.

Custom brushes to draw leaves – Angle Jitter and Scattering effects

First of all, you have to know what kind of tree you want to paint for your scene. Pines, for example, are different in shape and structure

from oaks or birches. In my own image, I decided to paint a rounded tree with elliptical leaves. The truth is that you don't need more than two brushes to paint tree foliage: one is used to paint the grouped leaves (the compact mass of leaves), and another is used to paint scattered leaves (to paint the leaves of small branches and to give detail and brightness to foliage).

The first step is to select a photograph or image of grouped leaves and convert it to grayscale mode (**Fig.01** – **02**) (I recommend you gather photos of trees and vegetation to have a good collection of images that will help you to create brushes). We then have to edit the image to define it and finish around its borders (**Fig.03**). Because the leaves in the real world are never completely opaque, I recommend that you adjust the image's Levels to reach a medium-dark tone of gray.

We convert the image to a brush now (Define Brush Preset in Photoshop's Edit menu) and open up the brushes editor. As we want that the borders of our strokes to appear irregular, we have to set Angle Jitter to the maximum level. You can also slightly adjust the Roundness Jitter to get a random deformation of the leaves (**Fig.04**). Regarding the opacity, I usually control this with the Pen Pressure setting. Adjust it to your needs and paint whatever is convenient for you. Once you've completed the editing of your brush, and it feels good on the canvas, save the brush and name it (I've named mine "**foliage brush**").
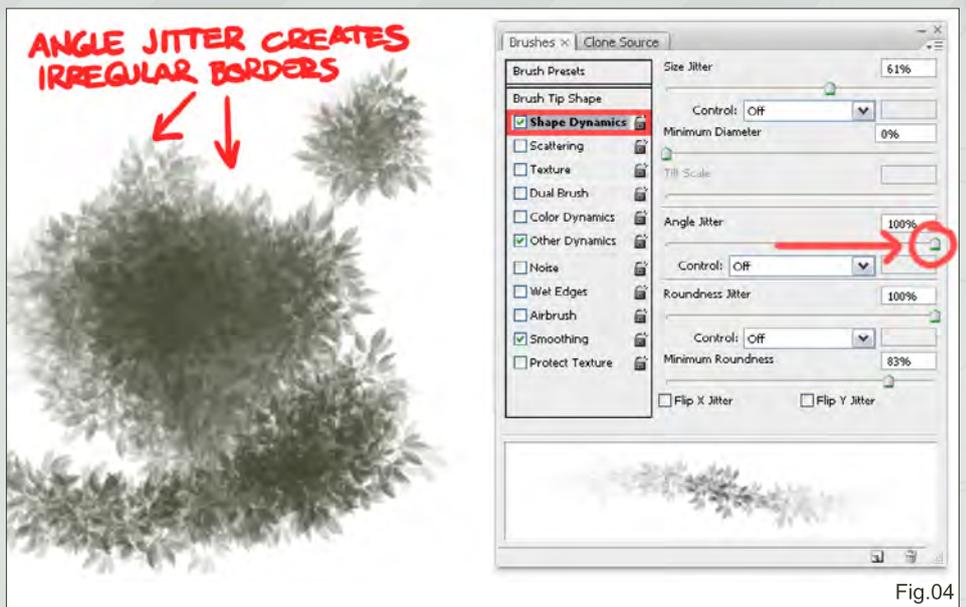
For the other brush of scattered leaves we need to isolate one leaf in the grayscale image we obtained earlier (**Fig.05**). The parameters in the brushes editor are the same as the foliage brush, only with one difference: we have to this time check the Scattering effe ct. Try the brush with different values to get a suitable result (**Fig.06**). I have named this brush, "**scattered leaves**".
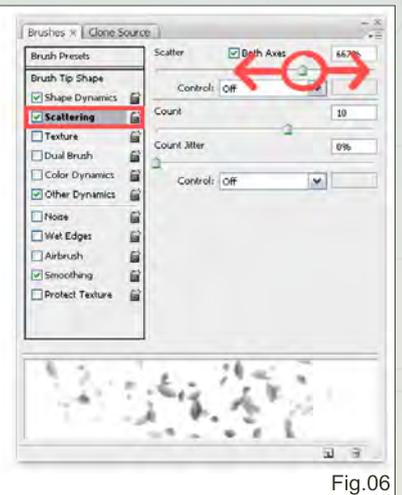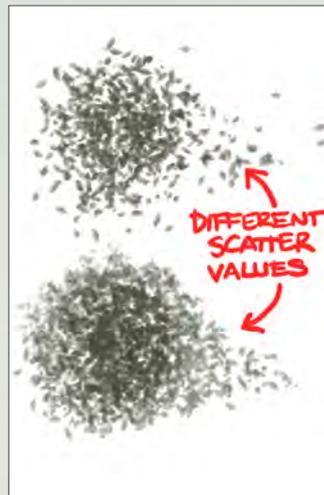
Brushes for branches – the Direction controller

We only need to design one more brush to create a tangle of branches now. Collect some images of trees without leaves (winter images of trees are perfect!) as these will be helpful. I prefer branches to be not too dense or complex (**Fig.07**), but this decision depends of the kind of tree you want to paint, of course. After removing

Fig.04

Fig.05

Fig.06

the trunk and some branches, we can define our new brush (**Fig.08**).

This brush has a new and interesting effect in that the rotation is now being controlled
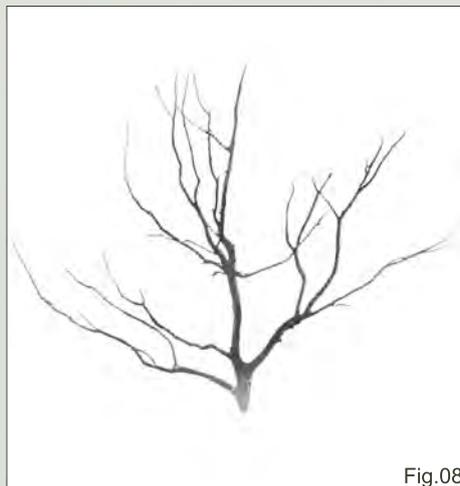
by the stroke's direction. Photoshop allows us to position the brush image depending on the movement and direction of our pen. You just have to change the Angle Jitter control parameter to Direction to get this working (**Fig.09**). A more precise way to do this is to select Pen Tilt, instead of Direction, but you should note that this is only applicable when using a pen which is sensitive to vertical rotation.

We can try the new brush out now and check how it works using the direction controller. As I final touch, I adjust the Spacing on the brush, and save it out. In my set of brushes that come free with this tutorial – simply click on the Free Resources download – you will find this brush labeled "**branches**".

Fig.07

Fig.08

Using the brushes – drawing trees

The steps to paint a tree are easy, but you're probably going to need some practice before you have full control over your new brushes. Before going any further, we have to create a layer for the trunk and branches, and another one for the foliage.

The first step is to create the branch framework of the tree on a new layer. In my Citadel painting, I draw the trunk on the top of a mound. I then choose the branches brush we designed just a moment ago, and make a clockwise stroke to create the basic branch structure of the tree (**Fig.10**). Don't be afraid of the result of the branches brush; the placement of the leaves in the next step will prevent us from seeing most of the small parts of them.

The next thing we need to tackle is the foliage. The time has now come to prove our painting skills! This may prove to be the more difficult part in this process, so take your time and try as many times as are required to get the results you want.

We select a dark color and start painting on another new layer with spiral motions of our hand, using the foliage brush to apply leaves to the branches of our tree. We must be sure not
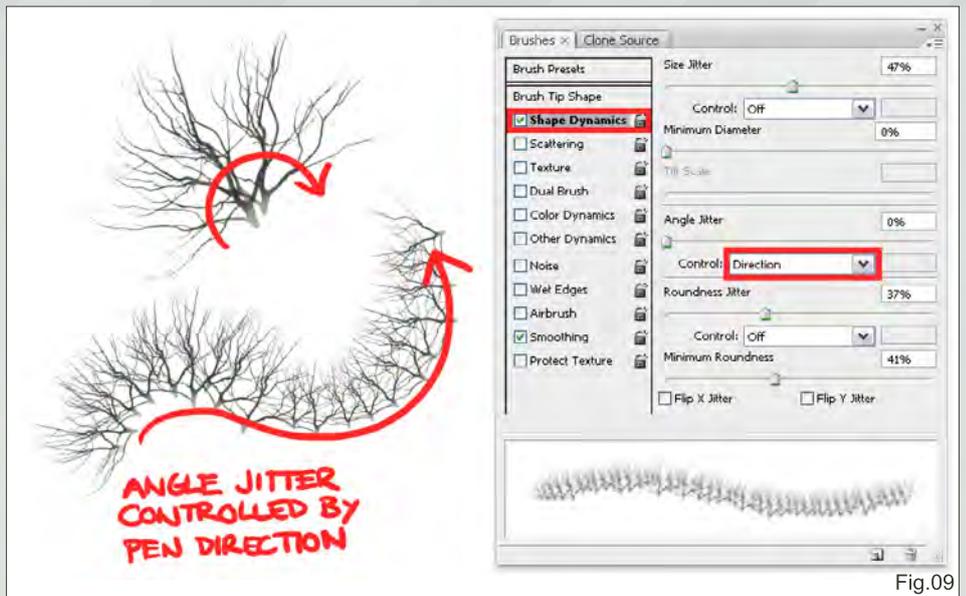
ANGLE JITTER CONTROLLED BY PEN DIRECTION
Fig.09

Fig.10

Fig.11

to create foliage too near the trunk, nor on the border of exterior edges of branches. The best way to do this is to concentrate on the leaves in the central area. As you can see in **Fig.11** I have deliberately left empty spaces where the branches appear through the masses of leaves (marked with circles).

Once we've finished with main mass, select the scattered leaves brush and define the outer border of the foliage now (**Fig.12**). When we use customized brushes, keep the brushes

Fig.12

editor open as a helpful habit. You can modify the Scattering effect (or any other parameter) quickly, according to your needs, at any time.

Finally, select lighter colors to create volume over the mass of leaves. "Lock transparent pixels" on this layer so you can be sure not to add more green mass unnecessarily. Use any brush you consider suitable to give more detail and definition (**Fig.13**). And be careful with the light source in the scene – as you can see in my image, I've created a backlight ambient that shapes the tree with dark tones of green.

The distant wooden mass – lighting tree crowns

Let's move onto something a little easier now: the distant mass of trees. As we can see in most landscape paintings, the distant trees and woods are usually represented as an undefined mass without detail. The rule is simple: The longer the distance of an object from the observer, the lower the amount of detail it will have. In the free brushes set that come with this tutorial, you will find several brushes to paint distant vegetation.

So let's now pass from theory to practice. Use the **wooden mass brush** to create the base of your wood. I've simply used a photograph of a tree to create it (**Fig.14** – **15**). By adding a Scattering effect, Angle Jitter and controlling the opacity with Pen Pressure, you can obtain lots of brushes to create a wooden mass. As mentioned at the beginning of this tutorial,

Fig.13

Fig.14
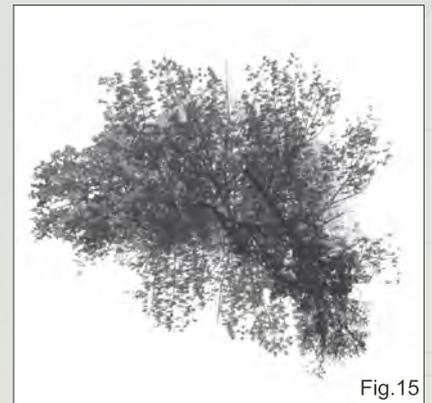
Fig.15

painting trees is similar to painting clouds or cotton!

To define the crown of the trees we have created a brush starting from another new photograph. As we need to see the tops of the trees, we can edit the image and erase the lower part of it (**Fig.16** – **17**). The result is a

vegetation arch facing down that will be very useful to provide volume to the plain mass we painted before. All we do with this brush is light the tree crowns. You'll find it in the free set labeled as the tree border brush. Note that in the brushes editor, I have activated the Direction controller to obtain a more flexible drawing technique.

Fig.16

Fig.17

I have created an example in **Fig.18** so you can see this in action. I have used only two tones of gray to show the advantage and simplicity of using this painting method. In the top image, we start by creating rough stains with the wooden mass brush to simulate volume. We then complete our wood by defining the borders with the tree border brush in the second image. It's easy, really! In few seconds we'll reach a perfect and realistic result without too much effort.

Custom brushes for everything you can imagine!

Creating custom brushes is a meticulous task that will bring you a new range of possibilities to your drawing techniques. All the custom brushes
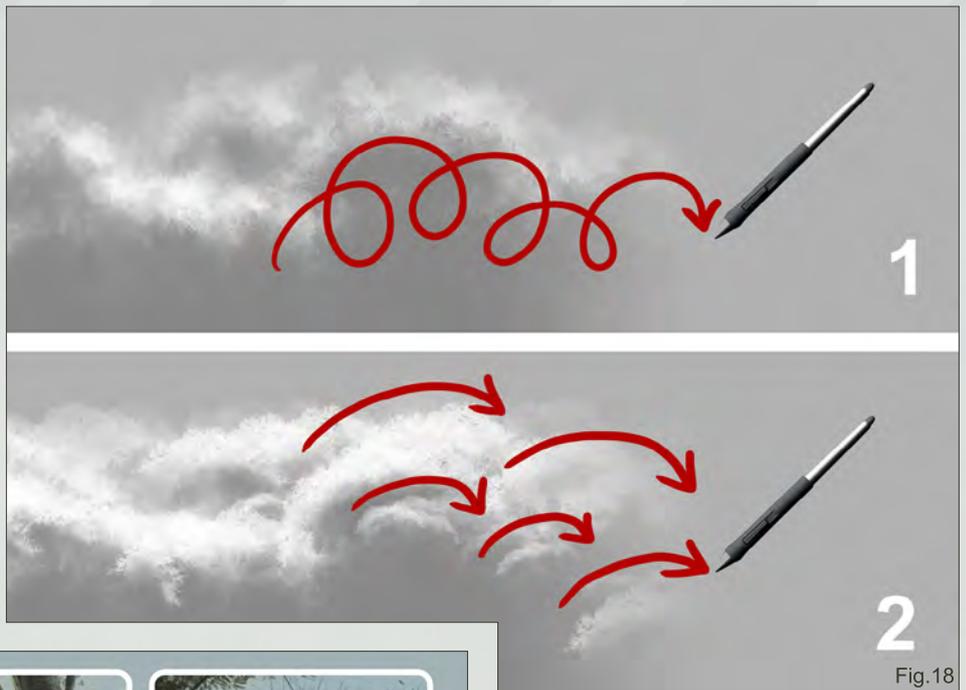
Fig.18
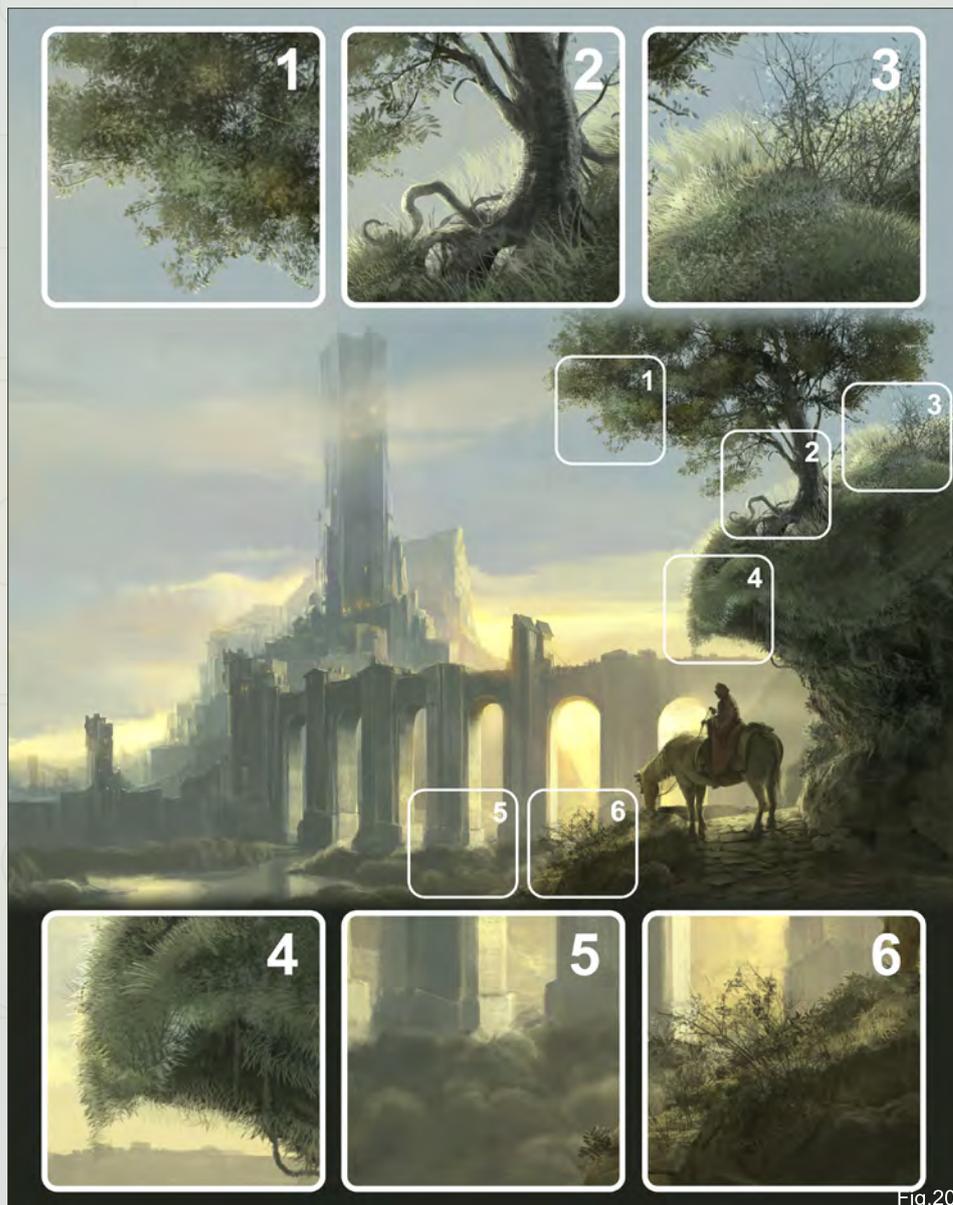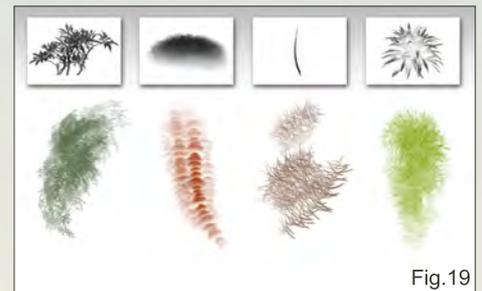
Fig.19

I have compiled for this tutorial are used in the Citadel image, and you can download the brushes with this tutorial for free. Explore them and create your own new ones for different tree species for your paintings.

My **trunk roughness**, **grass leaves**, and **light vegetation** brushes are some of the other vegetation brushes I have used on my, as you can see in **Fig.19**. Take a look and think about the different treatment of the vegetation elements regarding their position in the scene, the lighting, and the perspective (**Fig.20**).

There are lots of possibilities in the creation of custom brushes, and I'll be very pleased if this tutorial serves as inspiration to create new methods to face the difficult work of painting trees and vegetation. We could spend pages and pages explaining how to design brushes for countless purposes, but at the end of it all, the

Fig.20

most important thing is not my theory, it's your practice!

Thank you for reading this tutorial, and good luck with your own custom brush creations!

Roberto F·Castro

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DOWNLOAD RESOURCES

- Free Brushes

Chapter 1 | Vampire

In the first installment we look at the vampire, one of the most popular characters within the undead category. This character has perhaps varied more than any other in terms of the guises it has adopted over the years but this tutorial will take the classic human form as its foundation, inspired by the one and only Count Dracula.

Chapter 2 | Issue 049 Jan 2010 | Zombie
Chapter 3 | Issue 050 Feb2010 | Werewolf

"...part of the fascination with anything creative is the fact that it can suggest its own direction and surprise you on the way!"

PAINTING THE UNDEAD

This series of tutorials focuses on mythological and legendary characters and in particular the theme of the undead. It includes the two classic examples, most notably the vampire and zombie but also incorporates a werewolf which does occupy a very popular and unique place in modern myth. All of the above characters have featured heavily in both book and film contexts over the years as such have cemented themselves in history.

The tutorials cover the process of creating digital characters from the concept stage through to the final refinements. The value of thumbnail sketches and exploring variations on a theme will be covered as well as touching upon custom brushes and the power of Photoshop's blending modes which offer flexibility and freedom to edit the image throughout the design process. Each individual tutorial will take a slightly varied approach with regards to blocking in and color schemes and aim to show how Layers and blending modes can be manipulated to suit different attitudes.

Chapter 1 - Vampire

Software Used: Photoshop

Introduction

Before beginning any sort of project I usually begin by doing a bit of research into the subject and gathering some reference material. In this case I searched Google for images relating to vampires and the numerous incarnations that have appeared over the years. When you look into the topic of vampires you'll realize how many different interpretations exist, from the early vision of Count Orlok in the *Nosferatu* film through to the classic character portrayed by the ubiquitous Christopher Lee. Then at opposite end of the spectrum are the more modern takes that are evident in the *Blade* and *Underworld* series'. Suffice to say there is no single and consistent concept that springs to mind when you think of a vampire.

This poses an initial problem as I can't decide in my mind what the character should look like, and what type of aura I want him to convey. Should he be a sickly, cowering type that hides from human contact, or have a more powerful and charming persona exuding status and sophistication? These issues led to decisions

Fig.01

Fig.02

over the costume design and posture, and with so many question marks it was necessary to start with some thumbnail sketches to try and resolve the problem.

Thumbnail sketches

It's very good practice to make a series of small and swift sketches before starting a final design as it will help clarify things and also suggest artistic directions that you may not have previously considered. In this instance I begin with a few silhouettes to try out some poses (**Fig.01**).

You can see here that a simple silhouette can convey much about a character (#1 – 3), providing an insight into their proportions and clothing, for example. I decided to make a few head studies to explore the type of qualities and look he should have, and to try and decide on his demeanor (**Fig.02**). Should he look imposing and more human like or perhaps be eerie with

exaggerated features that resemble more of a sub-human or monster?

You can see that the top left sketch resembles Nosferatu (#1) and has a very different feel to the version seen middle-right. The bottom-left character looks more like a monster, whereas the top-right sketch looks more modern and contemporary in context (#2). Each has a different quality, and by making a series of sketches such as these we can begin to formulate an idea and turn a vague notion into a clearer vision.

Usually there is not one single sketch that looks right over and above everything else, but rather there are aspects that prove to be likeable in each. In this instance I like the more charismatic quality to number 4 compared to the left-hand column, but I also think that the long hair in number 2 adds a certain feminine quality which contrasts well with the notion of a physically

powerful being, lending him a certain dynamic. I also like the robe/cape shown bottom-right (#6) which adds a classic look, as well as providing a lyricism through the flowing lines of the fabric.

By making these quick sketches I have already been able to decide on a few components that I would like to include in my design, so I can now go back to the pose. The one that strikes me the most is number 1 (see **Fig.01**). It doesn't feel as domineering as 2 or 3, but with the extended arm it seems a little creepy and mysterious, without being too obvious.

Favoring this posture I begin on some variations (**Fig.03**). I have made the decision to give the character a robe and long hair, but if the robe envelops his body there will be little room for detail; I don't want the majority of the concept to be made up entirely of this element! To add some interest I open the front in order to include

Fig.03

some anatomy which will contrast well with the dark clothing (#1). Version 2 looks somewhat surprised, as though he's been disturbed and has looked around to face the viewer. This combined with his more hunched shoulders gives him a creepy quality, which I like but is not in keeping with a powerful presence.

I've decided to add another arm to version 1 for the bottom 2 thumbnails, but version 3 is the one that seems to work best, as 4 appears to be too gestural and makes too strong a statement.

Blocking in

The first step is to add a neutral background, which I generally do by filling the entire canvas with a tertiary gray of some kind, and then paint random strokes over it using a textured brush of some description. On a separate layer I then begin by blocking in the character in rough, bold strokes, focusing on the main volumes and areas of color (**Fig.04**).

I have used a custom brush to add the textured effect, which was modified from a photo of broken glass, of all things (see inset). Much of the other blocking in is done using the standard Hard Round Airbrushes and Chalk brushes that Photoshop provides.

I always keep the background as a separate layer as it makes it easy to change the color scheme and lighting, as we will see later in this tutorial.

Fig.04

Fig.05

Fig.06

Fig.07

In fact, I think it would be interesting to have the bottom of the image a touch darker and have the character almost emerge out of this darkness. To do this, I select a gray/green color (**Fig.05** – see inset) and on a new layer I add a Gradient (Foreground to Transparent), and then set the layer blending mode to Multiply.

You can also see that I have now started to block in the main shadow areas across the face and torso, and have better defined the head.

The character at this point appears to be looking slightly to his left, whilst the thumbnail sketch confronts the viewer directly. So I change this here, as well as tidy up the hair shape which looks a little windswept (**Fig.06**). The other issue was that his robe was open very low on his torso, which was looking a little risqué, so I amended this and started to paint in some fabric folds.
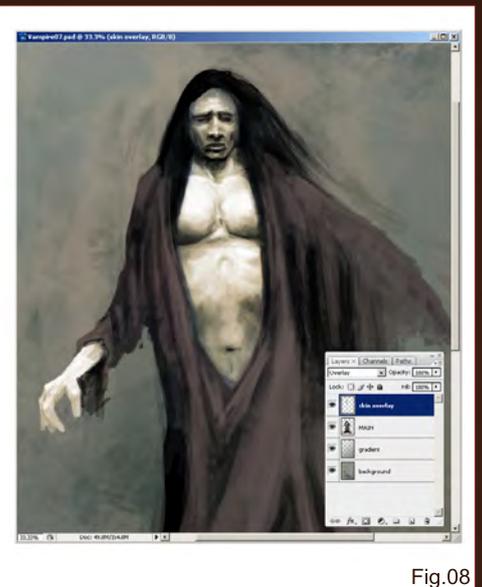
Fig.08

So far the Photoshop file has been divided into three layers: the background, the gradient and the character himself. Continuing on the character layer I start to use a grayscale palette to work on the skin. This is so I can focus on the tonal range, but I also want him to have very pale and lifeless flesh to create a ghostly, non-human appearance and a suggestion of the undead (**Fig.07**). Although pure coincidence, I really like the expression in the thumbnail (see inset). It suggests to me a look of sorrow, or some forlorn hope which I really want to capture.

Part of the reason I've painted the skin in black and white is that I can overlay a color, retaining

the tonal values but with the option of making hue changes at any point during the process. In **Fig.08** you can see a dull ochre color on the left, set to Normal mode, but when changed to Overlay (see right inset) it adds a certain glow, whilst maintaining the ghostly quality.

In compliance with the bottom-left thumbnail in **Fig.03**, I've added the character's left arm (**Fig.09**). You can also see at this point the layer structure on the right-hand side palette, with the separate color overlay for the skin.

I notice here that the figure looks a little wobbly on his feet, so I rotate him slightly to make him

Fig.09

more upright (**Fig.10**). I also add some fancy brocade around the sleeve and torso to add some interest, and start to form some of the folds in the robe, all of which is done on the character layer.

Building the detail

At this point I am starting to realize that because I have used my thumbnail as a starting point, which was obviously done quickly and not accurately, I have transferred many of the problems across to my final version; namely the proportioning. Not only does the character look very tall, but the rib cage looks too low down, and his left arm is also too long. Sometimes having these exaggerations can help a design, and in this case the small head and long arm does somehow lend our vampire a creepier presence. In fact, a smaller head is often a good device to make a character seem more heroic and portray a sense of power!

However, I have decided to squash everything up a little, which I do using the Edit > Transform > Scale tool. I duplicate the right arm, and on a new layer move it to a better position, using the Eraser Tool to blend it in with the original layer before merging the two together. In **Fig.11** you

Fig.10

Fig.11

Fig.12

can see the original position highlighted in red and how it has been altered.

With the anatomical proportions improved I start to work on some more detailing, namely fixing him on the ground. I consider the idea of having the robe hide his legs, or making the bottom part of the painting dark to create the impression of him floating, but I settle on some boots, along with a small decorative element to his robe (**Fig.12**). I add another gradient to make the bottom part of the painting darker, which also emphasizes his skin color.

I've been moving the robe detail around but it never really seems to work until I place it at the top of his left boot, which immediately feels right. I've also added another small focal point to the bottom section of the picture.

Fig.13

One other part of the design which has been causing me some problems is the hands, which look rather too symmetrical – as though he is sitting on a throne. I've thought about the nature of vampires and their reputation of being able to charm and seduce their victims, and so I've decided to change his left hand to a more beckoning gesture (**Fig.13**).

It's always good to have a distinct lack of symmetry in your characters to make them more believable, but in **Fig.14** you can see that the naval is far from being central to the torso and head, and looks awkward as a result.

Refining

I alter the shape of the hair, making it less bouffant, and I add some length and highlights on a different layer, just in case I want to reverse it or leave it short (**Fig.15**). You can also see that I have created a new layer called "eye color", which is set to Overlay and shows the red tint around the eyes.

You will have noticed that the background color has changed throughout this tutorial, which is the advantage of keeping it separate to the character. You may wish to change the tonal values etc. – or in this instance add some textural detail in the form of a blood spatter (**Fig.16**). I created this custom brush a while ago

Fig.14

Fig.15

Fig.16

Fig.17
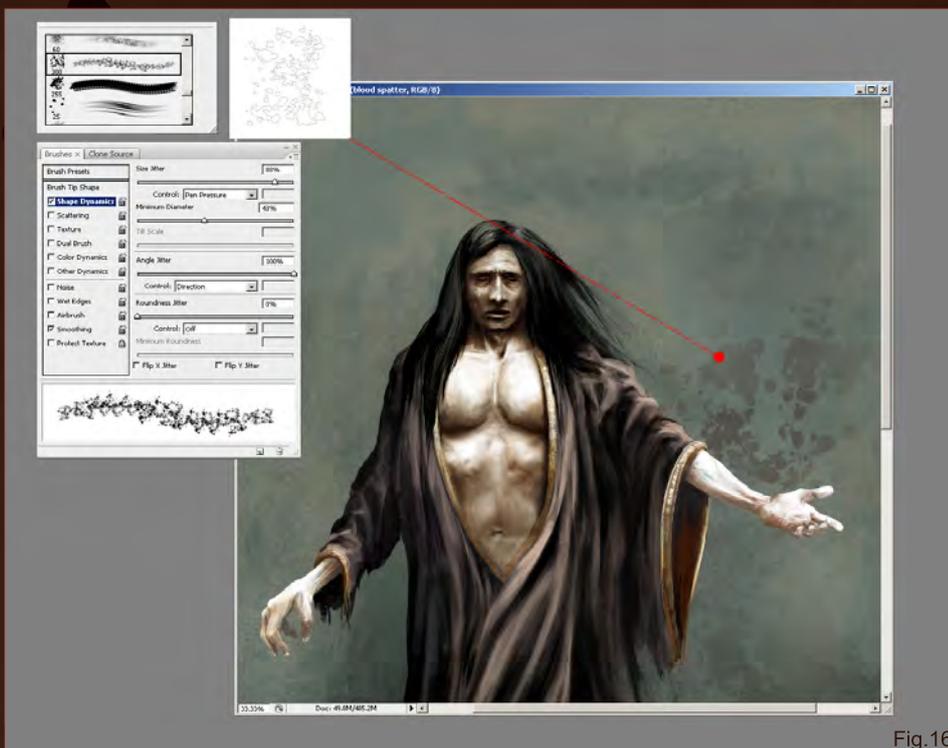
and thought, with some subtle use, could prove appropriate to this particular painting. I added a new layer for this effect.

The painting is almost complete now, but after having altered the right arm and hand it has since seemed inconsistent with the other one. The thin wrist and angle of the forearm does not feel right and again mimics the thumbnail too closely. After using a mirror and some careful posing, I decide on a different gesture, the result of which can be seen in **Fig.17**.

Conclusion

This has been a fun project as I have never painted a vampire before and more particularly because I did not have a clear idea about how he would look before starting out.

It's interesting to see how an idea or feeling evolves during the painting process, and you will have noticed how the character has transformed during this tutorial. There are aspects which perhaps do not follow strict rules, such as how the robe fits around the body (I am sure some fashion experts could point out some of the problems to me!), but from an artistic perspective I like the flow and rhythm it has created.

The boot design and hand gestures have certainly been improvised along the way, and the fact that one sleeve is torn and ragged compared to the other was also unintentional. However, part of the fascination with anything creative is the fact that it can suggest its own direction and surprise you on the way!

Here is the final version (**Fig.18**).

Richard Tilbury

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Fig.18

"WHAT MARKS THE END FOR MY WORK, PUTTING ALL THIS INFORMATION TOGETHER IN ONE COLORFUL PACKAGE, SHOULD ONLY BE THE BEGINNING OF YOUR JOURNEY MAKING USE OF IT."

Beginner's Guide to

DIGITAL PAINTING

This Workshop Series will look at, just as the title suggests, all the things that we need to know to get us started with Photoshop – mainly for painting, but also for other things such as matte painting and photo manipulation, which often use the same tools. We will be covering all the technical aspects of the programme, as well as some technical sides of painting that'll help us starting to swing the virtual brush!

CHAPTER 6 – THE FINAL PART: FINISHING TOUCHES, FILTERS, THE UNSHARPEN MASK AND SAVING YOUR WORK

Software Used: Photoshop

INTRODUCTION

As we are now drawing this six-part tutorial series to a close, we will be adding the final touches to our piece in this final installment. I'm almost sad to see the end of it, as I've rather enjoyed digging through Photoshop and all its quirks and treasure troves, and making it a little more accessible to those who thought "PS" stood for "Post Script" …

We'll be looking at adding additional lighting and overall textures, how to achieve different kinds of blurs to indicate motion or a focal blur, how to adjust or even change the overall color palette and intensity, and saving the picture for different purposes, like for print or the internet. All in all, this will be a rather short chapter, but no less important than the previous ones.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Every painting is an adventure, akin to good old fairytales, so what's better than to end one on a good note? We've journeyed from sketchy beginnings to massive changes, battling with tools and forging alliances with filters to refining the elements, and now all that is left to do is to tweak those things that will give the painting that extra special kick!

So let's have a look what we've got so far (**Fig.01**): a painting that looks pretty finished.

Fig.01

Fig.02

Fig.02a

However, not having looked at it for some time, I can notice some flaws in mine that I wish to iron out before attacking the final steps. It really is good sometimes to put a painting aside for a few days, or even weeks. Seeing it with fresh eyes makes you more aware of your mistakes. In this case, I notice that the values are a bit confusing, namely with the arch against the cliff face backdrop.

Switching the image to grayscale (Duplicate image, Flatten, and then Desaturate) shows more clearly where the values are off (**Fig.02**),

and we should address that. Just lightening the parts of the cliff face a little does the trick, using the Brush Tool and picking color off the rocks. We will do the same with the arch, darkening it slightly in those places (**Fig.02a**). If we now check the values in grayscale again, we see it's less muddled (**Fig.02b**). There are still some parts that can use a value boost, but we will look at that in a minute, or else we'll end up over- and re-painting the whole picture.

Something that the painting is distinctly lacking is light. Sure, there are light and shadowed

areas, but no actual, visible light – it's all very murky right now. We determined a few chapters ago where the light source is and painted the shadows accordingly. So now let's actually add that light.

Instead of painting a sun, we will be painting the glow of the sun that has to be somewhere towards the top right of the image, clearly illuminating the left rock faces and the girl on the arch. As there are no harsh shadows though, there cannot be direct sunlight, but rather an indirect haze filtering through the clouds, strong enough to cast distinct shadows.

One of the ways to go about doing that is to add a new layer right on top of everything, and set it to Soft Light or Overlay. Picking a nice, bright yellow (**Fig.03**) and choosing a very Soft Round Brush with Opacity set to Pen Pressure and Size Jitter switched off, we gently paint over
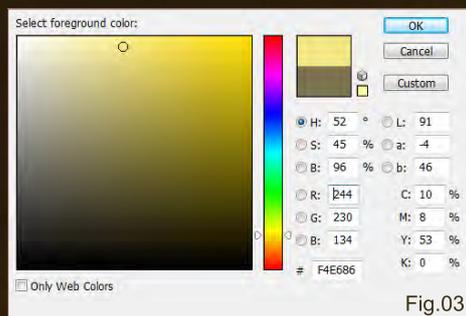
Fig.02b

the areas that we want to have a glow (**Fig.04 – 04a**). Changing the hue slightly here and there works nicely to give the light some color variation, even if it isn't all that noticeable, and adjusting the Opacity of the layer also helps.

Once again, more and stronger light can and will be added later. I've found that once an image is finalized and all adjustments made, it can be beneficial to repeat this step to get much more vivid and visible results.

SO WHAT'S NEXT?
BLURRING

Looking at the scene, we have to assume that a wind is blowing, seeing that the dress tendrils are happily floating and curling in the air. This is all well and good, but maybe we should make this slightly more believable?

Fig.03

Fig.04

What happens when you take a photo of a fast moving object in low light conditions? – Exactly! You get a blur. This is often very undesirable for photos, but very useful for paintings as it lends them a touch of heightened realism. There are several ways of going about adding blurs, but for a Motion Blur the filter of the same name works wonderfully, if used with care.

The tendril that we want to add some motion blur to would be mainly the central one, floating off into the distance. The first thing we need to do, before doing anything else, is merge the brocade pattern layer with the dress layer, if we haven't done so already. Sometimes, this is not


Fig.04a

Fig.05

possible for various reasons; if that is the case, the steps I'm about to explain will have to be repeated for the pattern layer. If that isn't done, we'd end up with a moving piece of fabric but a very static pattern!

We select the Lasso Tool and set its Feathering to something quite high; the reason being that if we don't, we'll get a definite break in the fabric where it goes from static to blurred, and that's not very pretty. Instead of the Lasso Tool, we can also use the Quick Mask with a very Soft Round Brush. It's all down to preference. In this case it's all very easy, as the tendrils that go over the arch are on a different layer than the one we need to blur, which means no painstaking selection process – we just select a nice and wide area around the tendril in question (**Fig.05**).

We then go to Filter > Blur > Motion Blur. A little box will pop up (**Fig.05a**). If Preview isn't ticked, tick it, because it will give you a real-time preview of the blur on the painting as you adjust it in the filter settings. If you cannot see anything in the small window but gray and white squares, drag its contents around until you see your layer. The Angle should be adjusted according to the direction of movement – we can do this by just turning the little wheel. And the slider at the bottom gives us control over the intensity of the blur. When we are happy with our selections, we hit OK.

Note: *Sometimes it works out best if the layer that is to be blurred is duplicated prior to blurring, and only the duplicate is blurred, while the original remains clear. Adjusting the Opacity of both layers in that case can be beneficial,*

and gives you a nice "clearly visible but moving" effect. A similar effect can be achieved by just using one layer, blurring it, and then going to Edit > Fade, to reduce the blur as much or as little as is desirable.
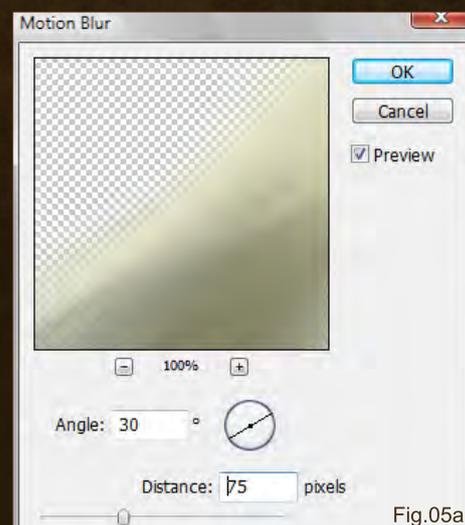
Fig.05a

We repeat this process with the other tendrils, as needed (**Fig.05b**).

Another blur filter that can come in useful sometimes – and again, if used with great care – is Gaussian Blur. It is not so good for indicating motion blur, as it simply diffuses whatever it is that's being blurred, rather than giving it a directional blur. It can be useful for focal blurring – like blurring parts of a person that are not meant to be in focus (especially long flowing hair and out of focus body parts), or the horizon line of landscapes. The latter, however, I have found to be too much most of the time, but that is personal preference so it doesn't mean you shouldn't be using it for that. The filter works the same way as Motion Blur, which means there is nothing much to explain or show. You can find Gaussian Blur in Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur. Try it and see for yourself what effects can be achieved with it.

There is a set of other blur filters still, which I personally never use. Again, this doesn't mean you can't or shouldn't. Play around with them as see what the different blur filters do, and whether you like them or not. However, solely relying on filters to blur

Fig.05b

things for you is a bit of a copout in the grand scheme of things, so learning how to actually paint blurs is very useful.

Of course, there is also the Blur Tool (**Fig.06** - See the icon on the left [icon]), and used with the default Round (and Soft!) Brush it can be extremely useful for targeted blurring. I've found it to be very useful for making objects appear more part of a scene by blurring the object's edges ever so slightly. Again, not everything in a painting needs that treatment, as sometimes sharp edges is exactly what you want or need. Again, use it with care. Over-blurring something is not very nice!

With this now covered, we are ready to look at final adjustments.

FINAL ADJUSTMENTS

Often, we realize after finishing a painting that maybe the contrast is not quite what we'd envisioned, or the colors aren't quite the way we wanted them. There's no need getting panicky or sad over that, as these things can be changed.

Before doing anything, let's just save the painting as it is, then duplicate the image (Image > Duplicate). This way we still have the original

version should we decide our tweaking didn't do much good and we want to start again without having to fully start over.

Note: *Depending on what you want to do – whether it's adjust the overall contrast or colors, or just area or level specific things – you may or may not want to flatten the image. This is another reason why it's good to keep the original layered version somewhere safe, in case you aren't happy with it once it's been flattened, adjusted and saved. I've learned that the hard way, so this may just save you repeating my mistakes!*

Before I flatten mine, I want to slightly adjust the Levels of the girl, as I feel she's a little too flat in contrast. As I've described the basic use of Levels in a previous chapter, I won't repeat it now (though I will go back to them in a second for some more interesting tweaking). In this case, I simply want to boost the basic Levels, using the sliders (**Fig.07**). Once that's done, I take a leap of faith and flatten the image (Layer > Flatten). Before doing this, checking that everything is in its right place, and there are no bits of texture sticking out anywhere where it shouldn't be, is vital! Trying to fix those things after an image has been flattened is definitely a lot harder, and also more time consuming.

Fig.07
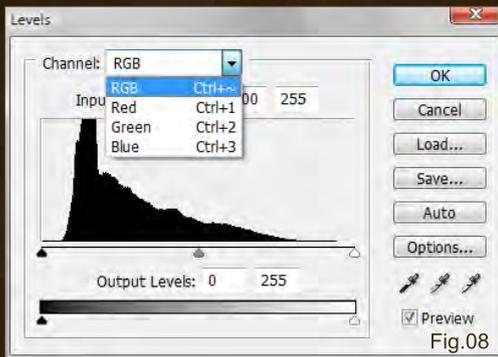
Fig.08
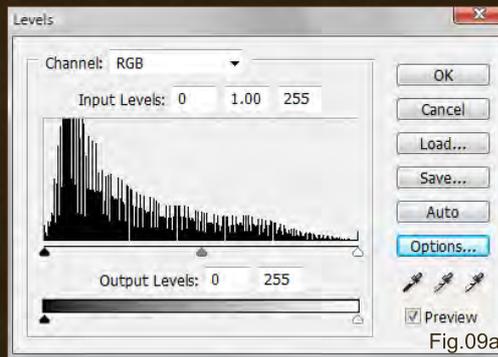
Fig.09a
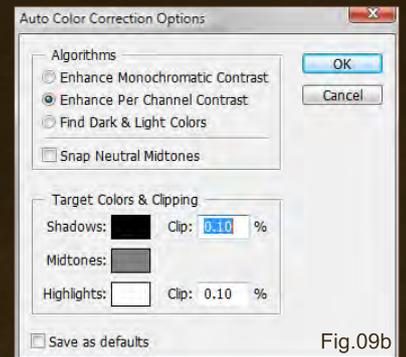
Fig.09b

The first thing I tend to do once I am at this stage is to see if changing the Levels will do any good to the painting. So let's have a closer look at some more options with this little tool (**Fig.08**).

Using the normal sliders often already gives us enough to play with. But there is more. In the Channel dropdown menu, we can choose to either change the Levels for RGB (Red, Green, and Blue) altogether or select one channel at a time and adjust it to our liking (**Fig.08**). And that isn't all. If you look at the buttons on the right, there is one called Options; if you click that, you get another box (**Fig.09a – b**).

Let's go through the settings one by one – they sound complex, but are really easy to understand.

ALGORITHMS

Enhance Monochromatic Contrast – Auto Contrast Option: It adjusts all channels/colors identically, preserving the overall colors of the picture but enhancing the darks and lights (**Fig.10a**).

Enhance Per Channel Contrast - Auto Levels Option: This maximizes the tonal range in each channel separately, changing the colors quite drastically (**Fig.10b**).

Find Dark & Light Colors - Auto Colors Option: This one finds the lightest and darkest pixels in the image and uses them to up the contrast (**Fig.10c**).

Snap Neutral Midtones: Tick this is you want Photoshop to find a nearly neutral color in the image and adjust the midtone values accordingly.

TARGET COLORS & CLIPPING

Clicking on the color swatches next to Shadows, Midtones and Highlights lets you change the colors of your Shadows, Midtones and Highlights. This is quite fun to do.

Fig.10a

Fig.10b

Fig.10c

Clip: These specify how much of the darkest (shadows) and lightest (highlights) Photoshop should ignore when identifying for the darkest and lightest pixels in an image. This is done so the highlights and shadows, when auto corrected, won't be too extreme.

And that's that! Once you click OK, the Levels can still be played with, as usual. There are – as always – no rules as to what goes and what doesn't; it's all down to personal taste.

VARIATIONS

With the Levels adjusted (**Fig.11**), I always like to see if perhaps the Variations can be played with. You can find those under Image > Adjustments > Variations (**Fig.12**). I've found them to be a brilliant way to adjust, or even totally change, a painting's overall colors. They are really quite self-explanatory as well; we can choose to adjust the Highlights, Midtones or Shadows, both in color as well as in lightness or darkness, and the slider gives us the option to have a drastic (coarse) change, or a subtle (fine) one. We can also change the Saturation of a picture. I'm personally rather fond of the bluish tint displayed in the bottom left corner, and so I play with adjusting that until it works for me

Fig.11
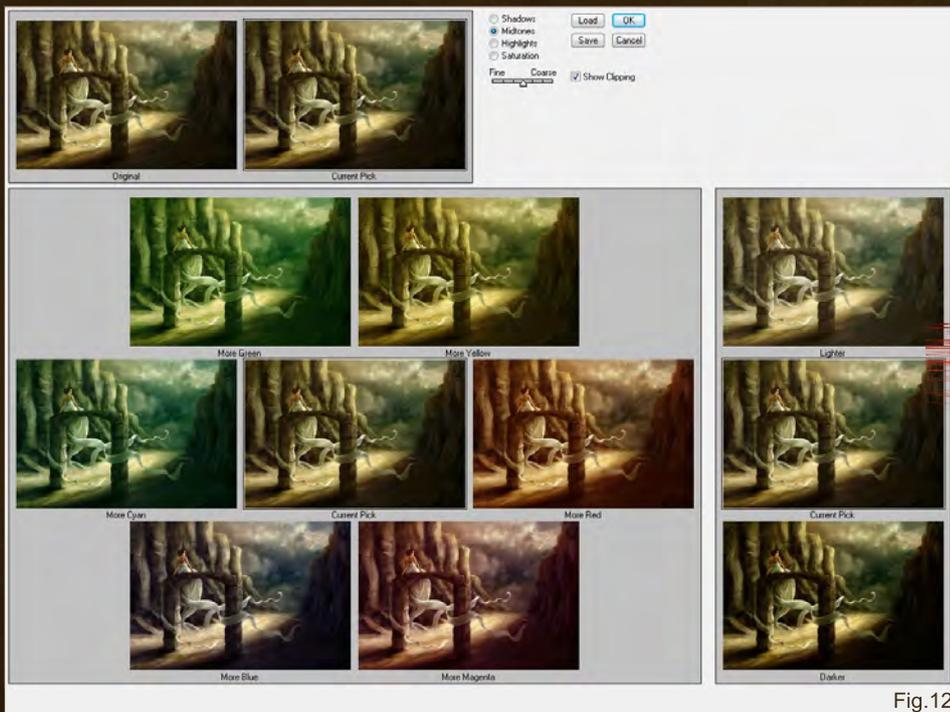
Fig.12

Fig.12a

Fig.13

(**Fig.12a**). The warm yellows and browns are lovely to look at, but don't quite match the mood I have in mind after all.

SELECTIVE COLOR

There are many more ways to adjust and change the colors in a finished piece. A very useful option is the Selective Color setting – Image > Adjustments > Selective Color – which lets you adjust colors with targeted precision (**Fig.13**). With the dropdown menu you can choose the color that you want to adjust, and with the sliders you adjust it. The Relative

and Absolute options give you either a more subtle result, or something more … absolute. Play with it – great fun!

CURVES

There are also the Curves which can help adjust the color and tonal value of a picture. We get the Curves by going to Image > Adjustments > Curves (**Fig.14**). At first this box may look a bit confusing, but giving it a closer look it has many similarities with the Levels Adjustment box. The dropdown menu at the top gives us the choice between RGB, Red, Green and Blue. This

means we can adjust either all channels at once or each channel separately. If we are working in CMYK, it will of course give us the CMYK options.

The three eyedroppers at the bottom right are once again there to set the White Point, Gray Point (Midtones), and Black Point, if we wish. And then there is the diagonal line in the box. This line is what we want to play with. The top end of the line is our Highlights, the bottom one the Shadows, and the point right in the center is our Midtones. By moving the line or (imaginary) points on the line, we can change the color and/ or values of an image. Try it! Often, just a minor adjustment of the curves is needed to get the desired results.

The two buttons ⌇✎ beneath the curves adjustment box let you adjust the curves by adding points, or draw your own curve. By default, the first button is clicked, and all we need to do to add points on the curve is click on the curvy line! Very easy!

WHAT ELSE?
COLOR BALANCE

Color Balance is a nice little tool that – just like Variations – lets you adjust the colors of an image. It's one of the easiest tools to use, and to great effect. You can find it under Image > Adjustments > Color Balance (**Fig.15**). We can choose to adjust the Shadows, Midtones or Highlights, and using the sliders we do exactly that. Moving the sliders more to one color or the other changes

the color more towards the one we slide the slider to. Simple! Un-ticking Preserve Luminosity pretty much dulls down the colors of the image, and it's not always desirable.

HUE SATURATION

And then there is Hue/Saturation, which can also be found in Image > Adjustments > Hue/Saturation (**Fig.16**). This one is a little bit more complex, but once you get the hang of it, it's quite easy to use – just like everything else! What you need to bear in mind with this one is that no amount of screenshots can show you exactly how it works; you have to play with it yourself to see what it can do.

Keeping the Master setting from the dropdown, all we can do is change the Hue (Color), Saturation (intensity of Color) and Lightness (Shade) of the entire picture. Once we choose a color from the dropdown menu, we are presented with an entire new set of options to play with (**Fig.16a**). The top sliders keep their purpose, and do exactly what it says on the box. We can completely ignore the bottom sliders that are showing now if we wish to. However, those bottom sliders are quite neat, as we can adjust the range of the color we want to adjust and also slide through the entire spectrum, saving us having to use the drop down menu. Playtime!

Note: *For more options and explanations regarding any of these tools, or in fact anything PS has on offer, you may want to check out the Help (shortcut: F1) that PS provides!*
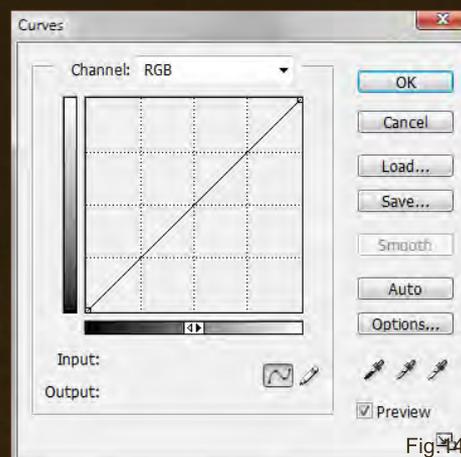
Fig.14
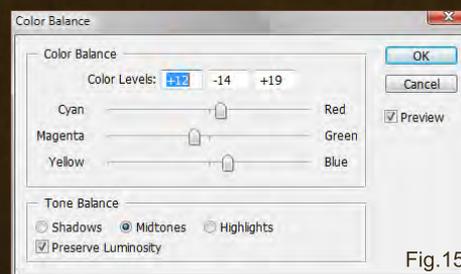
Fig.15

At this point we are essentially finished, but we can once again look at the lighting in our piece. With all the adjusting, the glow we had before may have gone, and the piece may have lost its sense of depth. To fix that, we do what we did before: We add a new layer, and choosing a light color (in this case blue as it won't enhance the yellow, but will balance it out) we paint the light in targeted areas – namely to peel the arch off the cliff face and give the horizon and distant cliffs an out-of-focus haze (**Fig.17**). We then set the light later to Pin Light and see if it works by adjusting the Opacity sufficiently.

If Pin Light doesn't work at all, Soft Light will do the trick. Using Overlay in this case would just
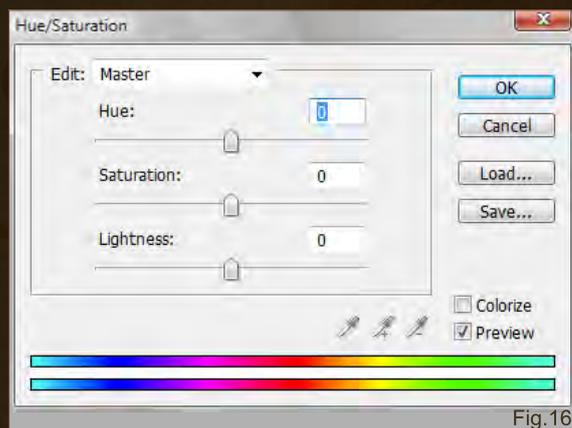
Fig.16
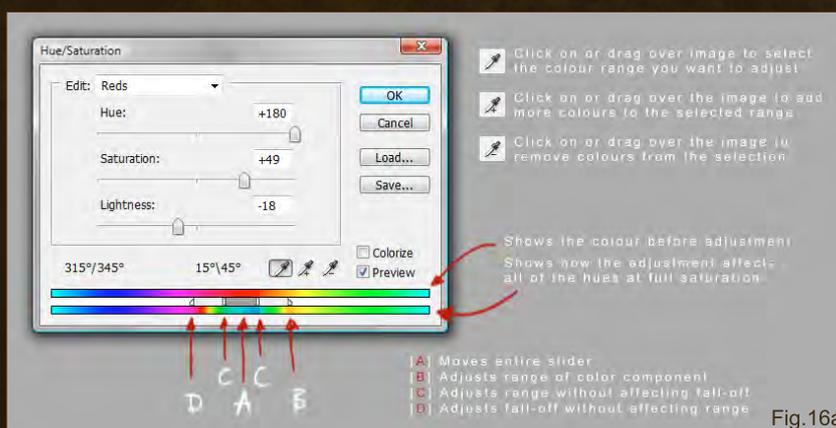
Fig.16a

make the colors much more intense, rather than softening them up a little. I also added some dark brown on the ground near the horizon to indicate some not-quite-so-strong shadows from the cliffs on the right. The image can be flattened once everything is as we'd like it to be (**Fig.17a**).

At this point, I suddenly realize that I am absolutely not happy with the dimensions of the canvas – it would look much better if it were a little wider still, to give the whole scene a slightly more panoramic effect. All good and well … can be done! The only thing is that I have to go back to the layered version of the image for this, and with that lose all the work we've done to the image since flattening it ... Why? Because to extend the canvas to one side (the right in this case), without having to repaint that part or add painted bits to it, we need to be able to select the background with the Marquee Tool from the gap between the cliff faces in the distance to the far right edge of the original canvas after changing the canvas size, and then Transform it, pulling it to the right to cover the entire canvas again.

After repeating everything from adding ambient light to adjusting the Levels and Variations, the image looks slightly different than before. Instead of going with the previously

Fig.17a

adjusted colder palette, I've decided to keep the warmer green and yellow hue (**Fig.17b**).

Lesson learnt here: Leave a painting alone for a couple of days before rushing into any finalizing bits and bobs. It can save the extra work of doing it all over again!

Right, if we want to, we could now add some overall texture to the image. This usually works best when there is either no texture at all in a piece, or they are very subtle brushed textures. When you already have a load of textures, like in this

case, an overall texture may make the image look far too busy. However, I will still briefly go through the options:

Both photos and brushes can be used again for applying an overall texture. Photos should be a high resolution so pixelization will be kept to a minimum when the photo is transformed on the canvas to match the size of the canvas. You can use virtually any photo texture for this – from rusty metal and watercolor stains, to paper or canvas textures. The color in the photos may even lend an interesting effect to a painting, so the photos don't have to be in grayscale. Overlay and Soft Light are both options that that work really well for a texture layer.

Of course, we can also make a brush from a texture photo and stamp it onto a new layer onto the canvas, and then transform it to match the canvas size. Here we have some more options of locking transparent pixels and painting over the texture in different colors to get the desired effect, as well as lowering the Opacity, as before. Naturally, a texture can also be achieved by painting random brushstrokes onto a new layer, preferably with rough brushes like the speckled one. The possibilities are endless!

Fig.17b

I won't apply a texture to my painting, as it has the right amount of textures already in it. More would simply overdo it.

Okay, that's it! We are done! We can save the image, grab a coffee and sit there for five minutes in quiet admiration of our handiwork … or something along those lines. Of course, most of us are deep down quite narcissistic little critters who want nothing more than to show off what we've just managed to do. And don't give me, "No, I'm not!" – You'd not be human if that was the case! Anyhow, I digress…

SHOWCASING YOUR HANDIWORK

Now, there are several ways to showcase your work. The first option would be the standard fine art approach of exhibiting in a gallery. For this, the work would have to be printed. Saving it for this purpose is really quite simple. We need to bear in mind that the bigger the file, the bigger the print can be done at a high quality.

But we also need to look at the file format in which to save our picture, as there are lossless and lossy formats. What that means is this: A lossless file format is a format that does not compress the pixels, but keeps everything as it is. Common lossless formats are PSD, PNG, and TIFF. Lossy formats on the other hand compress the pixels – meaning they reduce the general information stored in the painting to the effect that it will be smaller in file size, but also at not quite so high a quality, dumping pixels that it won't really need. This format is great for internet use as it loads fast and still looks very decent on any screen. JPG and GIF are lossy file formats (and GIF should be avoided unless you do pixel art, as a GIF only ever has 256 colors).
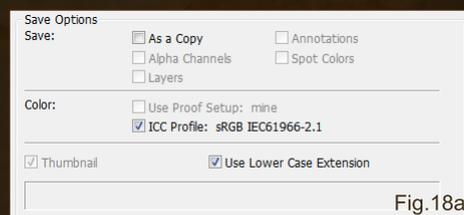
Fig.18a

So, we now know that we should save our image as a PSD, PNG or TIFF to get a great print from it – this is especially the case when you know that your piece will be printed with the same methods as a fine art piece, or in magazines and books.

We go to File > Save As… and get our Save As window (**Fig.18**). We can give the image a name in the File name bar, and then choose our format in the Format dropdown menu. In the Save Options, we also get the choice to Save As a Copy, and in the Color Options we can decide if we want to keep the color profile we assigned to our picture, or not (**Fig.18a**). Most of the options only become available when saving something in a specific format, so don't worry if there isn't much you can tick or un-tick.

Once we hit Save we will get another box giving us more options – different options depending on the file format we are saving in. The default settings are the ones we want for saving an image for print, so we leave things as they are and hit OK.

Some of you may wonder why I'm not going into detail about all the options. Believe me, if I did it would be another chapter all unto itself! So I suggest you consult Adobe's online Help manual for a more detailed breakdown.

Note: *The default PSD file format PS uses when saving layered images is great, but unless a print place uses Photoshop or a similar program there may be difficulties in opening the file for print. So saving as a TIFF or PNG is usually the safer option. If unsure, ask at the place where you want to have the picture printed, or consult an online print studio's FAQ for help!*

We can use the same option of Save As to save the image as a JPG or GIF. Once we hit Save, upon selecting this file format we are presented with another box and more options, just like with the file formats before. This way of saving an image as a JPG is good for saving it for print or
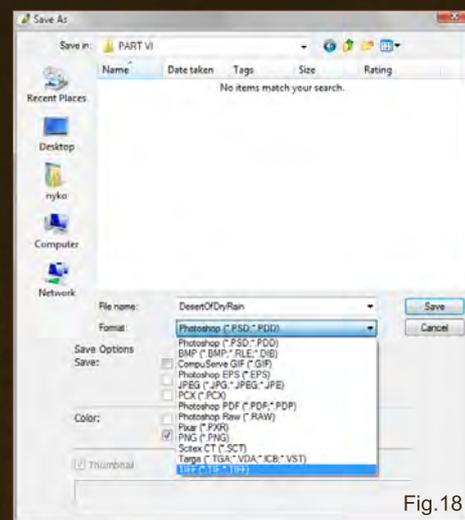
Fig.18

other large format displays, but not so much for use on the internet, as the compression is not ideal and the quality pretty shoddy. Don't ask me why, I really don't know.

So what can be done to save an image for use online?

First things first: we need to resize the image. Most people have screens no bigger than 17" – even though in the CG art scene, most professionals boast screens up to 30", or multiple screen displays. However, the majority of people who are browsing the web are not CG artists, and it is those people we need to keep in mind. Therefore, it is pretty pointless to display an image at its original size online. For starters, it wouldn't be possible to view the entire image without scrolling, and thus the impact the image could have if viewed in full is lost.

So for our image to not suffer this fate, we need to resize it to something reasonable – anything between 800 and 1600 pixels at the longest side. More would become too big. Usually, something around 1000 pixels at either side is a good size (and then we can show some small excerpts of a bigger resolution, close-ups, if you wish, so people can get an idea of what it looks like in more detail, and see all the little details).

We may want to duplicate the image before we continue, so we can be sure that we won't be

screwing things up and accidentally overwrite the original file at any point in time.

We go to Image > Image Size (**Fig.19**). To change the image size for web use, all we need to do is change the size in pixels, leaving everything else alone. When we're done, we hit OK.

Changing the image size to something significantly smaller always has the effect of "blurring" the image. This is because the information previously stored in a much higher amount of pixels has now been condensed to something a lot lower. To bring some sharpness back into the image we can use the Unsharp Mask. We can find it under Filter > Sharpen > Unsharp Mask (**Fig.20**). The default settings of this Filter actually give a pretty good result, but that should not stop you from playing around. Keeping the default settings for my painting, the difference is quite obvious between before applying the Unsharp Mask (**Fig.20a**) and after applying it (**Fig.20b**).

Sometimes, the Unsharp Mask makes certain parts too sharp, and those can be adjusted manually by using the Blur Tool (carefully!). Of course, the complete Unsharp Mask can be faded by going to Edit > Fade.

This shows that the proportions are locked, meaning that if you change either width or height, the other will change accordingly

The size of the image in pixels.

The size of the image if printed.

Changing the Resolution will change the print size

Unticking this lets you change the height and width seperately
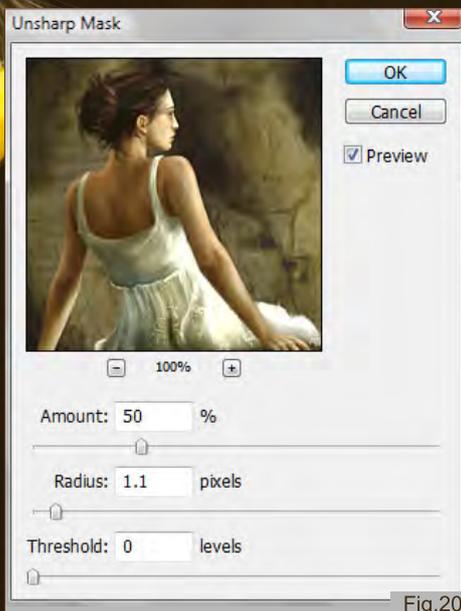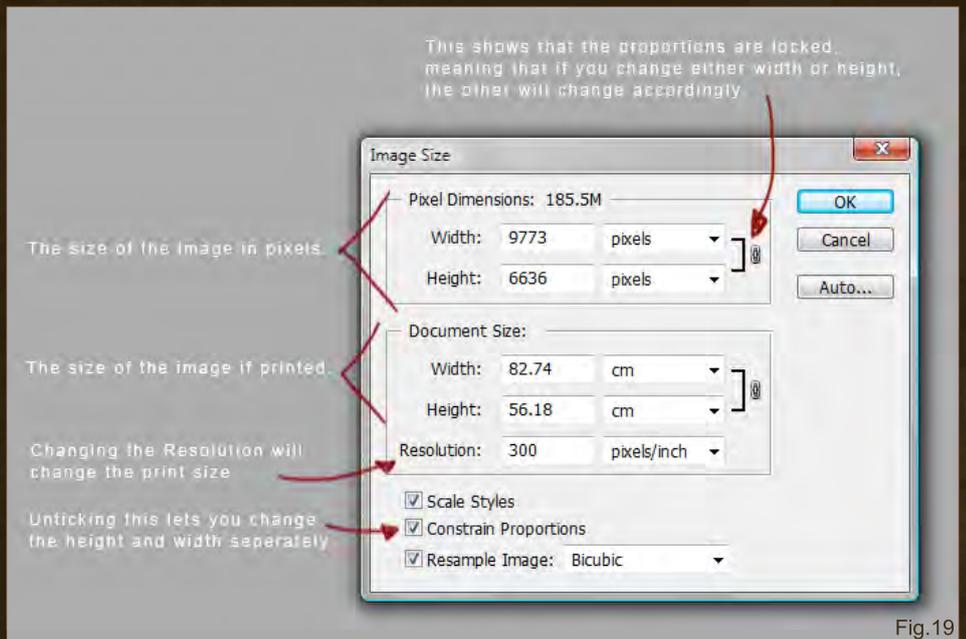
Fig.19

Now we are ready to save the image for internet use! We go to File > Save for Web… and a new window comes up (**Fig.21**). It will show us our image in the Optimized tab window. To check what the original looks like, simply click on the Original tab at the top, and it will change. The settings you see in the screenshot are my default settings for saving something for the web. The Quality can be changed by either entering a number manually, or by clicking on

the arrow and using the slider that pops up. The dropdown menu that says JPEG also offers GIF, PNG-8 (like GIF uses only 256 colors maximum), PNG-24 and WBMP (which is a black and white grain thing reminiscent of the first computer images ever made).

The Preset dropdown gives you a list of preset options, so you won't have to set and adjust them all yourself. Ticking

Fig.20

Fig.20a

Fig.20b
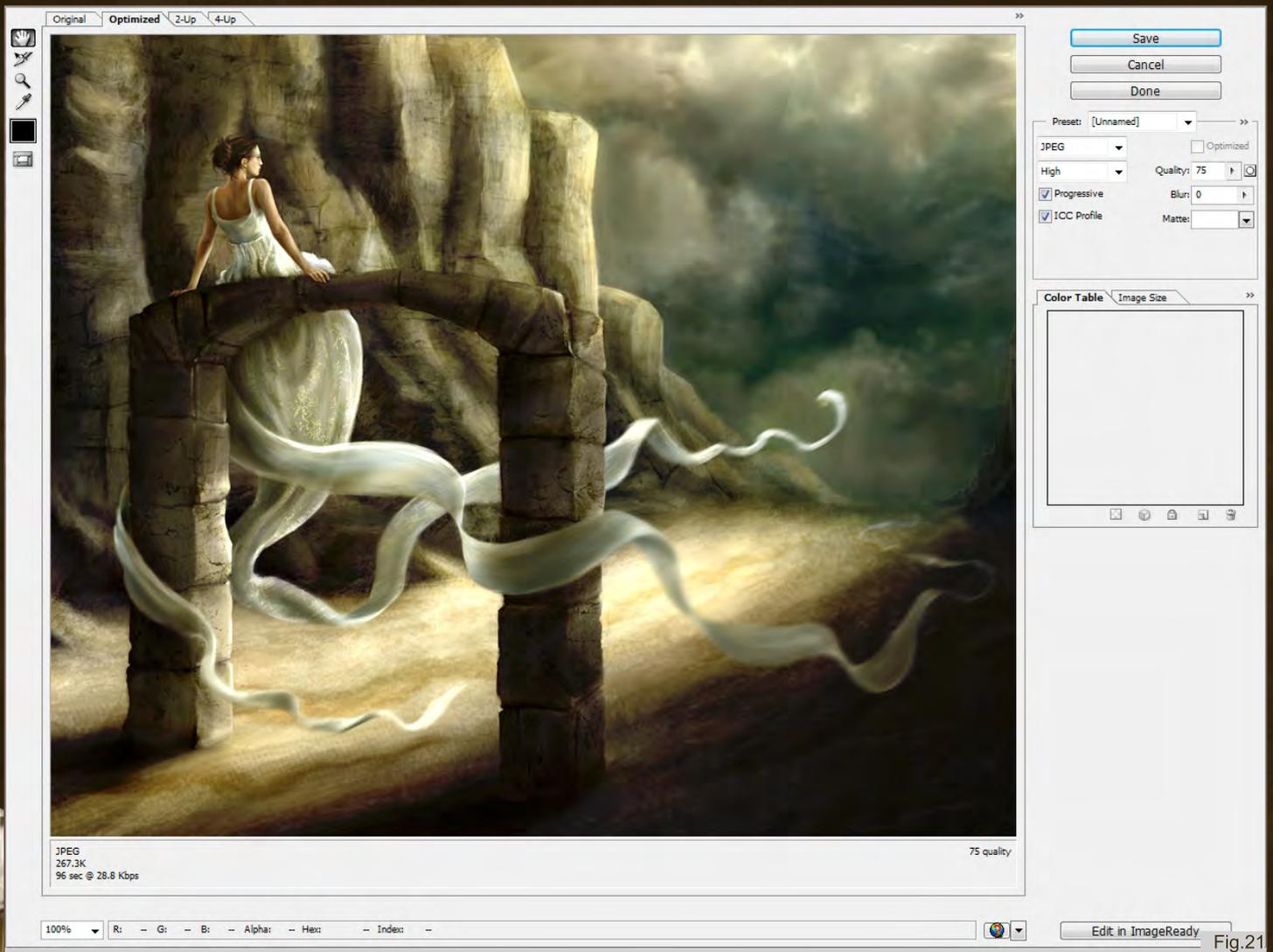
Fig.21

the ICC profile is good, as this keeps your image's Color Profile intact. And if you click on the Image Size tab next to the Color Table tab below the settings, you can even change the size of the image again. However, I found that changing it before saving this way gives you better results.

Once all settings are adjusted to our liking, we hit Save. A "Save Optimized As" window pops up, asking us to enter a file name, which we should do. It also asks us our Save as type preference – here the default setting is Image Only (*jpg), which we should keep. The other settings are for website layouts and HTML code.

We hit Save again, and our image will be saved, optimised for web use.

And now we can show what we've done to anyone who wishes to see it…

IN CLOSING

What marks the end for my work, putting all this information together in one colorful package, should only be the beginning of your journey making use of it. Enjoy it, live it, create!

Nykolai, signing off!

NYKOLAI ALEKSANDER

For more from this artist visit

http://www.admemento.com/

or contact

x@admemento.com

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MAKING OF BY BRANKO BISTROVIC

BREATH ON
YOUR NECK

Branko Bistrovic is with us this month to take us behind the scenes and straight into the creation process of his recent piece, "The Breath on Your Neck". Inspired by a blind man in the streets, and the good old Maple Leaves Photoshop brush, Branko set about this stunning image and took it through a whole range of flips and adjustments before happily calling it a day. As he says, "it was all cheddar cheese easy!", so immerse yourself in another fantastic making of in 2DArtist, and don't forget to download the complimentary custom brush on offer from Branko himself. Enjoy!

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• Free Custom Brushes

The Breath On Your Neck

Software Used: Photoshop

I don't know about you, but when I begin a painting there are usually two ways the idea arrives in my noggin: either it's a happy discovery while making random marks on the canvas, or it's something that came to me while I was out and about living in "the real world".

Like how at the movies watching a comedy I get the idea to paint flowers and robots, or while I'm in the shower scrubbing shampoo off my head I envision a captive mermaid screaming at heaven … You can never really be sure where you'll get your inspiration, but when it does come, hold onto it like a lifeline! It can be the fuel to your flame on those days when picking up the pencil seems like a journey.

"The moment granted me a solid visual to my idea."

In the case of this piece, I initially really didn't know where I was going until I passed by a blind man on the street who seemed perfectly capable of his surroundings. The moment granted me a solid visual to my idea. After that it was all cheddar cheese easy … Well, not quite, but at least I felt a little more confident with where I was heading!

I began this piece mundanely enough by using the default scattered Maple Leaves brush, with settings of:

Fig.01

Fig.02

Fig.03

- Spacing – 46
- Size Jitter and Angle Jitter – 100
- Roundness Jitter at 40
- Minimum Roundness – 50 (make sure the Roundness Jitter isn't too great; we don't want our maple leaves to look like they've been steamrolled!)
- Opacity Jitter – 20 (also turn on Pen Pressure for Opacity – this is the only setting that I use to recognize Pen Pressure in this setup; the rest of them are all on random jitter)

- Finally, set that Flow Jitter to a more aggressive 40

Then it was all about making some marks on the canvas! I first of all filled the canvas with a dark blue, since I was going to make my character an orangey hue. Utilizing color complementaries will help make your piece pop, and as long as it's done subtly it won't come off as tacky or crass (**Fig.01**).

I very quickly established the general lighting and texture for the background; I also started to bring in varying greens and oranges on top of the blue (all on the same background layer) (**Fig.02**) – keeping things rather subtle, spending little time on it, and letting it all flow freely.

On a new layer I started to pose the character and the lighting. He was looking like Mr. Smoke here – interesting, but not what I wanted (**Fig.03**). At this stage I was thinking: What the
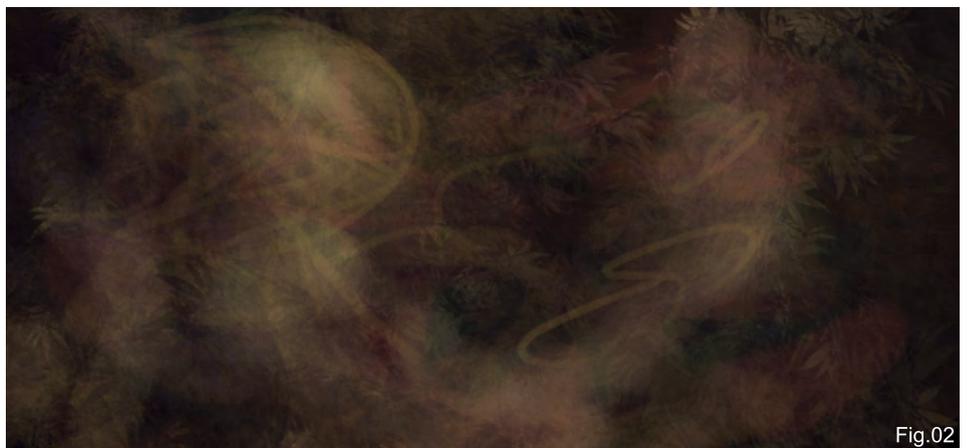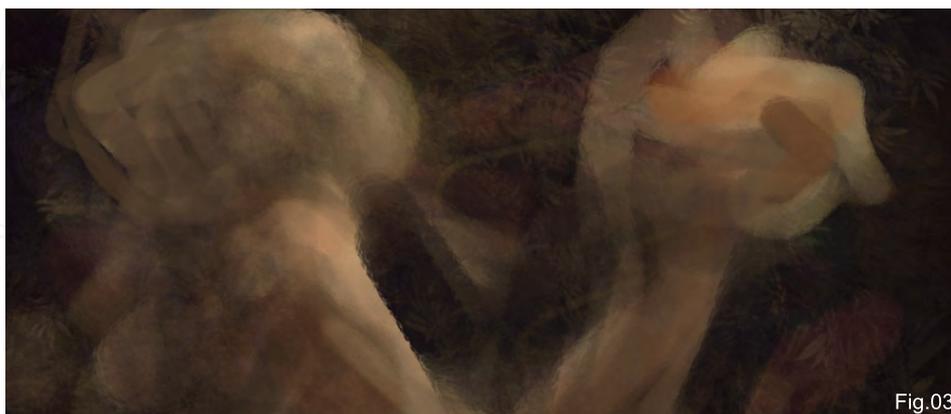
hell am I going for here? Is it a guy looking at something in his hand? Is this a confused ape? Or a bald ferret the size of a man?! So I decided to take a walk, clear my head, and that's when I came across the blind man in the street and – pop! – things fell into place enough for me to head back to the canvas.

"…lighting, gesture and silhouette are the aspects I must focus on and struggle with…"

Here I started solidifying; better defining where the lighting was coming from – the top-right corner in this case, with a slight bluish accent on his back (**Fig.04**).

Fig.04

For now, the focus is on subtracting and adding to the shape of the character, keeping the flow in the gesture while not making it overly exaggerated and cartoony; I want to keep this piece somber. To me, lighting, gesture and silhouette are the aspects I must focus on and struggle with in a painting. I feel that if the lighting is convincing you can make anything come to life! If the gesture is convincing, any shape can be interesting, and if the silhouette captures your imagination then the piece will be remembered long after.

At this point I noticed that whatever he had in his hand was starting to look a lot like a potential infant skull, which I thought was gross, but intriguing … (**Fig.05**) And then I decided to make it a bestial skull instead (yeah, I chickened out!).

I continued nailing down the shapes. It's easy to get carried away, especially when you are 300% zoomed in and think, "Ooh that eye looks

Fig.05
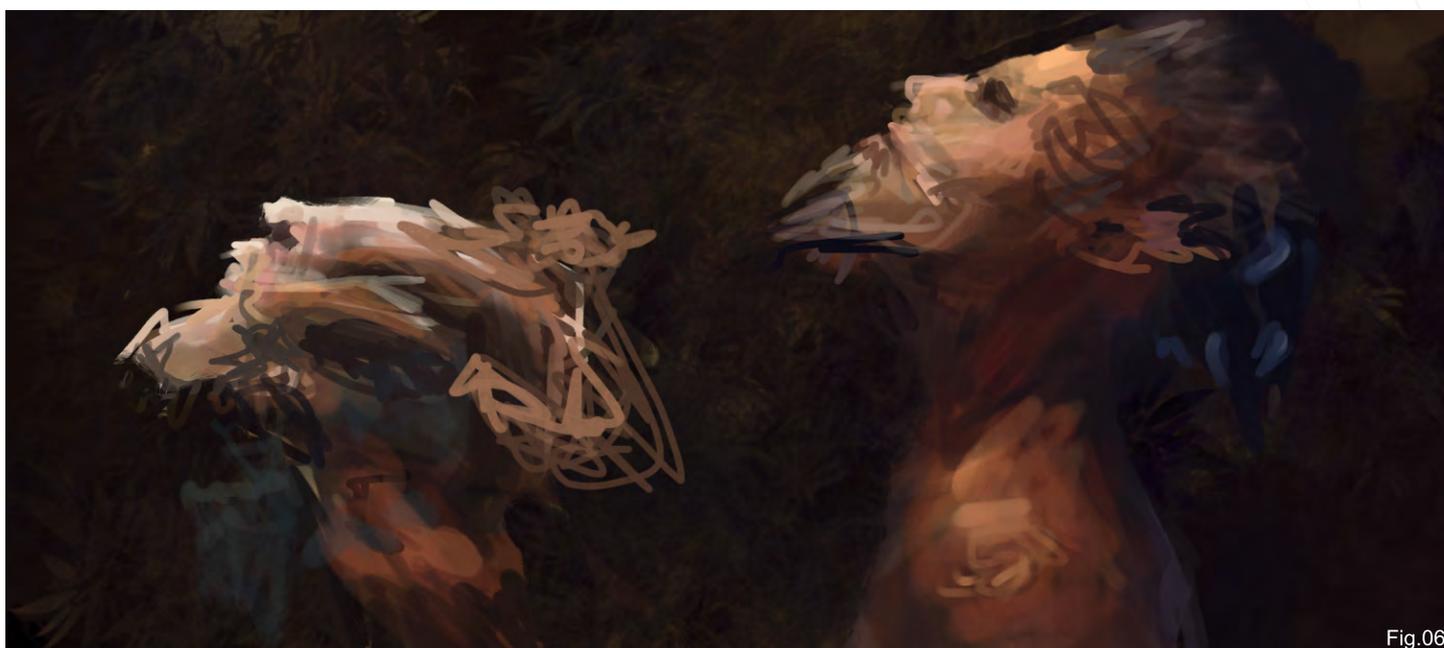
Fig.06

so nice", or, "Those lips – how plump!" But then you zoom out only to realize everything has a separate light source. So stay broad and not pinned down!

"…I just had to accept that for the next little while, I wasn't going to like what I was seeing…"

The canvas was flipped to get a fresh perspective (**Fig.06**).

I then added a little character holding onto the skull, since I felt the piece was lacking something like this. I could then start deciding on the details and where to place them; like the tattoos on his face, or the way his ear is shaped, and what's dangling out of his hair. This is usually where the painting comes to a crawl, and also where the painting enters its ugly stage, so I just had to accept that for the next little while, I wasn't going to like what I was seeing and kept reminding myself of the overall vision at the end, which (I prayed) would be more pleasant (**Fig.07**).

Continuing to refine, I was pretty much ready to start adding textures to the skin, and blending the transitions. The brush – which I am giving away for free with this article, simply click on the Free Resources logo to download it – was just a simple speckled brush. I applied it first using darks, then I subtracted from it with lights; this way it melded and blended into itself (**Fig.08**).
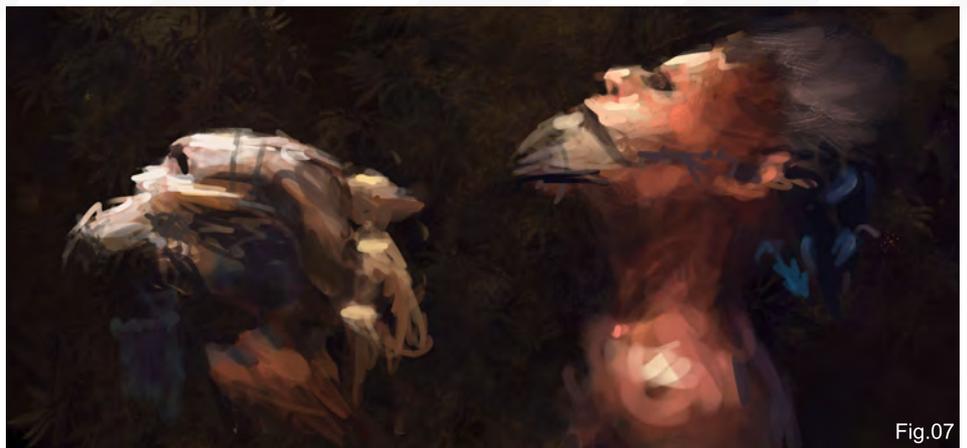
Fig.07

Fig.08

Fig.09

This process required some patience, so I always advise some music or an audio book handy at this stage!

Okay, so it took about twice as long to get from **Fig.07** to **08** as it did to get from **Fig.01** to **07**, but I was finally starting to like what I saw here, and could at last stop squinting so much! I shifted things around slightly, lightened aspects, trying my best to balance the lighting and allow for a realistic sense of fantasy. I also flipped it again – I like it more facing this way (**Fig.09**). Just a gut thing!

I pumped up the contrast by pushing the blacks and lightening the focal points. I also saturated the areas that weren't in direct light or totally

veiled in shadow by creating a layer above the whole piece, setting the layer blending to mode to Overlay and painting in the colors I wanted.

And there we have it: the final piece (or as close as it's ever going to get) (**Fig.10**).

"…every artist is their own worst critic…"

Truth be told, the process of creation is the most enjoyable bit for me; the results in comparison are usually pretty anticlimactic. Taking a look at this piece for instance: I am pleased with the final render but at the same time not too certain that this was exactly what I was searching for. I feel that, as strong as the lighting is, it could have still been better refined and the character's shoulder anatomy could also be revisited.

Alas, this is usually the case when it comes to my work; I can't help but analyze it every time I return to it. While I'm sure this sounds pretty frustrating, in the end every artist is their own worst critic, and ultimately it's this mentality that demands more from me and challenges my expectations, which in turn spurs me to strive for better, so the fact doesn't really annoy me! In the end, the gratification of another project

Fig.10

complete is still there, and that's a fuzzy feeling for sure.

I hope you have enjoyed this article. If you have any questions please feel free to get in touch. Cheers!

Branko Bistrovic

For more from this artist visit
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Digital Art Masters

: VOLUME 1

INTRODUCTION:

The 'Digital Art Masters: volume 1' book, is a collection of work from artists which have featured in the gallery of 3DTotal. Spread over 192 pages, the book features some of the finest digital 2D and 3D artwork that you can see today, from artist as Natascha Roeoesli, Philip Straub, Rob Chang, Jesse Sandifer, PiSONG, Meny Hilsenrad and Ryan Lim and many more. More than just any other gallery book, each artist has written a breakdown overview, each with supporting imagery of how they made there piece of work.
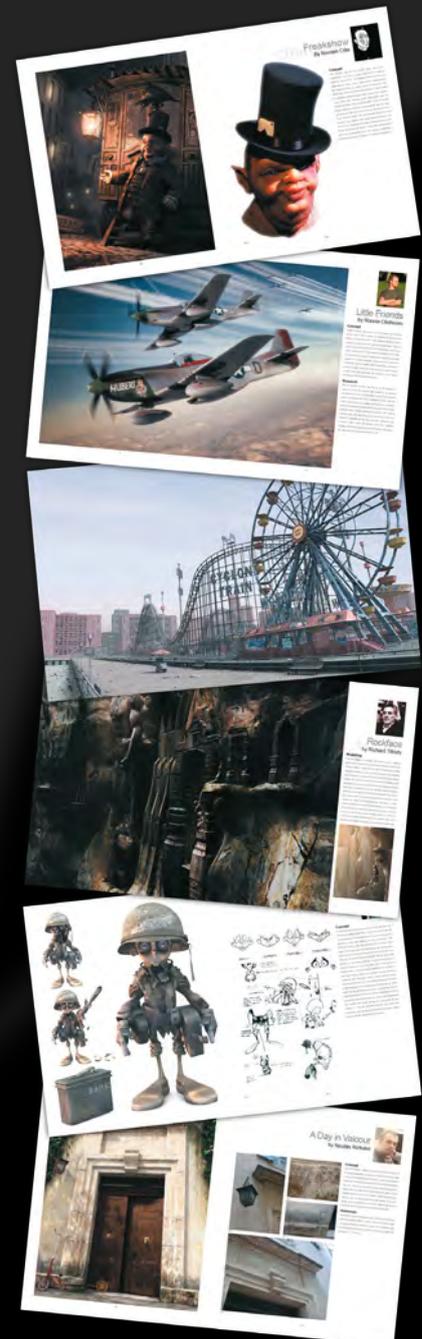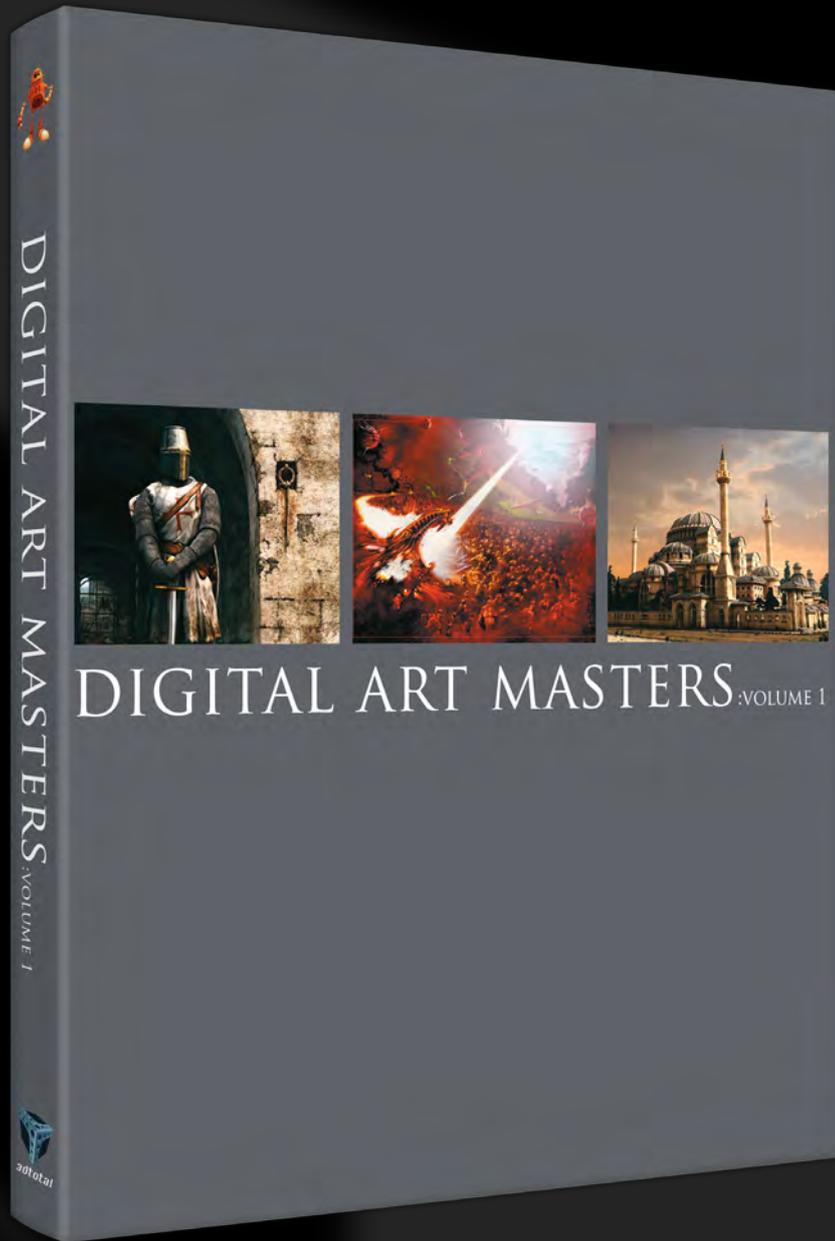
The first book in the "Digital Art Masters" series, contains work by the following artists:

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DIGITAL ART MASTERS
VOLUME 4

With the release of 3DTotal's latest book, *Digital Art Masters: Volume 4*, we have some exclusive chapters for you...

This book is more than just an artwork book. Not only does it feature full-colour, full-page images, but each artist has given a detailed description, in their own words, of the creation process behind each piece of published artwork. And they've done it especially for this book!

This month we feature:

"The Beetle Lord"
by Nicholas Miles

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