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



Creating video game art isn't just about painting an eye-catching piece. I thought Darren Bacon's interview this issue gave a fascinating perspective on the day-to-day life as an art director for a big video games franchise. It's a must-read for aspiring concept artists.

Elsewhere, the second year of Vertex, our very own art event, is now set for 8 March 2019 in London. ImagineFX is teaming up with our sister titles 3D Artist and 3D World to bring together the very best artists and studios to share their wisdom. By the time you read this, we should have announced our AMAZING line-up. Put Vertex in your calendar right now and visit www.vertexconf.com for all the updates and ticket info.

Last up, a gift subscription to ImagineFX is a very thoughtful present for an artistic loved one. If you buy a subscription as a present you can choose the option to send a gift card, so the recipient not only has something to open on Christmas Day, but they'll also receive 13 issues of inspiration from us for a whole year. Please take a look at our great offers over on pages 4 (UK) and 88 (overseas).

Claire

Claire Howlett, Editor
claire@imaginefx.com

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

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The view from above

Why does an art director choose one piece of art over another? Halo's Darren Bacon explains...

44



Scribbles from Brazil

Concept artist Thiago Almeida gets inspired to draw from games, robots and post-apocalyptic worlds. Fun!

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A workshop with purpose

It's always a pleasure to get Howard Lyon's art insight, and this issue's workshop is no different.

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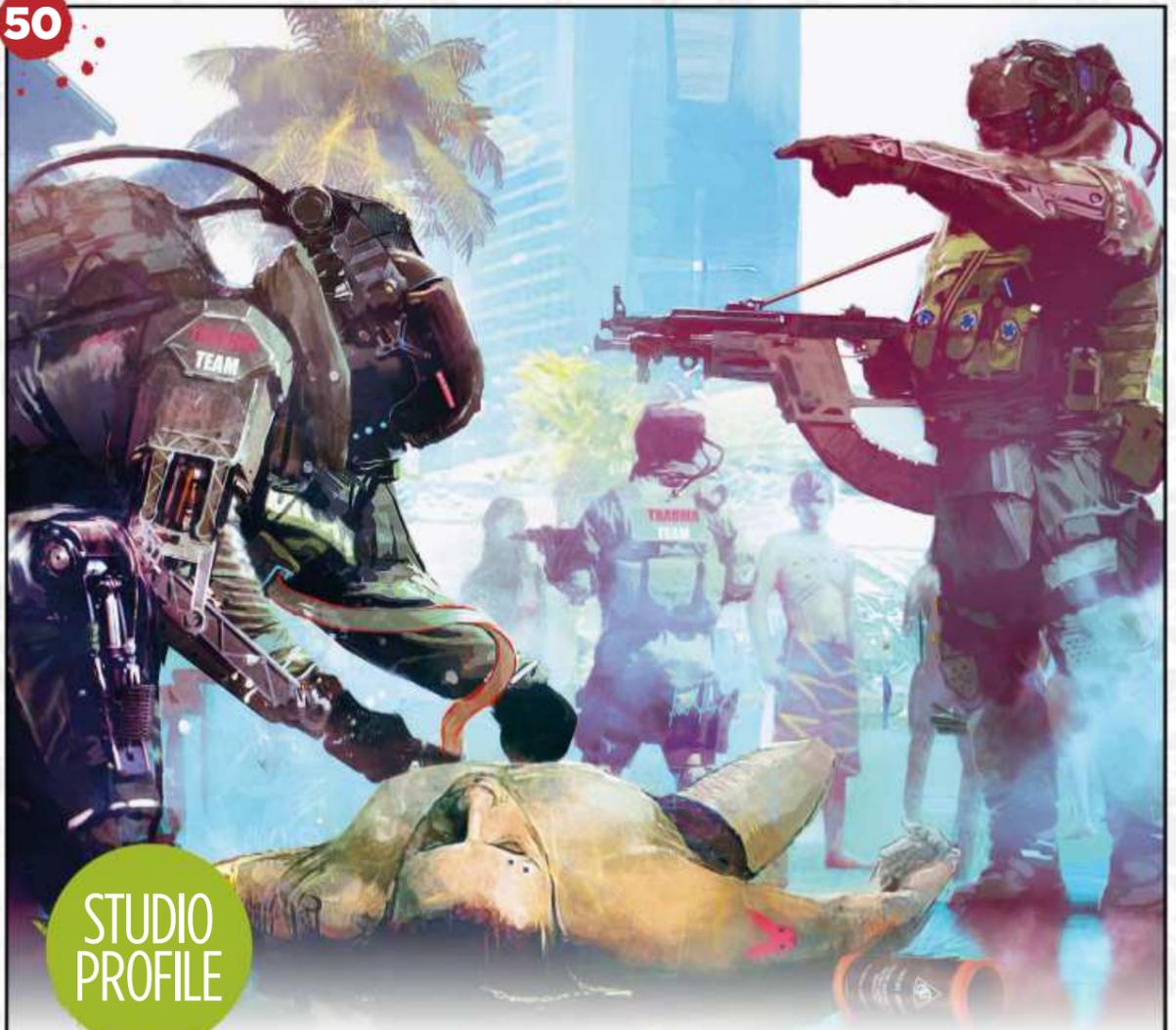
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CD PROJEKT RED

See how this studio has stepped into the future with the upcoming Cyberpunk 2077

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Discover why birds feature heavily in the work of this Vancouver-based artist.



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ImagineFX

Resources

Getting hold of this issue's videos and custom brushes is quick and easy. Just visit our dedicated web page at <https://ifxm.ag/game169art> and start downloading!

OVER 3 HOURS
of video tutorials
from pro artists
to watch and
learn from!

WORKSHOP



GET YOUR RESOURCES

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

1 Go to the website
Type this into your browser's address bar (not the search bar):
<https://ifxm.ag/game169art>

2 Find the files you want
Search through the list of resources to download.

3 Download what you need...
...or watch videos on our YouTube page (<https://ifxm.ag/youtube-ifx>).

Stand up for creature concept art!

That's what Roberto Padula is doing in his workshop video, as he designs and paints an original, excitable-looking fantasy creature. Read how Roberto approached the task by turning to page 74.



NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX

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A meaningful painting project

Watch Howard Lyon in action, as he takes inspiration from the Old Masters and their use of academic principles while painting a portrait in oils. Read his workshop on page 102.



Don't let gravity get you down...

Patrick J Jones's workshop video demonstrates the importance of taking gravity and compression into consideration when drawing figure art. There's more on page 80.



Watch a clip from Advanced Concept Art

In this instructional video, which we review over on page 93, Jakub Kowalczyk uses VR tools, and 3D and 2D art programs to create a fantasy landscape, complete with windmill.

EXPOSE

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART



Linda Lithén

LOCATION: Sweden MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: www.lindalithenart.com

Linda draws on historical sources for her fantasy characters. "I love to learn about new cultures and world history," she says.

1 THE DRUID GUARDIAN

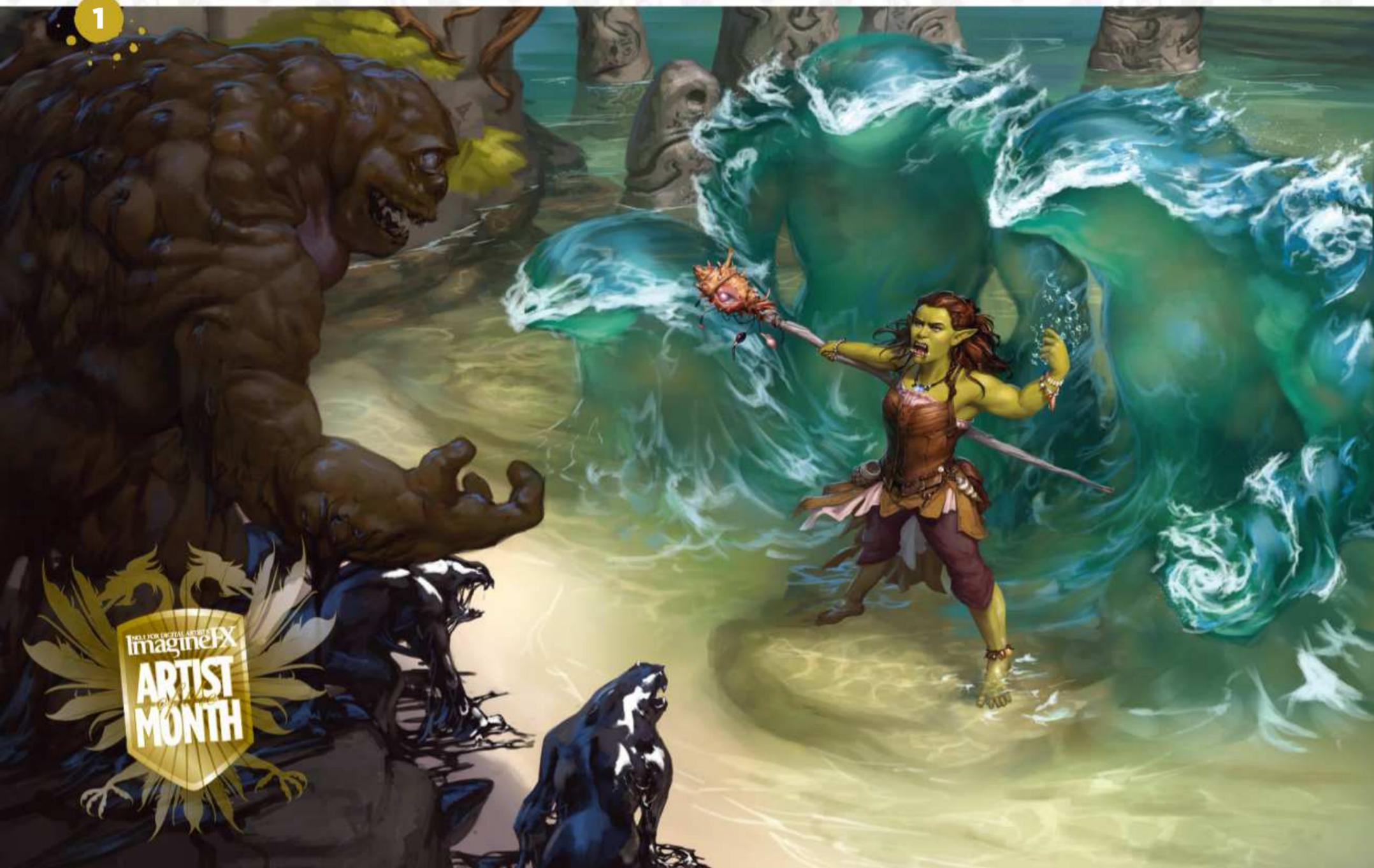
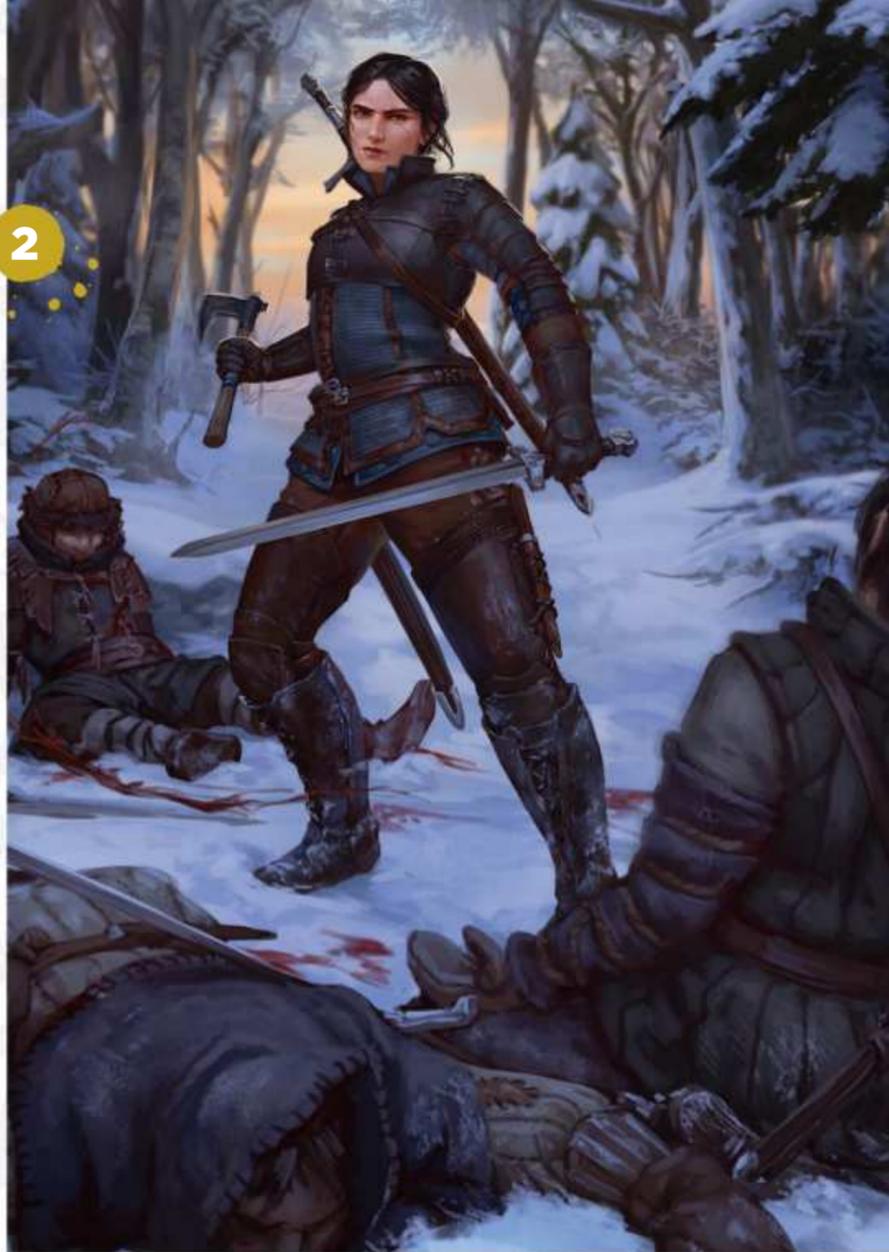
"I wanted to try and paint something with creatures, which I don't do enough to be honest. The water elementals were great fun!"

2 SARIENE

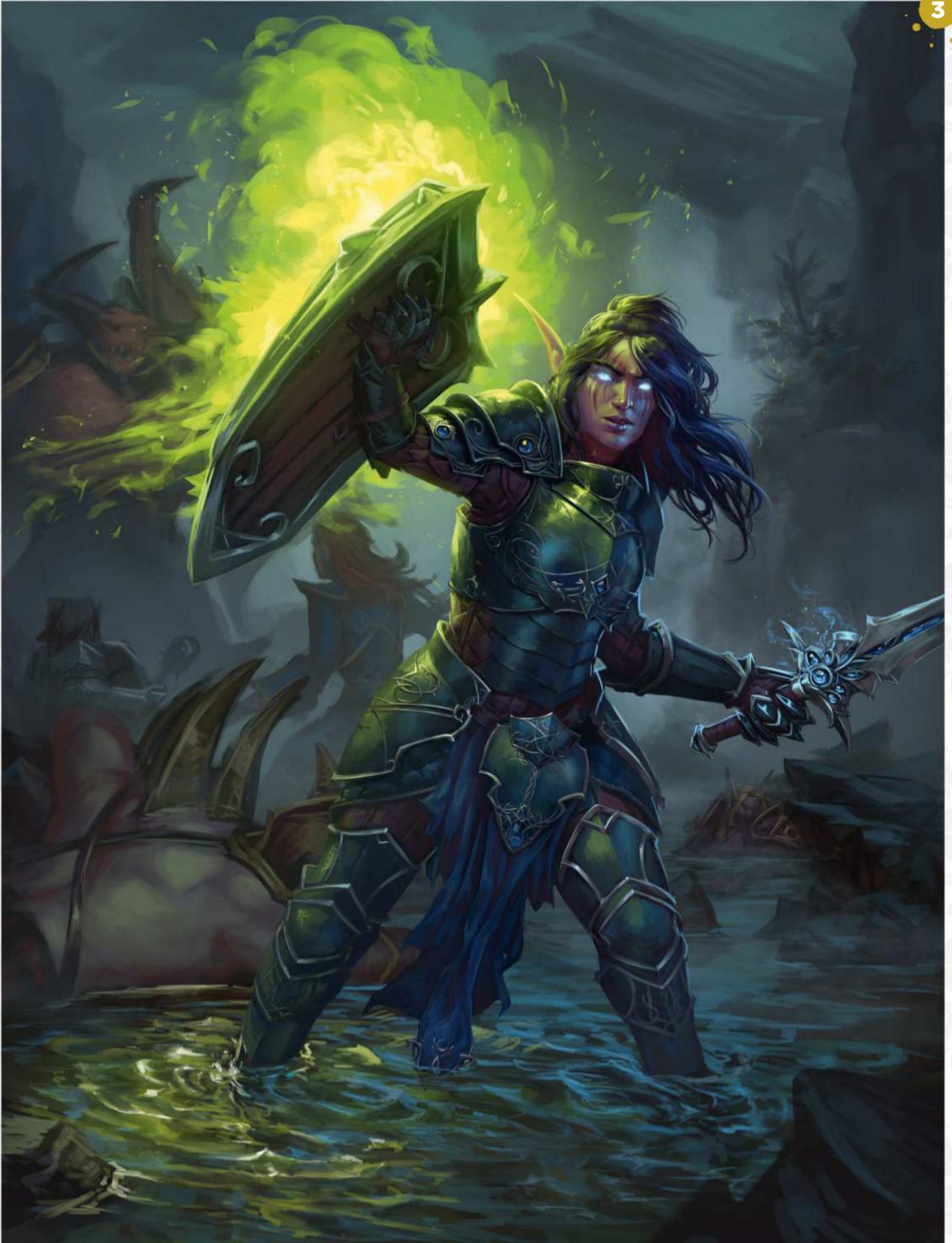
"I don't think I'll ever do anything with my own characters, but I've had them for over a decade and they're a fun touchstone to track my artistic journey by."

3 AT THE BROKEN SHORE

"An early childhood art memory is copying from the Warcraft III manual. Blizzard's games have constantly inspired me over the years."



ImagineFX
ARTIST
MONTH





Laura Diehl

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: www.ldiehl.com

Full-time freelance illustrator Laura likes to create whimsical paintings of magical things. Her art is often inspired by her own fantastical stories and creatures.

1 AEGEAN PRINCESS

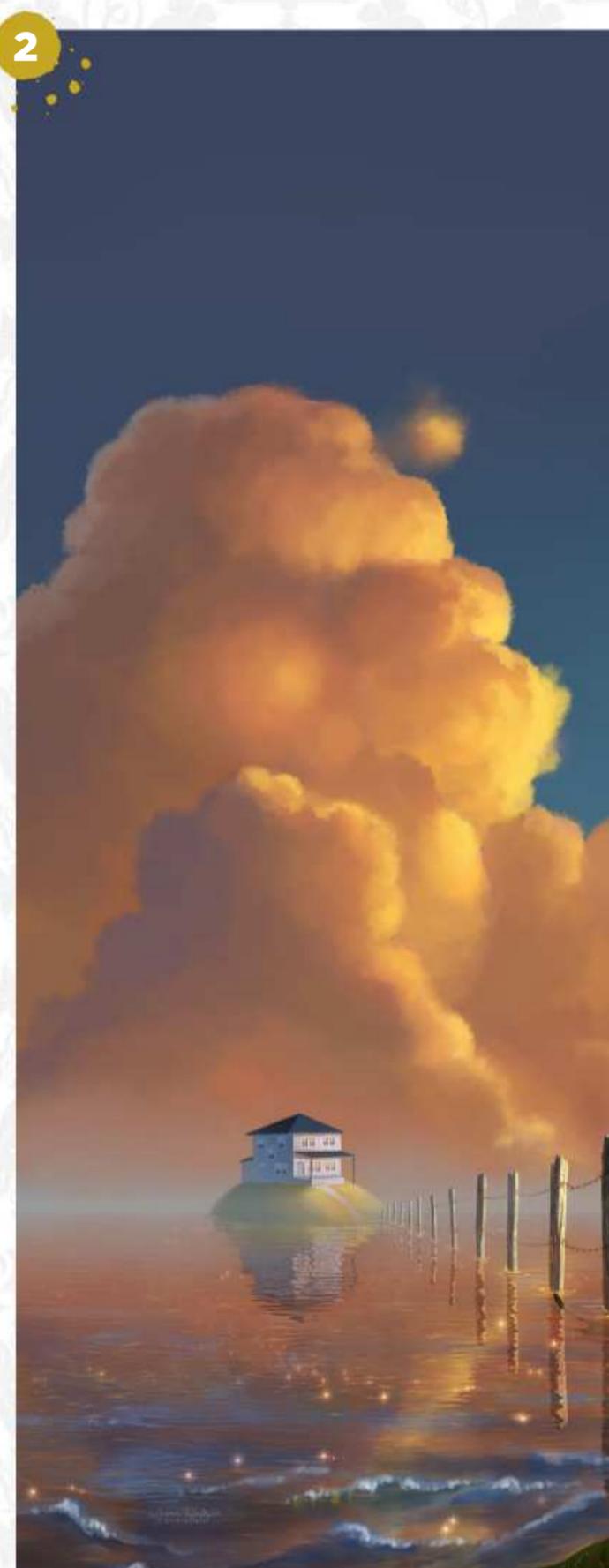
"A beautiful Aegean princess meditates in the warmth of the Mediterranean sunshine, as her nautilus shell glides across the calm sea."

2 PRAIRIE SEA

"Four siblings set sail on the high Prairie Sea, surging over the submerged fields at the golden hour as prairie dogs paddle alongside."



2



3 GOLDEN ANTLER

"Once upon a time, in the Far North, lived two sisters whose only memento of their father was a broken shard of golden antler..."

4 POPPY LULLABY

"A young singer enchants sparkling amethyst crystals with her lilting lullaby, before sending them to children on distant worlds. Owl helpers awaken and gather to start their night's work delivering the gems."



3



4





Stéphanie Leon

LOCATION: France **MEDIA:** Photoshop, pencil, watercolour, acrylic **WEB:** www.artstation.com/stephanieleon

Stéphanie's work combines traditional and digital techniques, and often explores dreamlike or grotesque worlds. She started out studying cabinet making, and Baroque and Renaissance ornaments still influence her work.

1 THE EVENING OF THE BIG BALL

"Light management is what excites me the most in illustration. What it shows, what it hides. Light is an important storytelling device to me."

2 BEHIND MY FLOWER POTS

"Everyone knows that there are a lot of interesting creatures living in flower pots."



3 TAPESTRY

"I took a slightly more graphical approach here, working with repeated patterns. I always hope that the characters from my paintings go out and take a break from time to time."





4 MENTAL PALACE

“The forest holds a very important place in my work – shadows, trees, and the mystery attached to them.”





Sudhan Lakshmanan

LOCATION: India MEDIA: Photoshop, ZBrush WEB: www.artstation.com/sudhanl

Concept artist and illustrator Sudhan has always enjoyed both listening to and telling a good story. “I strive to create stuff that engages and entertains people in some meaningful way,” he explains.



1 CRIMSON PINK
 “A fierce and passionate pink figure was the idea behind this piece. I’ve always wanted to make a pin-up illustration, so this was me exploring that interest.”

2 ZOMBIE L JACKSON
 “The world can never have too many zombies, right? I was curious what Samuel L Jackson would look like as a zombie, so I channelled him into this piece.”

3 METAL CHOMPER
 “This monster was inspired by the opening credits to the 90s Men In Black cartoon. I loved it when I was a kid (and still do!), so this was my tribute.”

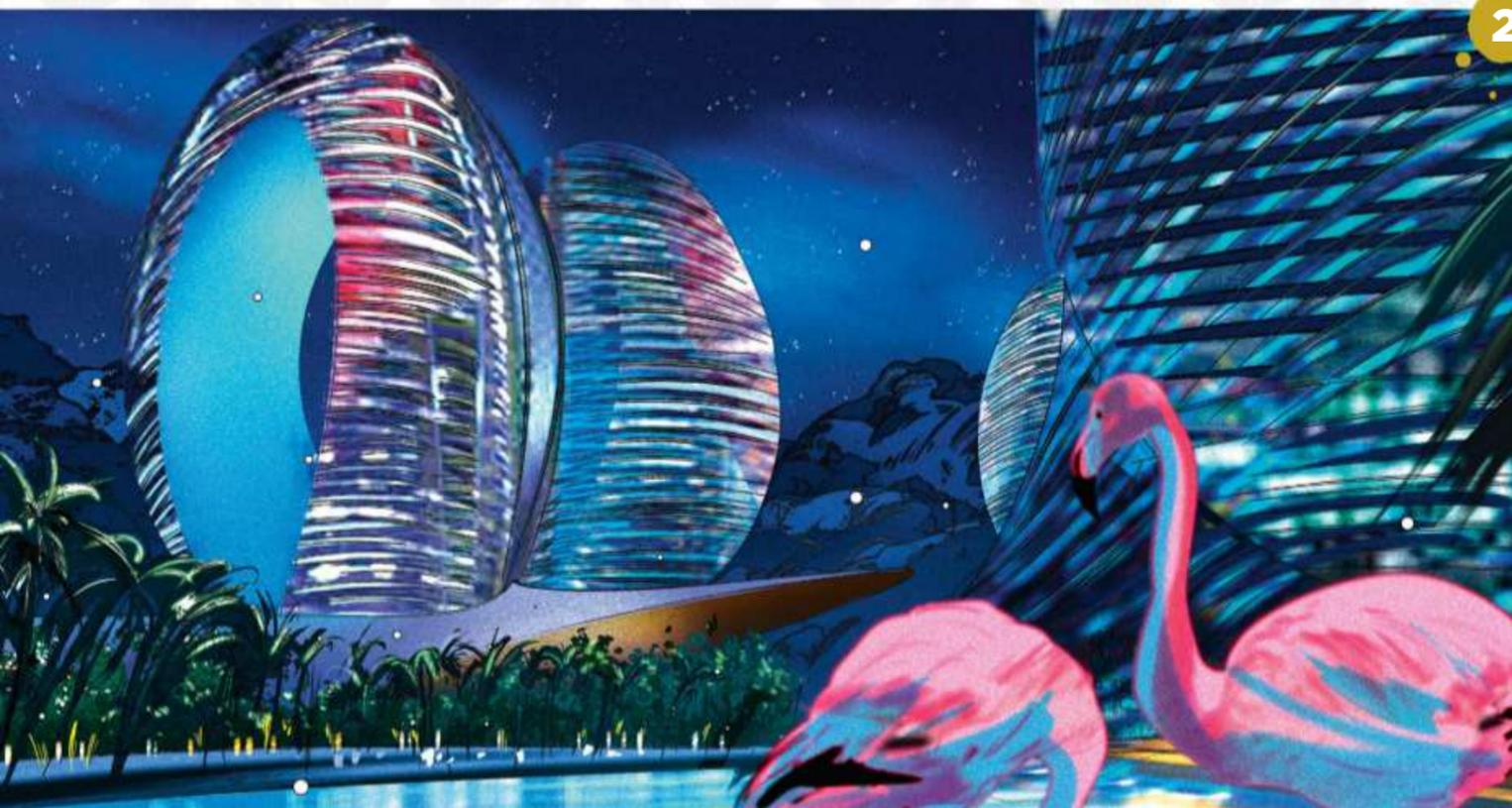
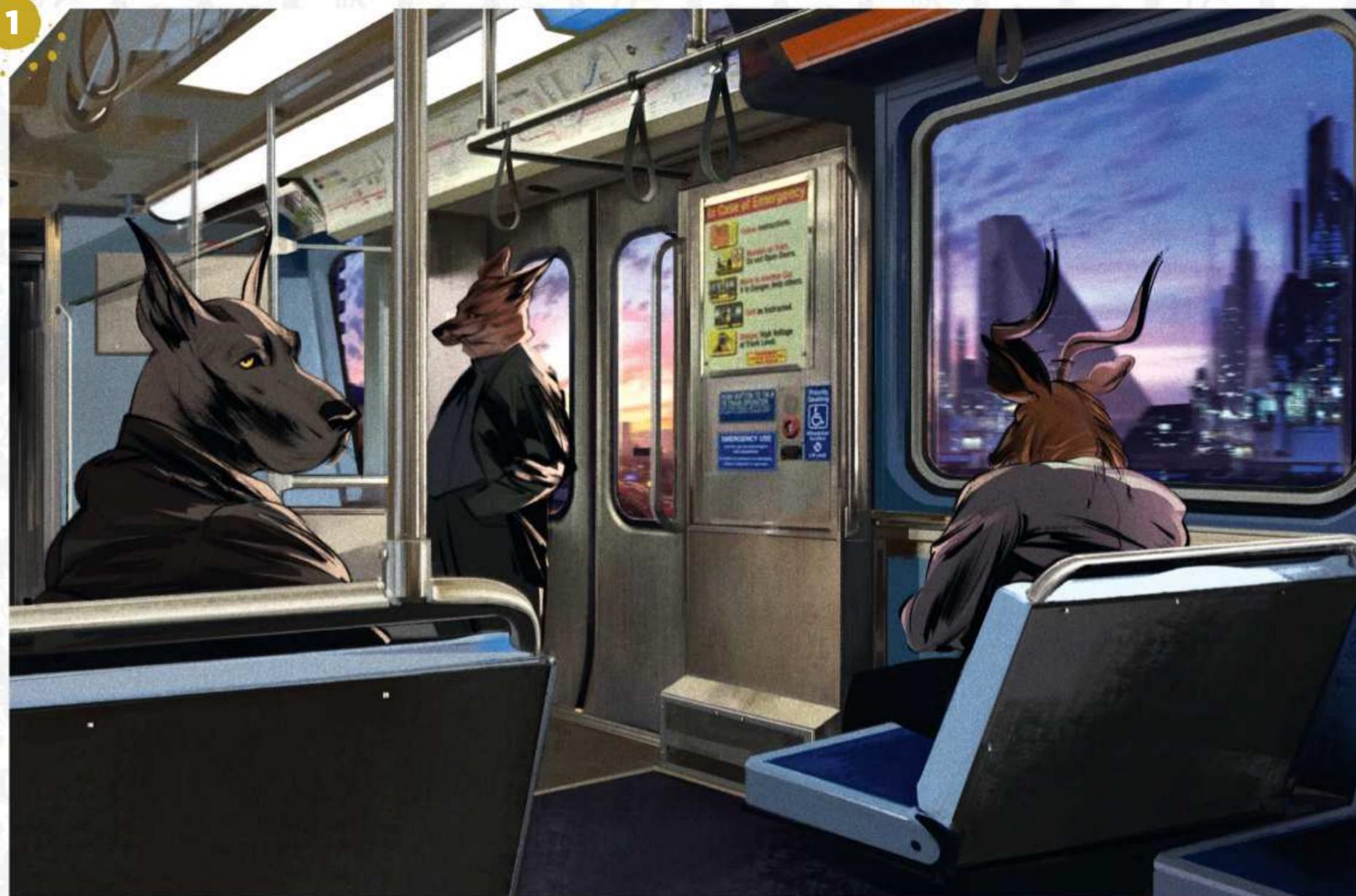
4 RUN BARTHOLOMEW RUN!
 “Chasing butterflies isn’t a valid hobby, but Bartholomew doesn’t seem to mind. I made this for the Jurassic June event – any excuse to paint a dinosaur!”



Zi Xu

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Photoshop WEB: www.zixu.co

Illustrator Zi specialises in producing advertising and promotional art for film, but her biggest passion is for science fiction. In 2018, her work was recognised by the New York Society of Illustrators.



1 **COMMUTE HOME**

“A personal piece inspired by my love for cyberpunk cities and staring out the windows on long train rides.”

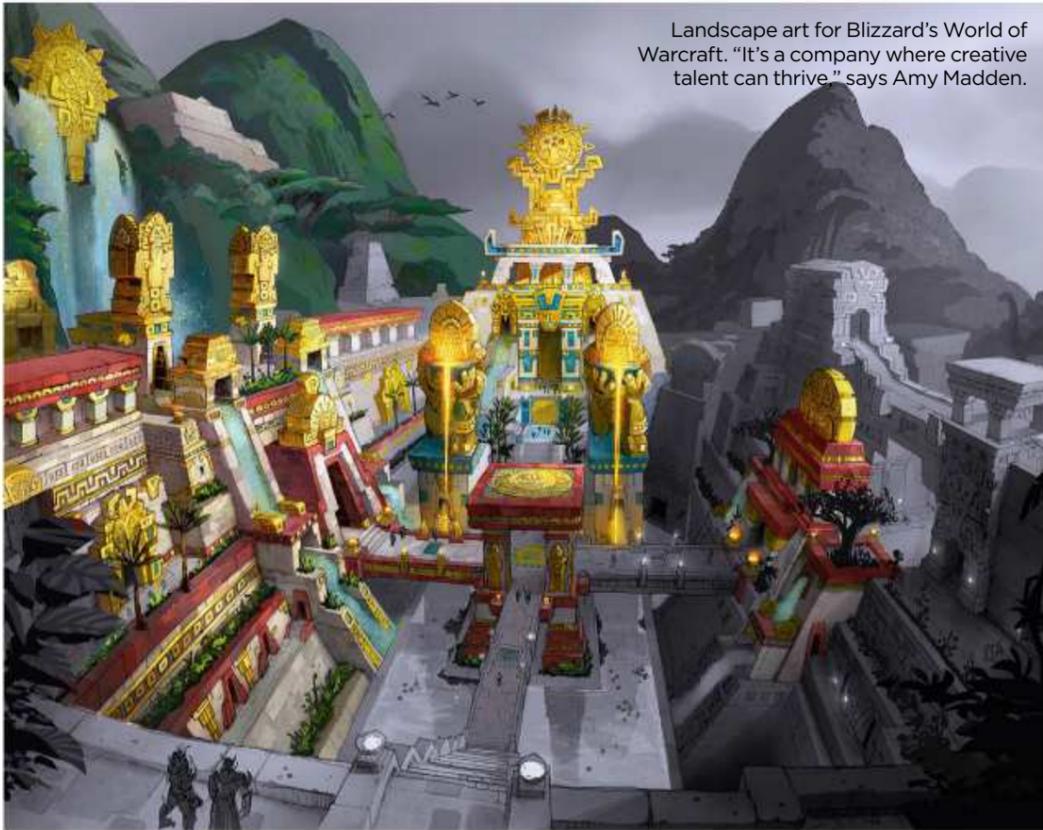
2 **PLEASUREBIRD ISLAND**

“Another personal piece, this time inspired by the structures of Phoenix Island found in my home province of Hainan, China.”

3 **THE THING**

“My poster for John Carpenter’s classic film. This piece was mainly an excuse for me to draw dogs and use an 80s colour palette.”





Landscape art for Blizzard's World of Warcraft. "It's a company where creative talent can thrive," says Amy Madden.



"We're hiring for a wide ranges of roles at King, from art internships to art directors," says Johnny Taylor.

How to get a job in games

Level up Recruiters from leading video game studios tell **Tom May** what they're looking for in an artist

Want to work as an artist in video games? Then good news: the industry is booming and most studios are hiring. So how should you go about getting your dream job?

The first step is pretty straightforward: check out advertised jobs on your preferred company's website. Right now, for example, British games studio Creative Assembly has five artist roles listed at www.creative-assembly.com/careers.



"We recruit in a wide range of fields," explains **Kevin McDowell**, the art director for its Total War series. "These include concept art, concept design, UI design, character art, animation, rigging/tech animation, technical art, real-time VFX, environment art, cinematics, illustration and art management. And we will scan the globe to find the right people."

But the 'right people' aren't just talented artists. More importantly, they're the perfect fit for the job. Which means it's vital to familiarise yourself with the company's games and tailor your portfolio precisely.



"Make sure it's not a big leap for the hiring manager to see you working in their team," stresses **Johnny Taylor**,



"I'm looking for a very specific match between the role and your portfolio"

who's the director of visual development at social games giant King. "You'd be amazed at how many artists apply to work on a game like Farm Heroes Saga, but they have a hardcore AAA-style portfolio and little else."

Instead, "each piece in your portfolio should be specifically designed to answer a question about your skill set," says Kevin. "See it from the art director's point of view. I'm looking for a very specific match between the role and your portfolio. For example, if I'm looking for a character artist I'll want to see both male and female characters. But amazingly, some portfolios I see ➔"

"The games we make at King require artists to be flexible and adaptable with their technique and styles," says Johnny.



BOOSTING PROFILES

John Picacio tells us why he decided to bring together Mexican-American artists working in the science fiction and fantasy industry. **Page 24**



INDUSTRIAL INSPIRATION

Diosdado Mondero has spent seven years turning his studio into a homage to Nikola Tesla, steampunk and the Industrial Revolution. It was time well spent. **Page 26**



YOUR VIEWS, YOUR ART

This is your opportunity to comment on all things ImagineFX and the art world in general. And if you've painted something recently, let us know about it! **Page 33**



To see what it's really like working on games like World of Warcraft, check out @lifeatblizzard on Instagram.

INDUSTRY INSIGHT

DREW WHITMORE

The concept artist explains how Atomhawk goes about recruiting...

What jobs are available for artists at Atomhawk?

All the roles on our art team are for concept artists. The concept art we do for games covers the full spectrum of the development cycle, from concept, design and early style exploration to production art, storyboards for cinematics and marketing art, once the game is ready for release.

What kinds of styles are you looking for?

We like to see artists with a range of styles, as the projects we work on can be so varied in style and genre. Some portfolios we see are focused on a particular style but we're looking for an ability and willingness to be adaptable and always up for a new challenge.

What common mistakes do applicants make?

Keeping older, lower quality work in your portfolio. We want to see what you can do now.

Where do you find people?

Every source that's out there: ArtStation, Facebook, word of mouth, through our website, through connections with universities and colleges and sometimes through recruitment fairs and events, too. We recently hired the winner of our Atomhawk Art Challenge, which we ran earlier this year, and look forward to him joining the team soon. We're always on the hunt for and interested in hearing from talented people who we think we'd like to work with.



Drew is principal concept artist at Atomhawk Design Ltd, which creates art for games, film and digital media.

www.atomhawk.com



"LinkedIn, Artstation, conventions and engaging with a few universities are all ways Creative Assembly finds new artists," says Kevin McDowell.



Amy warns against “applying for as many jobs as possible. Recruiters know this as the serial applier.”

➔ feature only men or only women.”

Another no-no is just including complete work. “We don’t just want to see the end result, we want to see how an artist gets to the final image,” says Johnny. “Concepts, sketch books and moodboards all really help form a picture of what an artist is about. Often, inexperienced artists are scared of including this work in a portfolio, but it’s so important to see how they work through an idea.”

Getting your CV right is also crucial, stresses **Amy Madden**, lead recruiter,



story and franchise development at US games developer Blizzard Entertainment. “Most of those I see are missing

“I don’t care if you have a degree – a strong portfolio is what I’m looking for,” says Hendrik Blaauw.

“You need to show you have a handle on the production and craft of creating game art,” says Johnny.

“ Concepts, sketch books and moodboards all really help form a picture of what an artist is about ”

details about what the applicant did in their current or previous role. Plus they’re usually too brief – for example: ‘Created concept art for [insert company name].’ You need to give the recruiter more to go on. Did you work with a team of artists? Did you draw characters or environments? Did you work on colour keys or the lighting?”

DON’T MAKE ME GOOGLE YOU!

And don’t forget to link everything up, or you’ll end up with one cheesed-off recruiter. “About a third of applications I see have no link to their portfolio in either their cover letter or résumé,” says Kevin. “I’m dumbfounded at how common this is. I end up Googling the candidate’s name plus ArtStation, in the hope that I’ll find their work. So put your portfolio link everywhere: on your cover letter, on your CV, on the application form... everywhere!”

What about software? Many job ads will specify exactly which skills you need. If not, Photoshop, Illustrator and 3D packages such as Maya and ZBrush

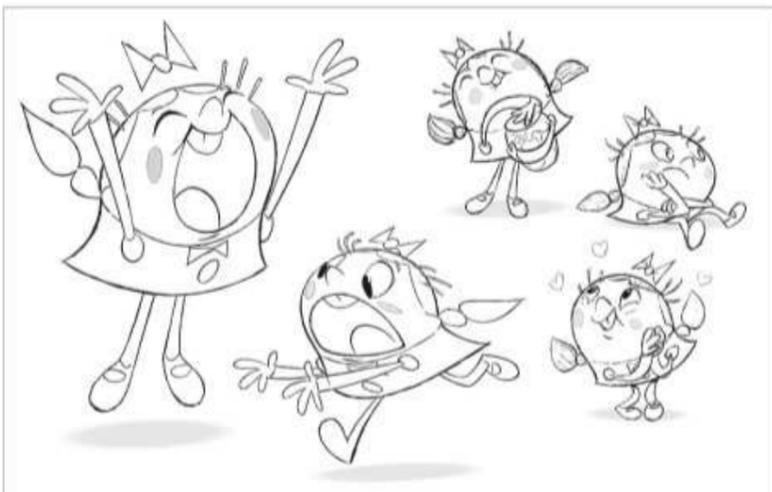
will always help your cause, while a broad knowledge of game engines like Unity will certainly be a bonus. That said, every role is different and some companies are even software-neutral, so it pays to do your homework.

Take, for example, online gaming company Yggdrasil, which is opening a studio in Barcelona next year. “We’re always on the lookout for illustrators, concept designers, 3D artists, animators, UI designers and graphic designers,” says creative director



Hendrik Blaauw. “I don’t mind which software they choose to use – or indeed, whether they prefer PCs, Macs or Wacoms – as long as they deliver the quality that we’re known for.”

If you’ve having no luck with advertised jobs, most games studios do recruitment through other channels, too. “Recruitment fairs, conventions, portfolio reviews, email submissions and ArtStation are all channels through which we find artists,” says Amy. “I’ve





met some amazing talent at events such as Comic-Con, SIGGRAPH, CTN and Game Developers Conference, not to mention coffee shops, LinkedIn and Game Developers Monthly Meetups.

“So my advice is to get yourself out there! Be visible in the artistic communities and to recruiters, and make it easy for recruiters to review your work, such as on your website, Instagram, ArtStation or YouTube.”

All those we spoke to for this article told a similar story. “When I set up the

Yggdrasil art department, I turned to ArtStation and hand-picked all the artists I felt we needed,” says Hendrik.

TALENT SPOTTING

“We’ve started attending conventions in Europe and the US, where we had portfolio reviews and that’s worked well for us,” Hendrik continues. “But I’m always on the lookout for talent, so I still check ArtStation daily.”

Many artists hold back from posting online, because they don’t want to



“At King, we find that a lot of artists apply for roles they’re not suited to,” says Johnny.



“In your portfolio, showcase the art you’re proudest of, and as you improve, remove the old work,” says Hendrik.

Art for Diablo III. “Before applying, I’d recommend researching portfolios of artists working at Blizzard,” says Amy.

engage in a popularity contest. But by and large, recruiters don’t really care how many likes or followers you have.

“Social media is helpful for being spotted by art directors and other hiring managers, but that’s all we’re really interested in,” says Kevin. “We’re looking for artists who produce the sort of work that we can use – that’s it. So make sure it’s visible to us, and don’t worry about the numbers.”

And if you do get an interview, here’s one final piece of advice from Kevin. “Please be familiar with our games,” he urges. “Play them if you can. If you can’t, then watch gameplay videos and trailers on YouTube. If you’ve not bothered to do this basic level of preparation, then it’s a huge red flag to us.”

And finally he says, “At an interview it’s okay to be nervous or excited, to be an introvert or extrovert – but be engaged, positive and curious.”

John Picacio says that, "Now more creators are launching initiatives promoting diversity, and I think it's great."



"The initiative has opened my eyes to the importance of being part of a creative group with the same cultural background," says Gary Villarreal.



Artist Tehani Farr says that, "The Mexicanx Initiative has not only changed my perspective on illustration but turned my world around."



Taking the initiative for Mexicanx creatives

Support network When John Picacio was awarded the artist guest of honour at last year's Worldcon, his response was to launch a project for Mexican-American artists



Last year **John Picacio** was invited to be **Worldcon 76's** artist guest of honour. He soon realised that he was the **first Mexican-American to be offered the role.** "That's great to be the first," says the artist, "but the disturbing question is, 'what if I'm the last?'"

There are few Mexican-Americans – or Mexicanx – working in the US and UK sci-fi and fantasy (SFF) publishing industries. John saw his chance to inspire change, offering to sponsor two Mexicanx to attend this year's convention, "and if I got frisky, maybe sponsor four or six myself," he says. As soon as he posted his goal on Twitter, author John Scalzi matched two sponsorships. Within weeks, the Mexicanx Initiative was sponsoring 50 Worldcon attending memberships.

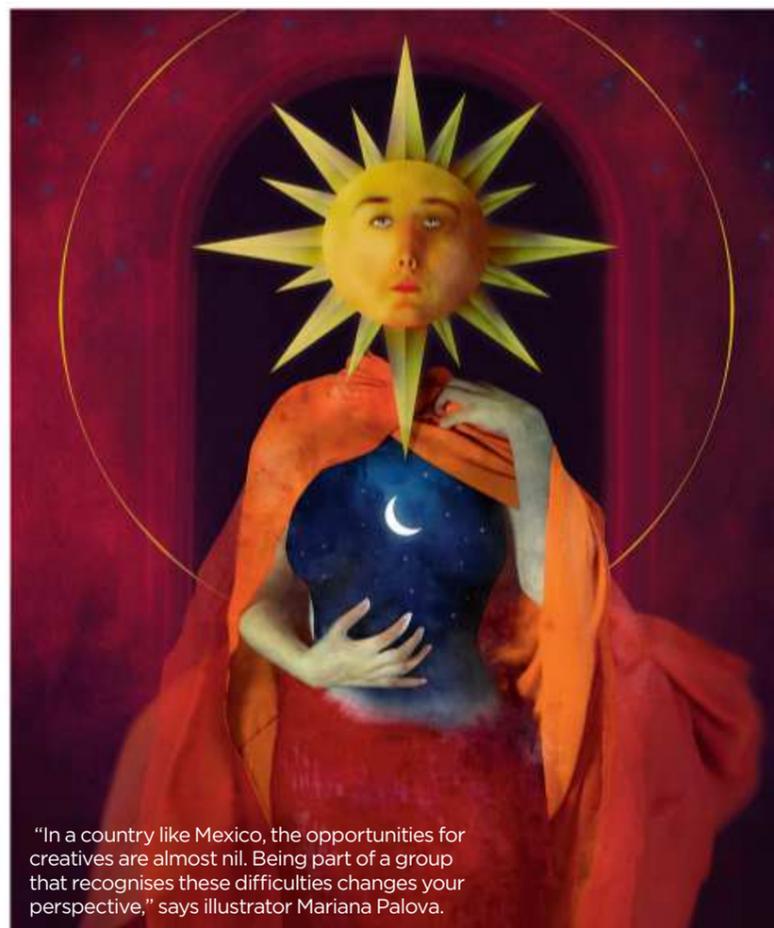
"Much of the success was due to the generosity of US, Canadian and British SFF fans," says John. "I think many of

them are disgusted by the Trump administration's treatment of Mexicanx people, and its inhumane separations of families and children at the borders."

But out of these negative realities, John sees only hope. The initiative has since inspired copycat projects: An LGBT-focused project saw success in this year's Worldcon, for example.

And the seeds that were sown last year are already beginning to grow. "In the end, 42 of the 50 made it to Worldcon," says John. "Of those, I'd say about 25 have bonded as a family. We text and email each other, create projects together, advise and push each other to be better." Comprising a mix of artists, editors and authors, "it's the kind of chemistry that can't be calculated. It happens when the right people come together in the right moment. It's our time."

You can read more about the Mexicanx Initiative on John's website: www.johnpicacio.com.



"In a country like Mexico, the opportunities for creatives are almost nil. Being part of a group that recognises these difficulties changes your perspective," says illustrator Mariana Palova.

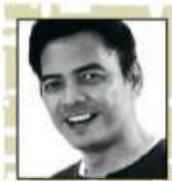


Robbie Trevino says, "Many of us have stories we want to tell and I feel privileged to have found a group of like-minded individuals who support each other in the telling of those stories. I've found my wolf pack, my family."



Diosdado "Dodie" Mondero

Electric dreams Imagine if Nikola Tesla was not just a brilliant inventor, but also an accomplished fantasy artist...



Back in 2014 our basement was flooded by a severe storm that knocked out the power. We were

walking around in three inches of water - it was a stressful time.

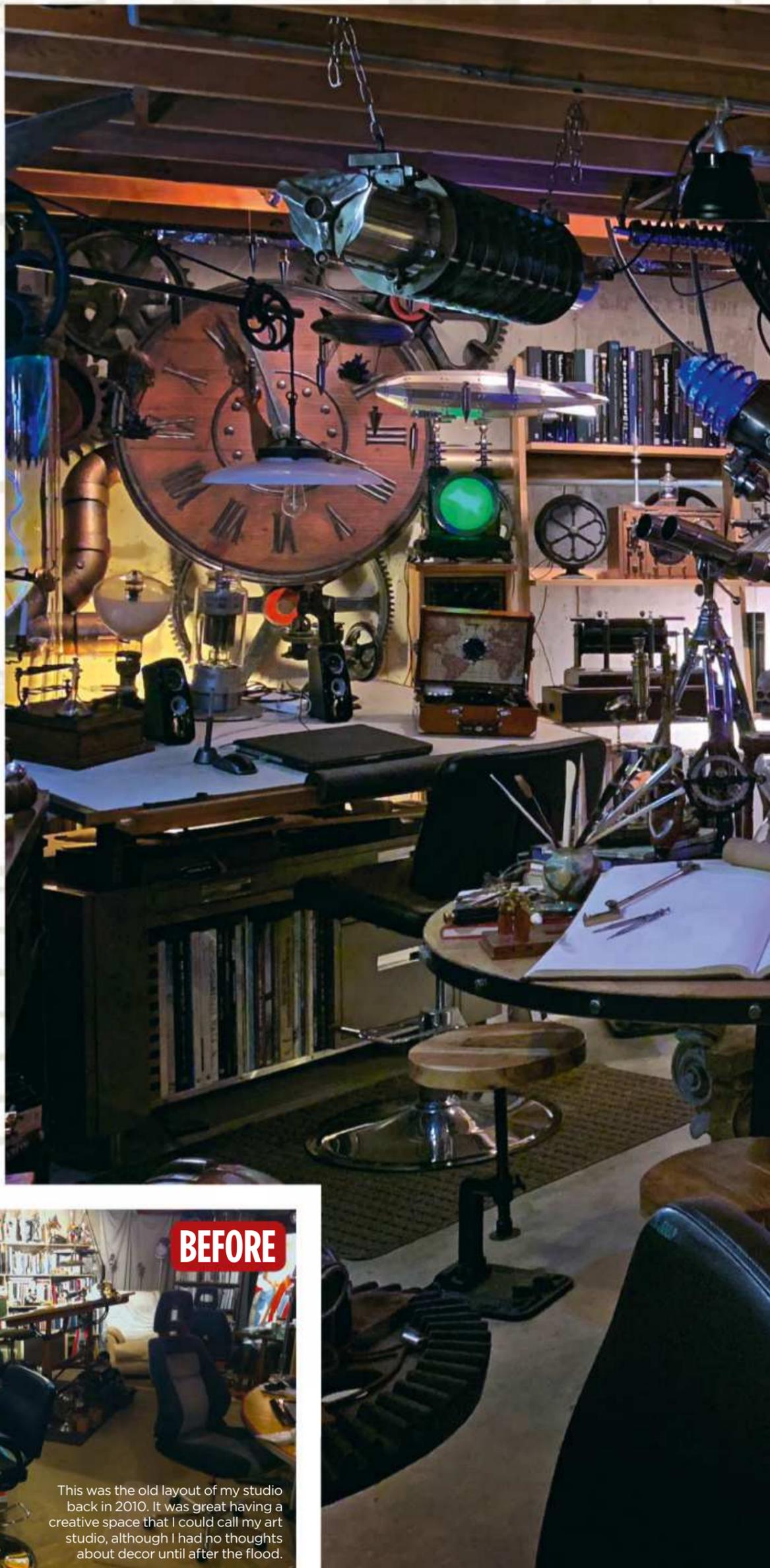
We had to throw out many large personal items that suffered water damage, which freed up space. And it was during the clean-up process that I realised this was a blessing in disguise. I had an opportunity to start over and create my dream art studio.

As I was brainstorming some ideas, I asked myself what interior appealed to me the most? I remembered how impressed I was when I saw steampunk cosplayers attending the San Diego Comic-Con back in 2008, with their Victorian fashions ➡➡

I attached a camera lens to a 1911 swing arm that I use when I do live drawing demos on Facebook. I love to stay authentic to the period.



This was the old layout of my studio back in 2010. It was great having a creative space that I could call my art studio, although I had no thoughts about decor until after the flood.



AFTER

My studio is my way of celebrating my success in the art industry. Over seven years it went through several layout changes. Whenever I added a new item I had to rearrange what I thought was the final layout!



“I decided to create an Industrial Revolution-themed studio with a touch of steampunk”

ImagineNation Artist in Residence



My first Wacom Cintiq has served me well. I'll pass it on to my youngest son, Brandon.

“ I continued to buy more antique items that defined the Industrial Age ”

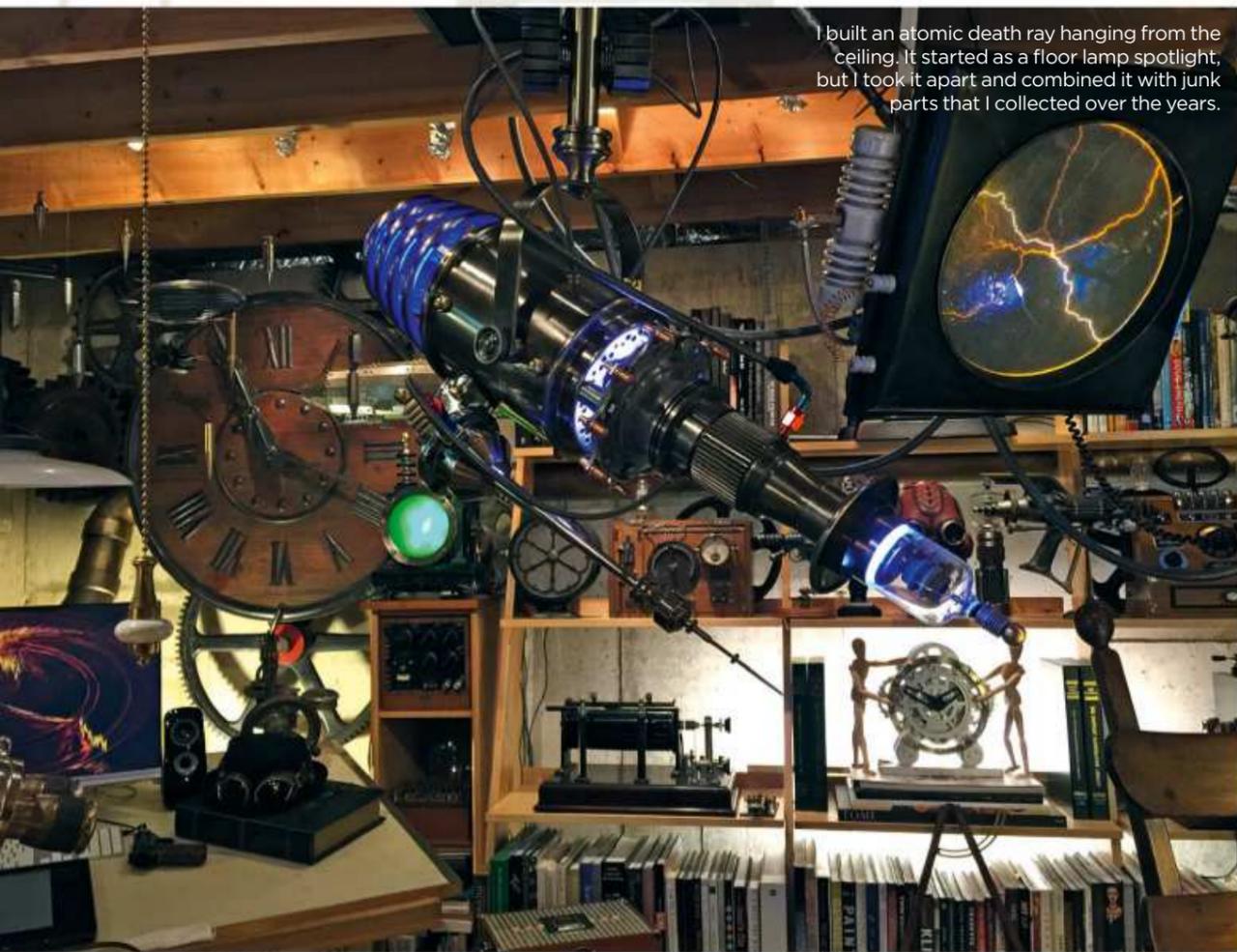


I faux-finished my cement wall to mimic the look of a boiler room, with rusty metal plates and round rivets. Visitors are often fooled by it.



My Tesla-inspired drawing table is where all the artistic wizardry begins. It gives me amazing creative energy as I start a new drawing while channelling Mr Tesla's brilliance.

Artist news, software & events



I built an atomic death ray hanging from the ceiling. It started as a floor lamp spotlight, but I took it apart and combined it with junk parts that I collected over the years.



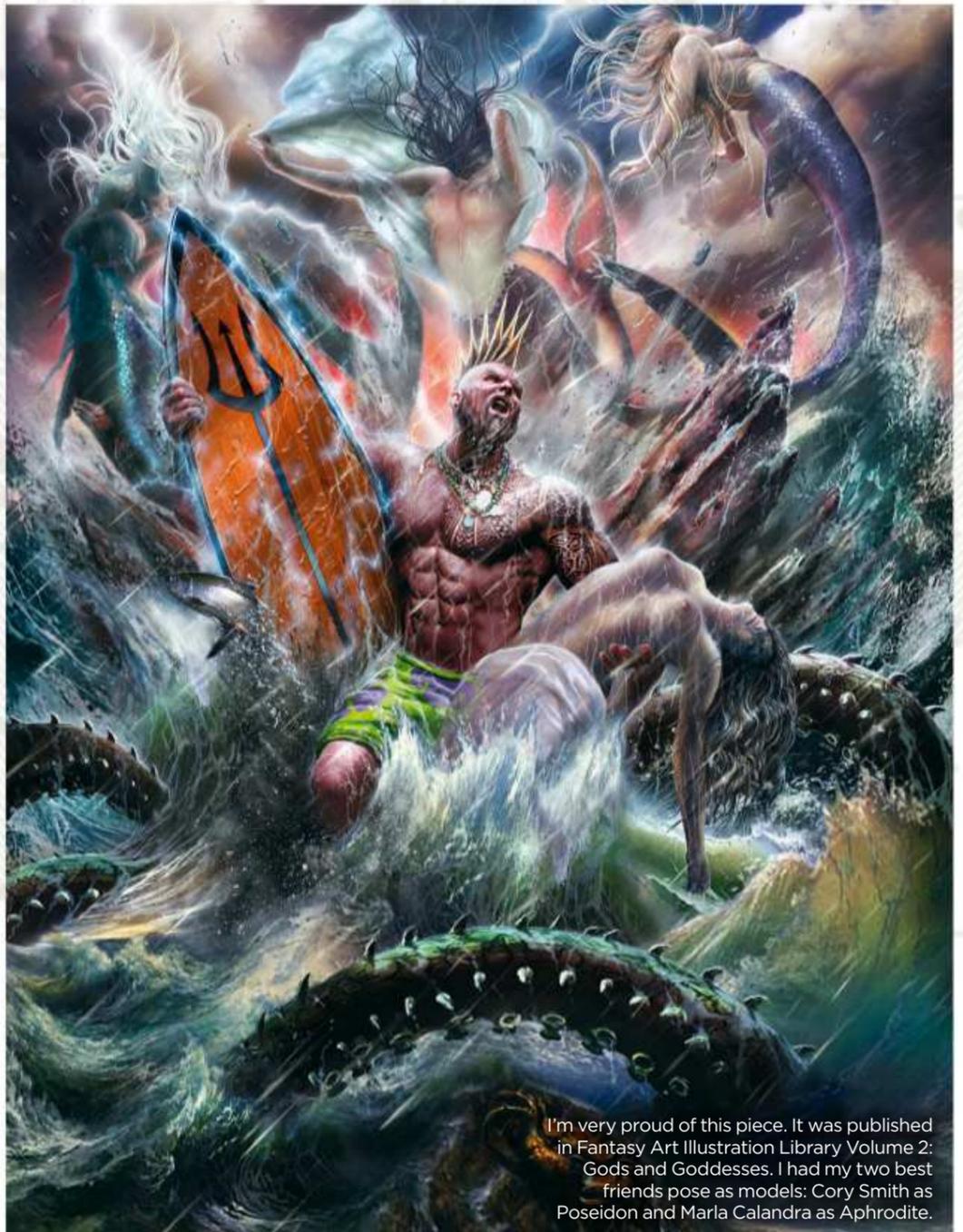
I built this control panel that manages the lights and effects throughout the studio. It used to be a belts and socks display stand from an Eddie Bauer store.



I have a small collection of antique pencil sharpeners. My best find is a rare piece from 1836. It has a large gear crank with a wheel that sharpens.



I kept a dead dragonfly in my studio that followed me home one time. I learned that a dragonfly is my spirit creature. I consider them good luck when they appear.

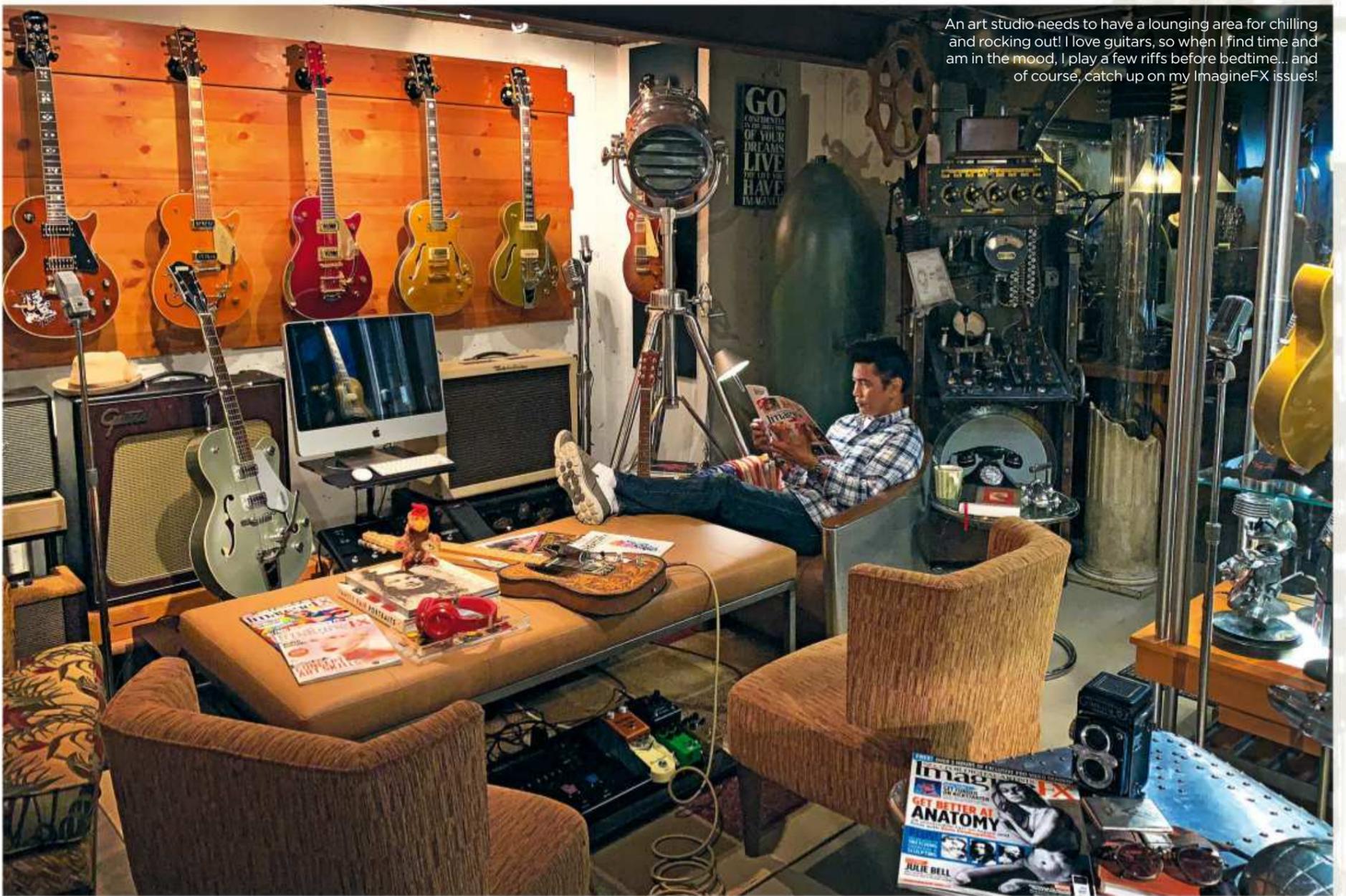


I'm very proud of this piece. It was published in Fantasy Art Illustration Library Volume 2: Gods and Goddesses. I had my two best friends pose as models: Cory Smith as Poseidon and Marla Calandra as Aphrodite.

Fig. 9. British Museum zu London.

2016 © D. Mondoro

ImagineNation Artist in Residence



An art studio needs to have a lounging area for chilling and rocking out! I love guitars, so when I find time and am in the mood, I play a few riffs before bedtime... and of course, catch up on my ImagineFX issues!

“ I also built more unusual items, such as three atomic death rays, and even made my first Jacob’s Ladder ”

➔ combined with custom-made accessories. I’ve always loved the Industrial Age, and that was my light bulb moment. I decided to create an Industrial Revolution-themed studio with a touch of steampunk.

HEAVYWEIGHT TABLE

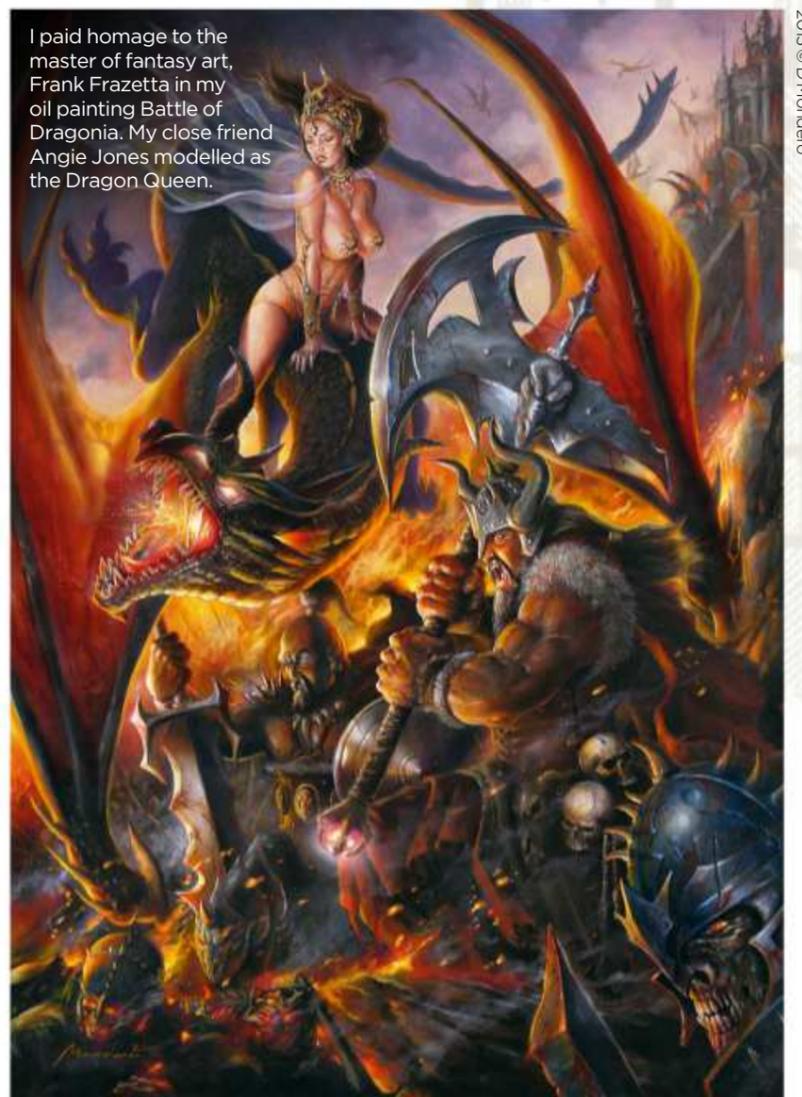
I started by repurposing my vintage drawing table, which I originally picked up in a dumpster. It was a lot of fun making it look as if it came from the late 1800s. And the more work I did on the table, the more ideas I had on how to improve it. I even asked my neighbour to weld and fabricate a new metal base to it. There are so many metallic parts and details on this table that it’s ended up weighing a ton.

My drawing table was inspired by Nikola Tesla. I imagined it was the type of table you’d find in his laboratory, and found a brass ‘T’ that I mounted

in its front as a finishing touch. I continued to buy more antique items that defined the Industrial Age – anything from the late 1800s to the 1920s. I also built more unusual items, such as three atomic death rays, and even made my first Jacob’s Ladder that generates 15,000 volts.

After seven long years, all my hard work and passion that I put into creating my ultimate dream studio finally paid off. I remember standing at the bottom of the stairs and looking around at what I had created, and knew and felt in my heart that this is the room I could finally die in. Mission accomplished!

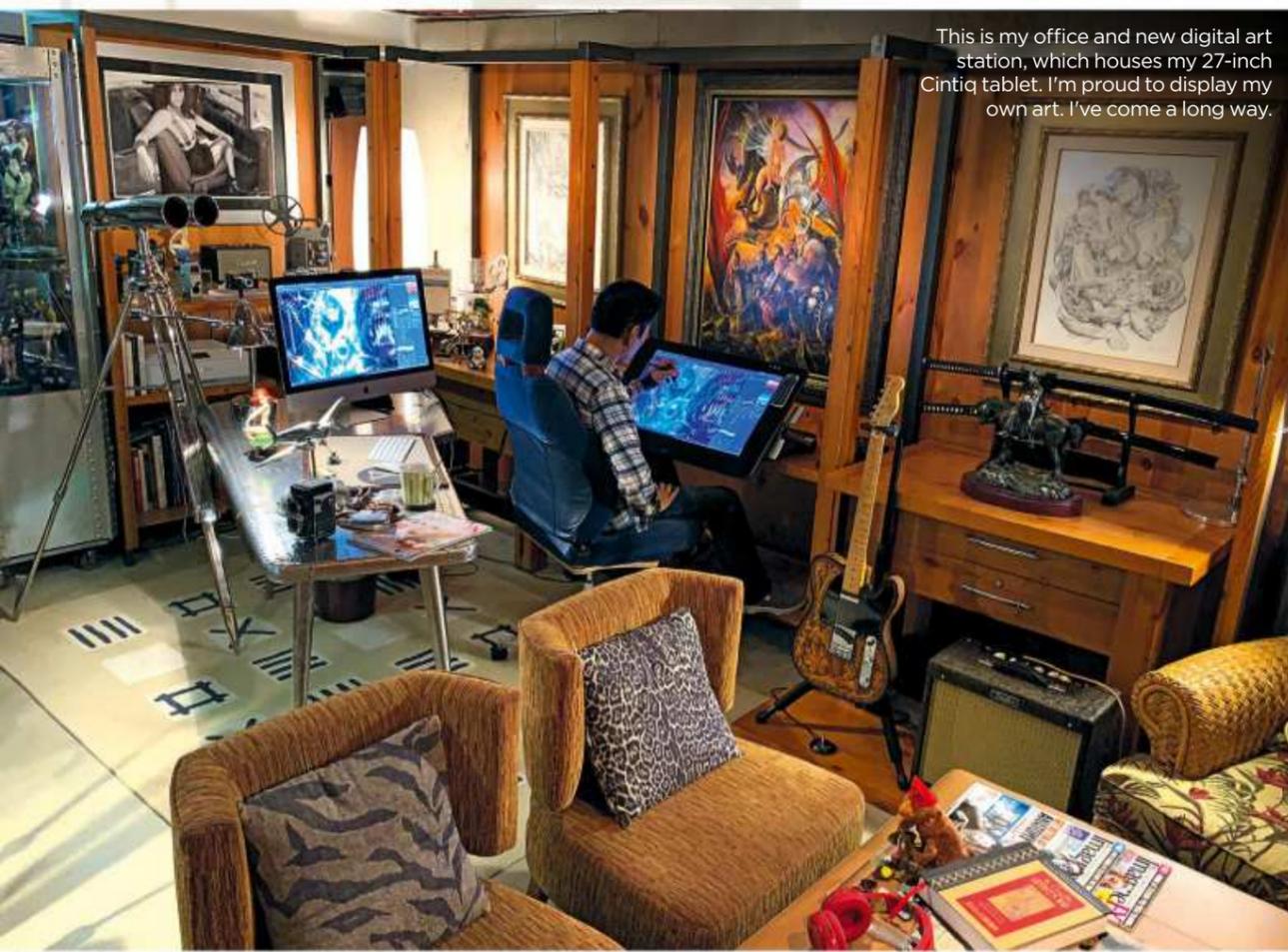
After studying fine art and commercial advertising, Diosdado worked as an art director at an interior design company. He left the firm to launch Mondero Studios in 1995. You can explore more of Diosdado’s art at www.monderostudios.daportfolio.com.



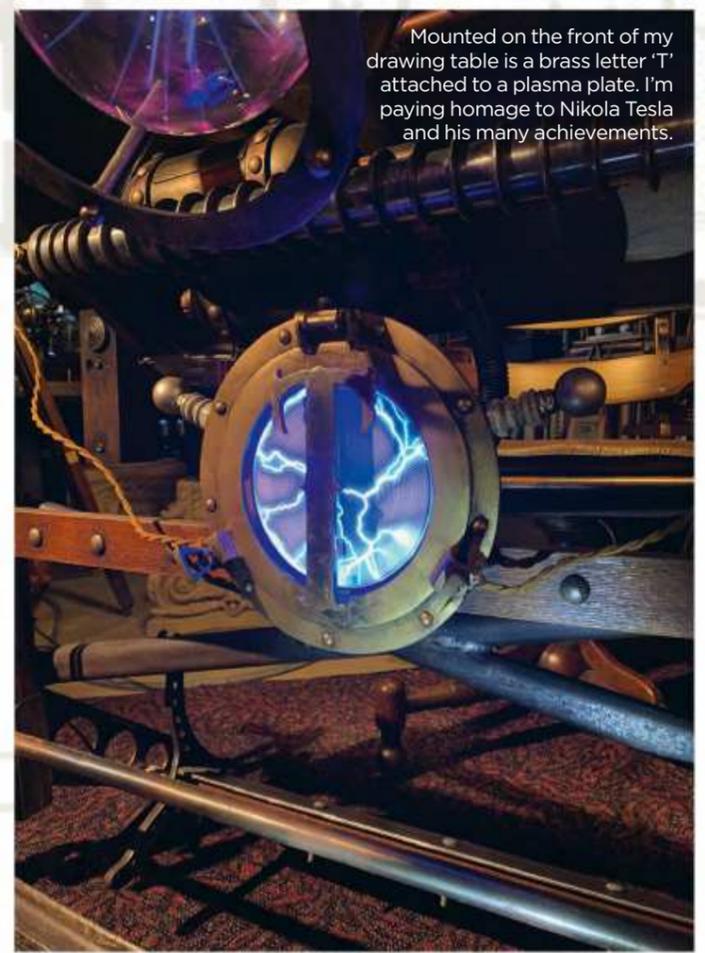
I paid homage to the master of fantasy art, Frank Frazetta in my oil painting Battle of Dragonia. My close friend Angie Jones modelled as the Dragon Queen.

2013 © D Mondero

Artist news, software & events



This is my office and new digital art station, which houses my 27-inch Cintiq tablet. I'm proud to display my own art. I've come a long way.

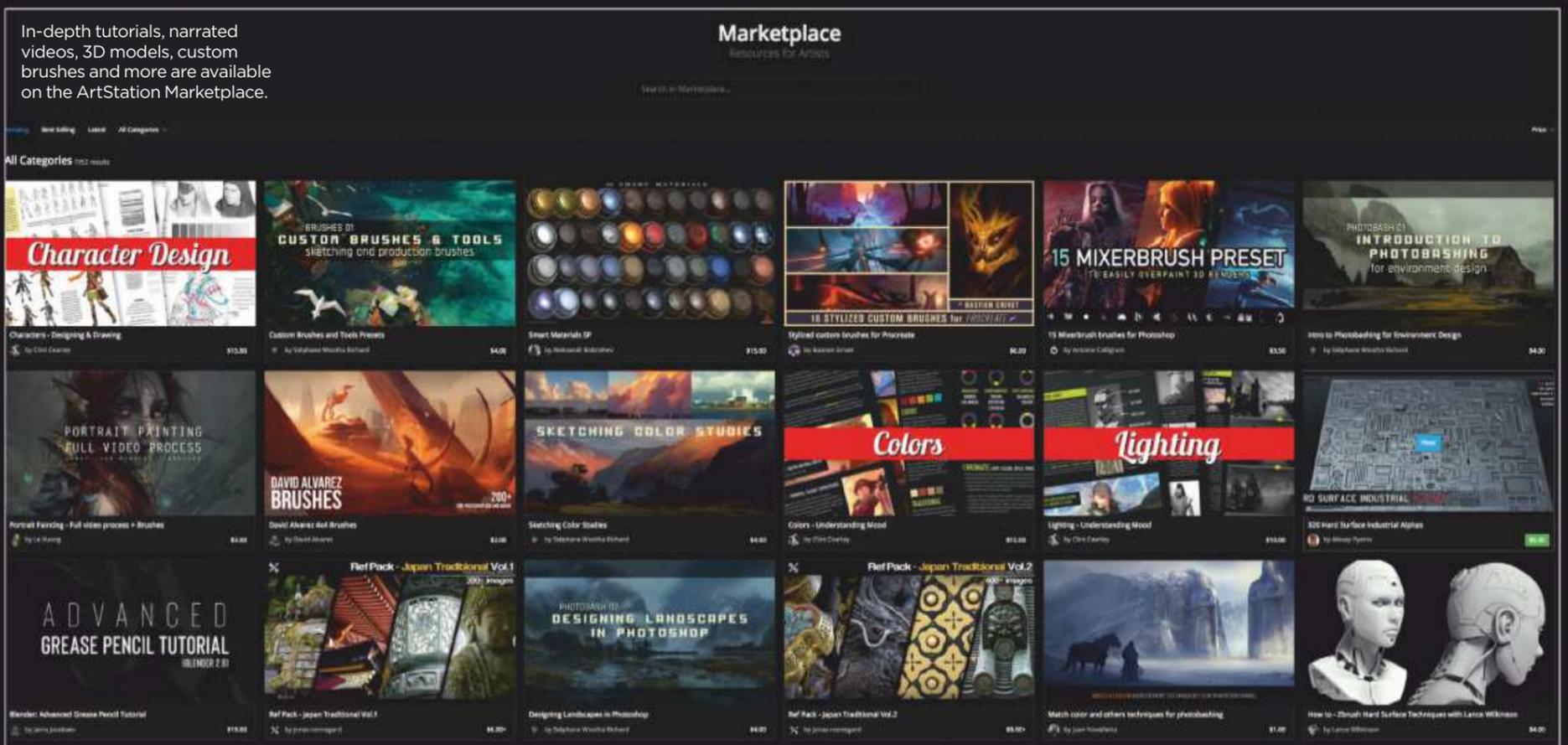


Mounted on the front of my drawing table is a brass letter 'T' attached to a plasma plate. I'm paying homage to Nikola Tesla and his many achievements.

Fig. 9. British Museum zu London.



This is my second painting station. I love the steel and chrome easel. The area has an old world vibe inspired from the decor in seen in the recent Sherlock Holmes films, starring Robert Downey Jr.



Supplementing your income as an artist

Making money ArtStation's Marketplace makes it easy to earn a few extra pennies – or more if you've plenty to sell to fellow artists!

Whether you're a freelancer working full time, a student learning how to create concept art for video games, or have a day job working in a studio, selling your digital products online can be one of the easiest ways to make money on the side.

With the newly released ArtStation Marketplace, some artists have been making enough to earn a living! For most artists, it's the easiest way to make a little extra money. As the largest community and resource for artists in the industry, what better place to set up your shop? All it takes few clicks and you can have your storefront up and running.

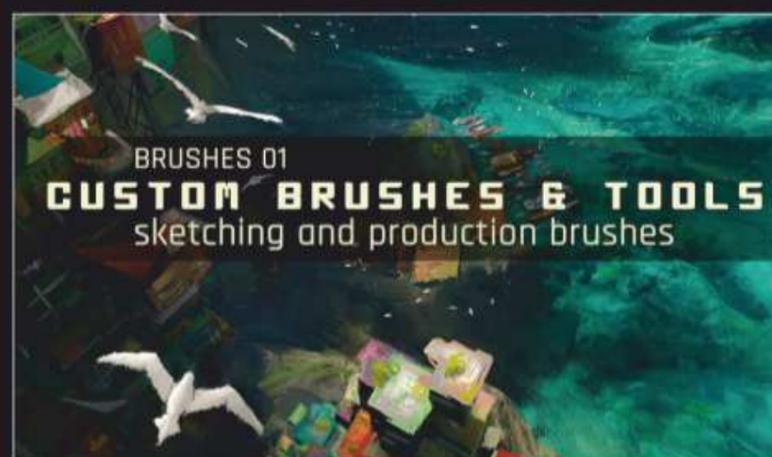
WHAT PRODUCTS CAN YOU SELL?

1 Tutorials and process videos
Sharing your knowledge is a win-win. Make money by helping others

learn! Your tutorials don't have to be lengthy or complicated – even a short video of your painting process can help aspiring artists.

2 Custom brushes
Artists are always looking for tools that can help them achieve a certain effect more easily, or speed up their

Get more from your collection of custom brushes by selling them.



painting process. So if you've spent time creating custom brushes, why not bundle them in a pack ready to selling on ArtStation Marketplace?

3 Reference packs
Many artists swear by using references for their work. Whether it's for painting reference, photobashing or matte painting, your photography skills might pay off – literally!

4 Digital eBooks or PDFs
Share guides or a digital version of your artbook. The ArtStation Marketplace accepts virtually all kinds of file types, making it easy to share your product in the preferred format.

As artist Stephane Wootha Richard has discovered, ArtStation's Marketplace is worth a closer look. "I wasn't expecting such a strong response from the community," Stephane says. "Results were much better than I expected. When I first received emails about the ArtStation Marketplace, I was a bit skeptical about yet another online content publisher for artists, but now I'm glad I joined."

There are no startup fees and setup is easy. Start selling your digital products on the ArtStation Marketplace today!

START SELLING AT WWW.ARTSTATION.COM/MARKETPLACE

Letters

YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS



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



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Sketchbook sensations

I don't know how you do it, but the Sketchbook section in ImagineFX is constantly inspiring and amazing to look at. There's been a great run recently: the emotive drawings that feature in Eliza Ivanova's sketchbook, Sam Hogg's original character art, and the unsettling creatures drawn by Dibujante Nocturno. All different styles and subject matter, yet with one thing in common: they've all been a feast for the eyes.

We're all used to seeing finished art online and in real life, but I think there's something magical in seeing raw ideas coming to life in an artist's sketchbook. It doesn't matter if the art's loose or uncoloured – there's still plenty of technical underpinnings to learn from. Although it's always refreshing to read that an artist was doodling something just for fun – after all, isn't that what art's meant to be?

Jonas, via email

Claire replies Yes! Yes it is Jonas. Sketchbook is one of ImagineFX's enduring and much-loved features. It's funny to think that it wasn't a part of the magazine when it was launched back in 2006. I gave it a try in issue nine and asked the wonderful (and much missed) Francis Tsai to be our first artist to offer his scribbles up for scrutiny. The rest is history.

Road trip

The news story from issue 168 on the successful Trojan Horse Was A Unicorn art event made me wonder if you'd ever consider taking ImagineFX on the road? Maybe you could use the ImagineFX



Sam Hogg's sketches from issue 167 made a big impression on reader Jonas. And we suspect he's not alone in his admiration of our Sketchbook artists.



DID YOU MISS THE PREVIOUS PACKED ISSUE? Don't worry – you can still get hold of it. Visit <https://ifxm.ag/168milton>.



Goro Fujita at this year's Trojan Horse Was a Unicorn. Top artists will be appearing at our Vertex event in 2019.

name to attract artists to venues around the country (I live in London) to give talks, demo their painting techniques or give portfolio reviews. It would also enable them to sell their art. That's a win-win scenario, right?

Alexander, via email

Claire replies Hello Alexander, we actually launched an event called Vertex, which was held in London in March this year. It's a collaboration of 3D Artist, 3D World and ImagineFX magazines. It was a great success and we've already settled on 8 March 2019 as the date for next year's event. It's going to be even bigger – and with a whole room dedicated to 2D art workshops! We should have announced the line-up by the time you're reading this, so check out www.vertexconf.com for all the exclusive info!

To be continued...

So far I'm loving Patrick J Jones' series on figure drawing. And it's going to be eight parts, you say? That's practically a book in itself. I wonder if other artists would be keen to tackle one topic close to their heart in such detail, published over multiple issues of ImagineFX? I'd love to see one of my favourite comic artists such as Fiona Staples or Babs Tarr put together an 'Art of the Comic' series. Can you make this happen? And I'm sure readers would love it if you put all the parts together into a supplement accompanying the main magazine – just in case anyone missed an issue.

Jennifer, via email

Claire replies Nice idea Jennifer! I'd love to see both Fiona and Babs create a series of workshops for us. Readers, do you have any suggestions on a theme for a series of workshops you'd like to see in ImagineFX? And an idea of the artists you'd like me to ask? Let me know!



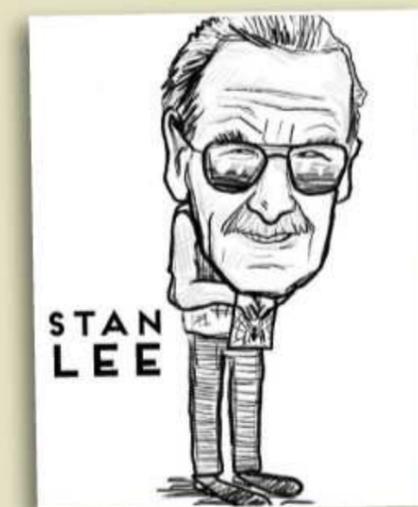
New works that have grabbed our attention



 **Brett Schwindt**
[@brettschwindt](https://www.instagram.com/brettschwindt)



 **Joseph Pratana**
[@josephpratana](https://www.twitter.com/josephpratana)



 **Luke Benjamin**
[@lukeartography](https://www.instagram.com/lukeartography)

If you've created art that you want us to shout about simply tag us on Twitter or Instagram, or find us on Facebook!



Artist Portfolio

DARREN BACON

Project pillars, studio culture, and the final five per cent: Halo's lead concept artist takes **Gary Evans** behind the scenes of the AAA-franchise



All Halo artwork © 343 Industries

You work as a concept artist at video games developer 343 Industries. You've just finished designing a vehicle for the new Halo.

You're pleased with it, this assault vehicle. You like the energy weapon, the anti-gravity propulsion system, the hatch on top that covers the player. It's functional, but it looks good too. At least, you think it looks good.

You take your concept into a meeting with the rest of the team. Somebody

speaks up. A fellow concept artist doesn't like your design. This person's got a problem with your hatch, that part of the vehicle that covers the player. They don't think it looks good at all. In fact, they think it's ugly.

So you and your fellow concept artist look to the head of the table, to Darren Bacon, lead concept artist on the Halo franchise. He thinks for a minute, then points at something stuck up on the wall – an overriding idea that helps guide the production process. He's pointing at a "project pillar".

"If a project pillar is 'gameplay first,'" the American says, "it's easier for a

PERFECTLY COMPOSED

"This image was done near the ship date of Halo 5: Guardians as a magazine cover proposal. It was tricky because there were so many compositional elements going on."

team designing a vehicle with a disputed 'ugly' hatch on top to know what action to take. To solve the discrepancy, the teams knows, at a project level, that the gameplay function of being able to cover the player is more important than some aesthetic preference. Therefore, they can make the right decision for the project, knowing what's most important according to the pillar."

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

It doesn't matter whether or not your hatch is ugly. It matters that your hatch serves its purpose. This, Darren says, is where things get a bit weird, a bit paradoxical. Your concept art can be good and bad at the same time. It can succeed in being functional, but be less successful as a standalone piece of art. Your work is still very good. It's ➡

“If a project pillar is 'gameplay first' then it's easier to know what action to take”

Artist PROFILE

Darren Bacon

LOCATION: US

FAVOURITE ARTISTS: Syd Mead, Doug Chiang, Ralph McQuarrie

SOFTWARE USED: Photoshop, Modo

WEB: www.darrenbacon.com



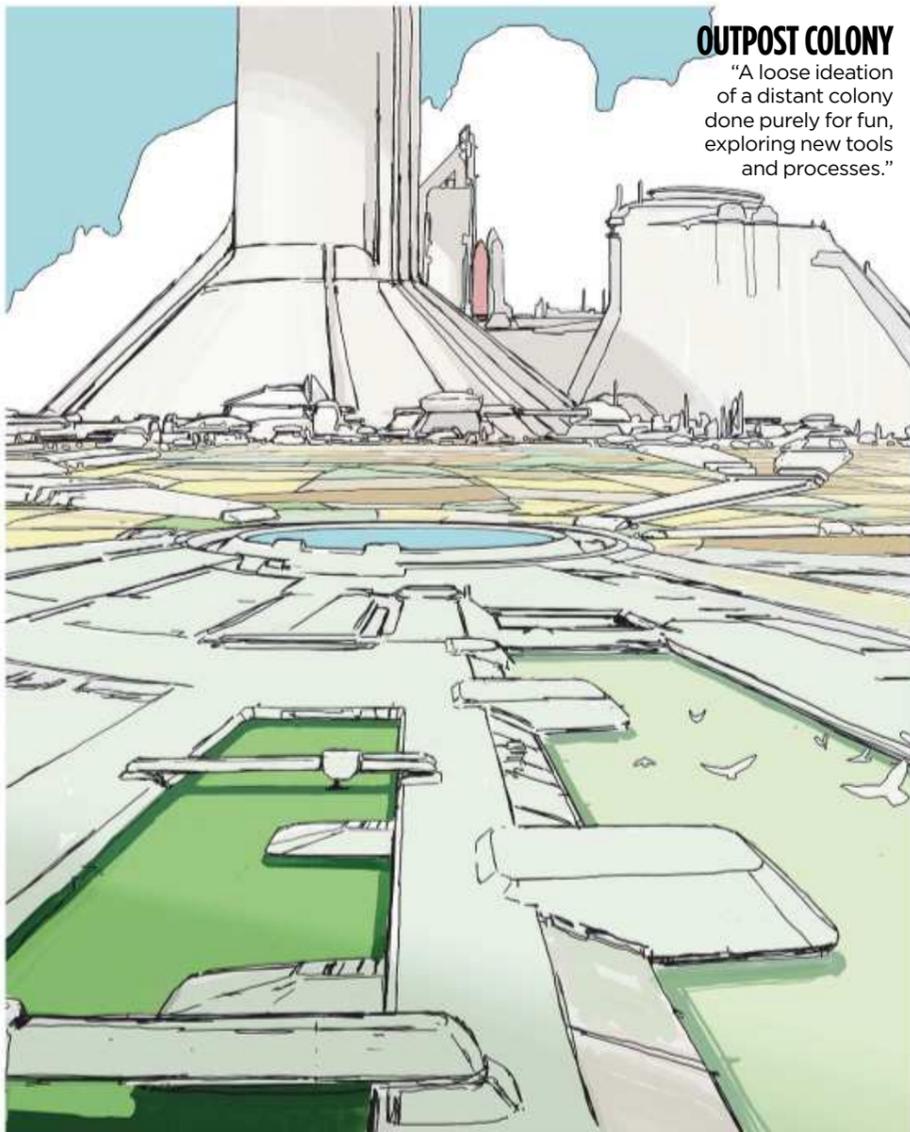
HUMAN SPACE

"In Halo lore, one of the ships (left) comes back to Earth for an update, and in the background we can see the next generation of the fleet being constructed in low Earth orbit."



OUTPOST COLONY

"A loose ideation of a distant colony done purely for fun, exploring new tools and processes."



MEAD INSPIRED

"This is fan art of a Syd Mead rover design. I wanted to depict it in a different situation other than drawings I've already seen Mead illustrate previously."





GUARDIAN FALL

"My greatest challenge on Halo 5: All I was told was that Master Chief falls or fights his way down the spine of this giant alien robot-weapon. I had to try to figure out what that would look like."

➤➤ 95 per cent of the way there. But the difference between very good concept art and truly great concept art comes down to that final five per cent. So how do you get to 100 per cent?

TAKING HARSH CRITICISM

For Darren's first ever job in art, he had to come up with drawings that served a purpose... a pretty dull purpose. This was back in high school. His art teacher put him in touch with someone who was writing a manual about oil. Darren had to draw various illustrations of oil workers performing storage and transfer procedures.

"It wasn't the most exciting work," he says, "but I'm very thankful for the experience. Looking back, it was kind of remarkable what a huge impact that had on me. Because, even

“ One of the greatest things about my time in school was learning to take criticism ”

though I only made a few hundred or maybe a thousand dollars or so, at a very young age, it formed an incredible shift in my mindset about being an artist professionally."

Darren studied entertainment design at the ArtCenter College of Design in Pasadena, California. College was a stressful experience, but stressful in the best possible way: "There was a lot of pressure to generate a lot of quality work all the time, while also keeping your head above water on the workload and hitting certain milestones along the way.

GLASS EXPLORATION

"This was illustrated for the franchise team, exploring ideas around surviving pioneers analysing their ruined, glassed planet from Halo Reach."

"I would say one of the greatest things about my time in school was learning to take harsh criticism. Learning to get comfortable taking and applying criticism can be a discipline all in itself."

Darren describes 343 Industries, a studio of several hundred people, as being like a big ship. Once it sets off, it's very difficult to turn around. Far better to point the thing in the right direction in the first place. Project pillars help keep the ship on course. But even more important, something that Darren keeps coming back to, is "studio culture." This is what guarantees smooth sailing.

AGREE TO DISAGREE

Studio culture means a number of different things. Communication is one. If somebody thinks a hatch is ugly, they should feel comfortable enough to say so. But they've also got to be flexible and make compromises. If they're overruled on the hatch, they have to "disagree and commit." Darren calls it "growth mindset." Instead of being a know-it-all, you need to be a "learn-it-all." You also have to be able to build on other people's work. It's a collaborative process. So take the criticism and crack on, just like Darren did in college. But he understands that it's not always an easy thing to do.

"Art can be such a personal expression. Making art ➤➤





THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES

"I was listening to the audio version of The Martian Chronicles and began sketching: here, a team is exploring a giant canal network."

A DATE WITH DESTINY

Darren shares key moments from early on in his career that helped shape the way that he works today

"There were a couple of memorable breakthroughs I've had in my career. The first was during my time at Bungie. Some point during the production of Destiny, my workflow started to click and I got to the place as an artist where I could pretty articulately get my ideas out in a close to 1:1 fashion.

The thing I spend a lot of time and effort on is putting that 3D or photo texture into the scene and then rebuilding it or embedding it into the image in a way where it all sits together. If I do as intended, it should be hard to figure out how I did it. I try to cover my tracks and have as much image data as I can get in an image, while also hitting the look I'm going for. As a reminder I keep folders of benchmark images made by me or others, so I have a

ballpark that I know I'm trying to stay in stylistically.

Prior to that, I think I did some of what I would consider good work, but it was unintentional or done out of sheer will and extraordinary effort. I mean, I think some of that earlier work was good or useful, but I didn't always know how to replicate my successes every time. I was just sort of trying super-hard and would get lucky as a result of the effort sometimes.

Since that breakthrough, I've grown to a place where I can start to analyse images in a better way to know what works and what doesn't, and why. I wouldn't say I've mastered it, but I feel like I can more regularly get my work to that five per cent wall and then spend more energy struggling there."

FORERUNNER TEMPLE

"This is a good example of a 3D environment art draw-over. I'd work with the 3D environment artist who's designed a loose 3D art block-in, which they'd like help 'arting' out."



BATTLE OF SUNAION

Darren talks us through the concept art that was created for a level in Halo 5: Guardians



1 LOOK AND FEEL

“This concept was done to establish the look and feel for the overall art palette for the mission Battle of Sunaion in Halo 5: Guardians. The process started out with exploration sketches. This version was getting pretty close to what we wanted, so we decided to push it a bit further into a more resolved image.”

2 AN ILLUSTRATIVE LOOK

“For this type of task one of my favourite ways to work is to find a sketch I’m happy with, lock a camera to that image in 3D, and build out some basic geometry to establish the scene. I try to resolve foreground elements in 3D if I can, because then the closest information to the camera is the most structurally solid. Detail and structure can then dissipate to indication, as elements fade to the background of the scene. I can hand-paint that information in to save time and retain a more illustrative look.”



3 HARMONISING PROCESS

“While finishing a painting I like to work from background to foreground, ideally. Once I get the bulk of the image laid in as a sketch or 3D, I find it helpful to resolve the background first and let that dictate the rest of the image’s fidelity. I can indicate a lot of details in the background, and build in more information as I move forward to the foreground. In the foreground my efforts go into ‘breaking’ the 3D and harmonising it with the rest of the image.”





4 BACK TO FRONT

"I've included this step to show my thinking on working back to front. This new element on the right is in the mid-ground, and starts to get built in 'paint' as I work closer to the camera in the painting."

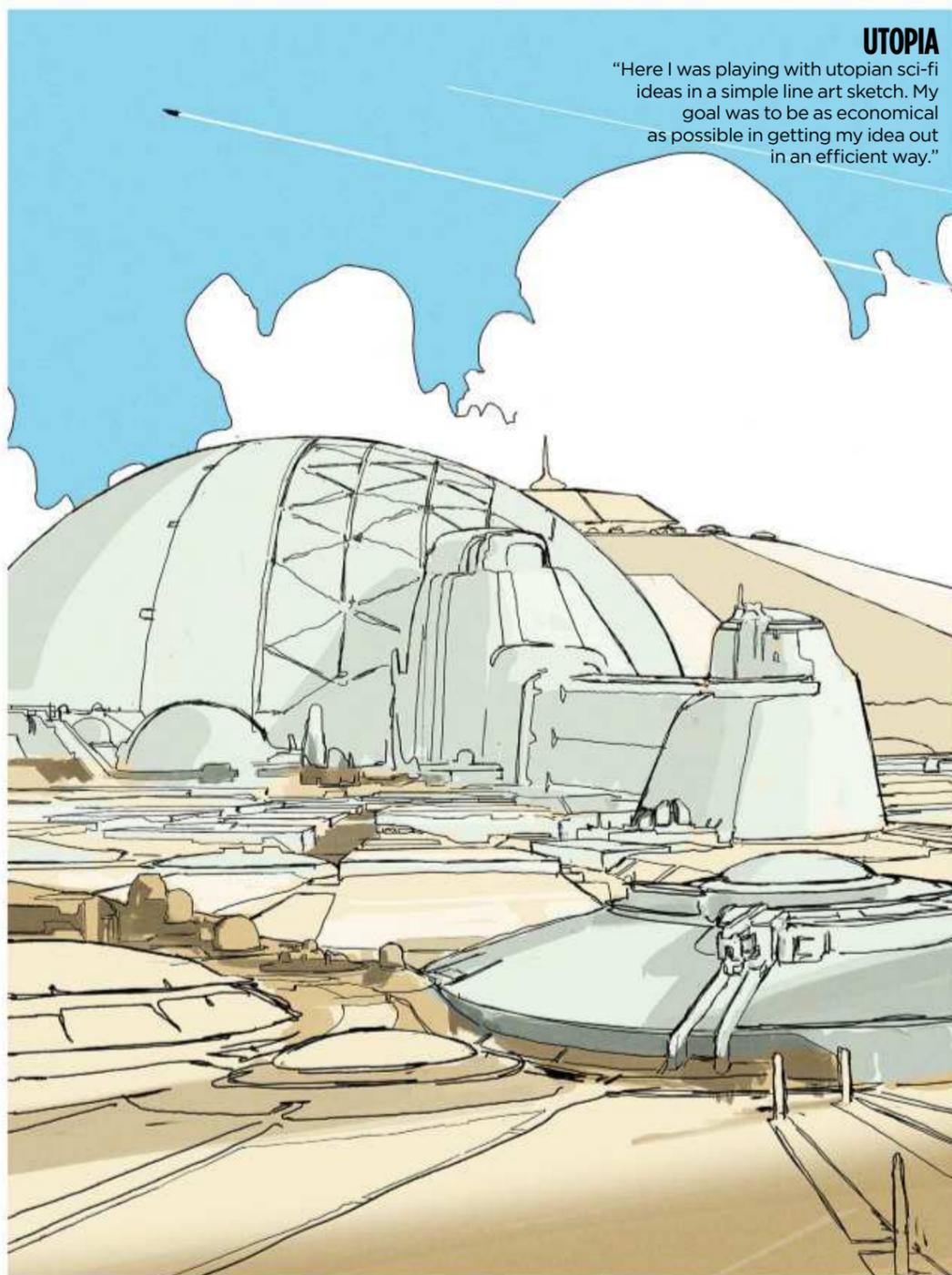


5 IN THE FOREGROUND

"I've moved to the foreground and can see the finish. A lot of the data I want to have in the final is now in the image, and it's now more about finishing details, harmonising and tweaking the image overall."

6 FINAL IMAGE

"I've continued adding balance to the piece, and put in a few last-minute narrative details, such as the shadows on the central structure, to add the illusion of more of the banshee's [a flying vehicle] presence out of frame."



UTOPIA

"Here I was playing with utopian sci-fi ideas in a simple line art sketch. My goal was to be as economical as possible in getting my idea out in an efficient way."

“ You try something, it doesn't work, so you move on. This is another big part of the studio culture at 343 Industries ”

➡ commercially puts us artists in a vulnerable position. What was once this personal expression of ourselves has now become this measurement of our worth as an employee or content creator. It can get weird.”

A big project like a Halo game starts with a “pretty extensive pre-production phase”. Darren calls it a “delicate time of incubation.” This is where concept artists have a lot of fun. It's the ideas stage, so artist must be allowed to fail and feel comfortable doing it. You try something, it doesn't work, so you move on. This is another big part of the studio culture at 343 Industries. A lot of that failed art will end up in the archive and may never be seen again. So you need to show perseverance, grit.

It'll be a while before everybody knows exactly what they're doing.

Darren describes concept art as the first step in the process of developing everything that will go into the game. His team helps establish the look and feel of the environments, characters, vehicles... everything. A writer, director or art director comes up with an idea and the concept team illustrates it. That idea will go from rough sketch to completed illustration, and then the 3D teams will take over from there.

As lead concept artist, Darren still makes art himself. But as the production moves forwards, he finds himself in more and more meetings. He's also responsible for less glamorous-sounding stuff: ➡



MARSH CAVE

"I was given the geometry of this area from Halo 5 and asked to draw over it for the 3D artists, so they had something to build from."

➤ schedules and load balancing and quality assurance. He's the person who the rest of studio comes to when they want to talk about concept art.

The big breakthrough is the first time the team gets to play it. This will be a very rough version, an early build, but it's the moment the game begins to feel real. Darren reckons artists and game developers would happily refine and tinker indefinitely, but he's also a big believer in deadlines, because a bit of pressure invariably leads to better work. So how does he know when something's done, when he needs to stop refining and tinkering?

"A lot of it has to do with when I'm not really offended by it any more. Both in personal art and game assets, I tend to have pretty high expectations, and I usually can tell

“ I usually can tell quickly if things aren't meeting my personal benchmark ”

quickly if things aren't meeting my personal benchmark. Getting the feel for that probably just takes a while, looking at art and media, and my personal obsession of continually improving my own art."

THAT FINAL FIVE PER CENT

On Darren's desk sit a couple of large monitors and a Wacom Intuos tablet. He mainly uses Photoshop, with Modo for 3D work. He's working digitally, but his aim is emulate the traditionally painted work of his favourite concept artists, guys from the 70s and 80s, the

BACKGROUND DESIGN

"A concept piece done for a specific shot of a cinematic from Halo 5."

innovators: Syd Mead, Doug Chiang and Ralph McQuarrie.

These artists knew how to get that final five per cent, the bit that separates the good and the great, the work that has a real voice. Darren believes there's only a very small percentage of artists who know how to do that.

"Imagine an exponential curve. Far to the right are the final few percentage points that are nearly seen straight up, like a wall. Prior to that point, artistic or design achievement is easy-ish to obtain, so many can get fairly far down the curve. The artists who know how to get up that final wall of the graph are very rare, and that wall is what I'm struggling to hit and get up every day, and it's what keeps me motivated."

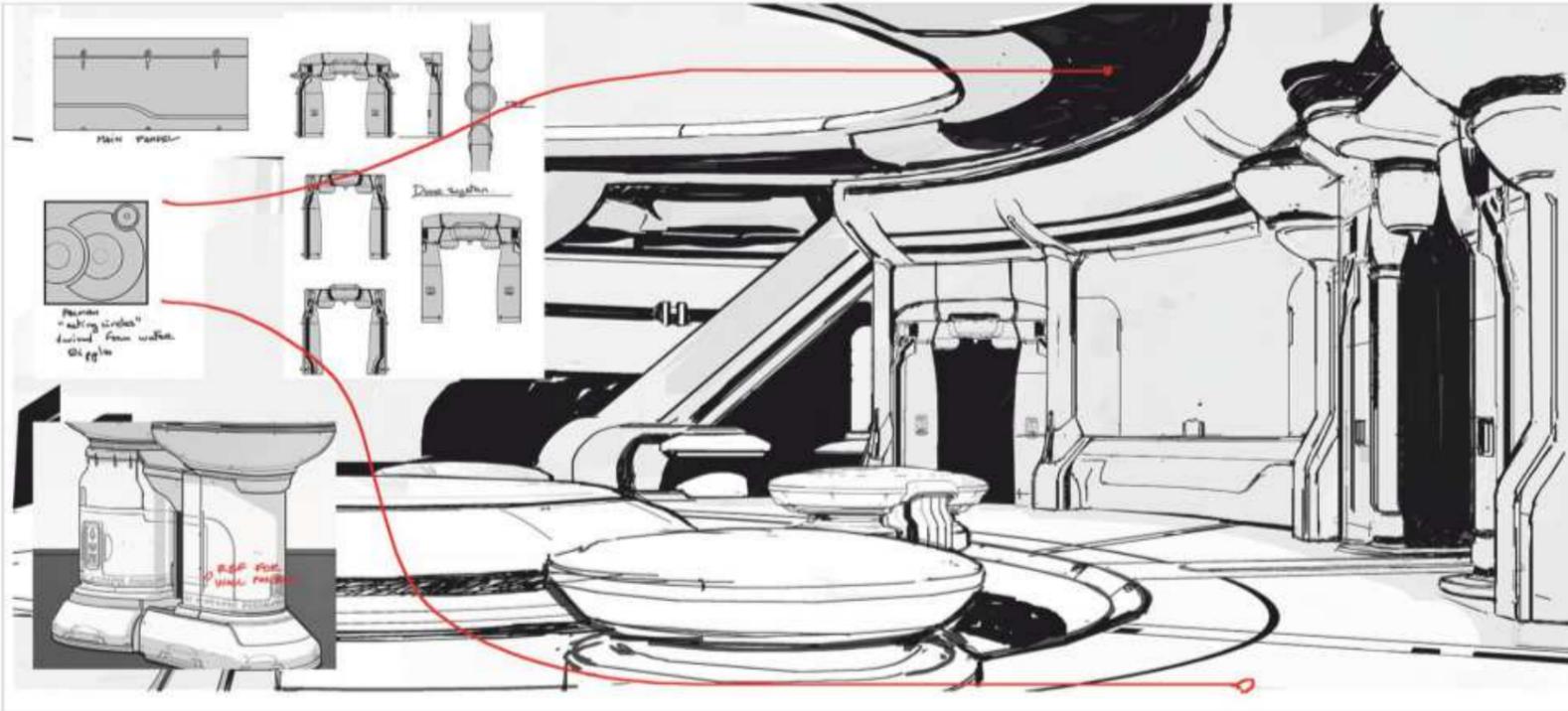
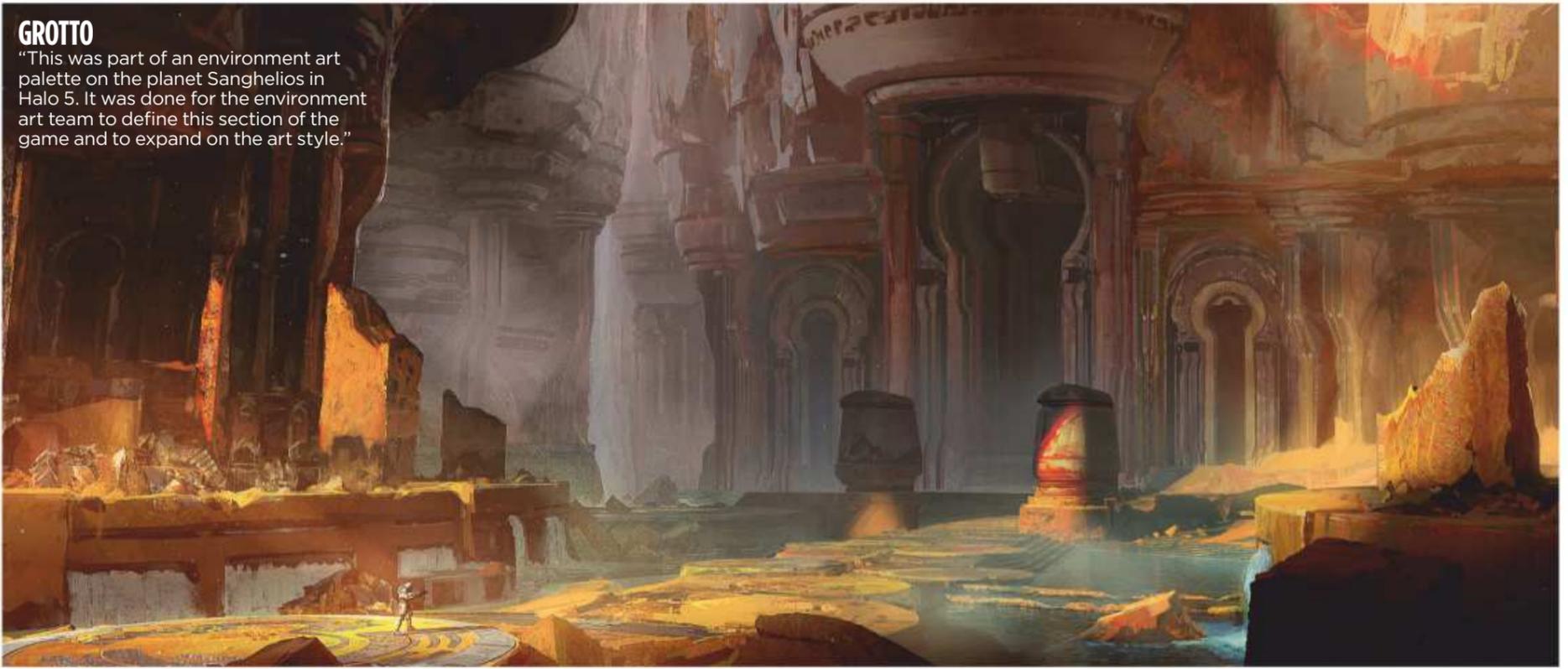
Darren doesn't have a foolproof method for making great concept art. But he has the next best thing. Early in his career, Darren received a bit of advice from a co-worker. The advice was simply put: "Make your art look beautiful to you."

"I'd been struggling and kind of frozen trying to paint key art. He was helping me with an image and had me start to focus on just painting it to look good to me, and not worry about anything else. The neat thing about working like this is that, over time, as you figure out what it is you like and what inspires you, your work will start to develop its own voice." ●



GROTTO

"This was part of an environment art palette on the planet Sanghelios in Halo 5. It was done for the environment art team to define this section of the game and to expand on the art style."

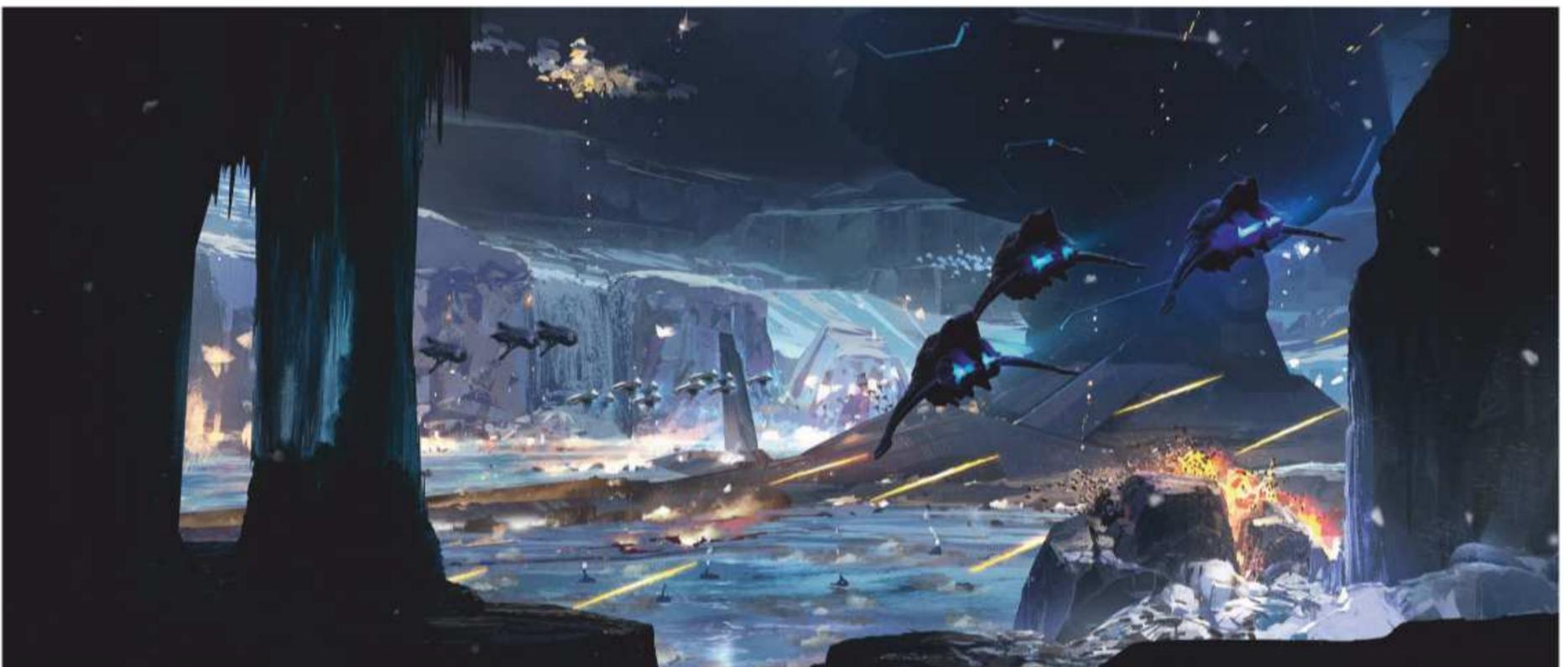


TSUNAMI

"This drawing was done over specific designer geometry to help the environment artist solve the aesthetics in this space."

HALSEY

"This image helped sell the idea and to get all the teams on the same page. It shipped and can be seen in-game during the opening mission of Halo 5."



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PRINT AND DIGITAL BACK ISSUES



Issue 168

Christmas 2018

Character art advice from cover artist Mel Milton, add texture and colour to your portraits, and pencil shading techniques. Elsewhere, we talk to Magic: The Gathering's Svetlin Velinov and fantasy painter Vanessa Lemen.



Issue 167

December 2018

Patrick J Jones kicks off his eight-part series on figure drawing, we talk to SIXMOREVODKA and book artist Shaun Tan, and list the 15 best online art schools. Plus Wayne Haag reveals how he generates epic scale in his art.



Issue 166

November 2018

Learn to paint an ethereal portrait, a group of adventurers and a war beast in our fantasy special issue. Tran Nguyen passes on her tips for honing your artistic prowess and we check out the latest Magic: The Gathering card set.



Issue 165

October 2018

In our packed animation issue, pro artists pass on their advice on how to break into the industry. There's tips on posing, rendering, storyboarding and character design, and we talk to Disney legend Armand Serrano.

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*Resource files are available from issue 85 onwards.

Thiago Almeida

This Brazilian illustrator likes to use his free time to explore original character designs, as these pages from his sketchbook clearly show

Artist PROFILE

Thiago Almeida

LOCATION: Brazil



Thiago's a freelance illustrator and concept artist who works in the advertising and video games industries. As a child he spent hours drawing, and he says life's not much different now. He loves creating characters, creatures, mechs and robots, and constantly challenges himself to come up with original designs.

www.artstation.com/thiagoalmeida

ALEXSTRASZA

"I did this fan art piece when Alexstrasza was added to Blizzard's Heroes of the Storm. She eventually becomes a dragon, and is an incredible character."



DRAGON HEAD

"I love drawing dragons. Whenever I start one I try to depict a more interesting design, from an anatomical point of view."

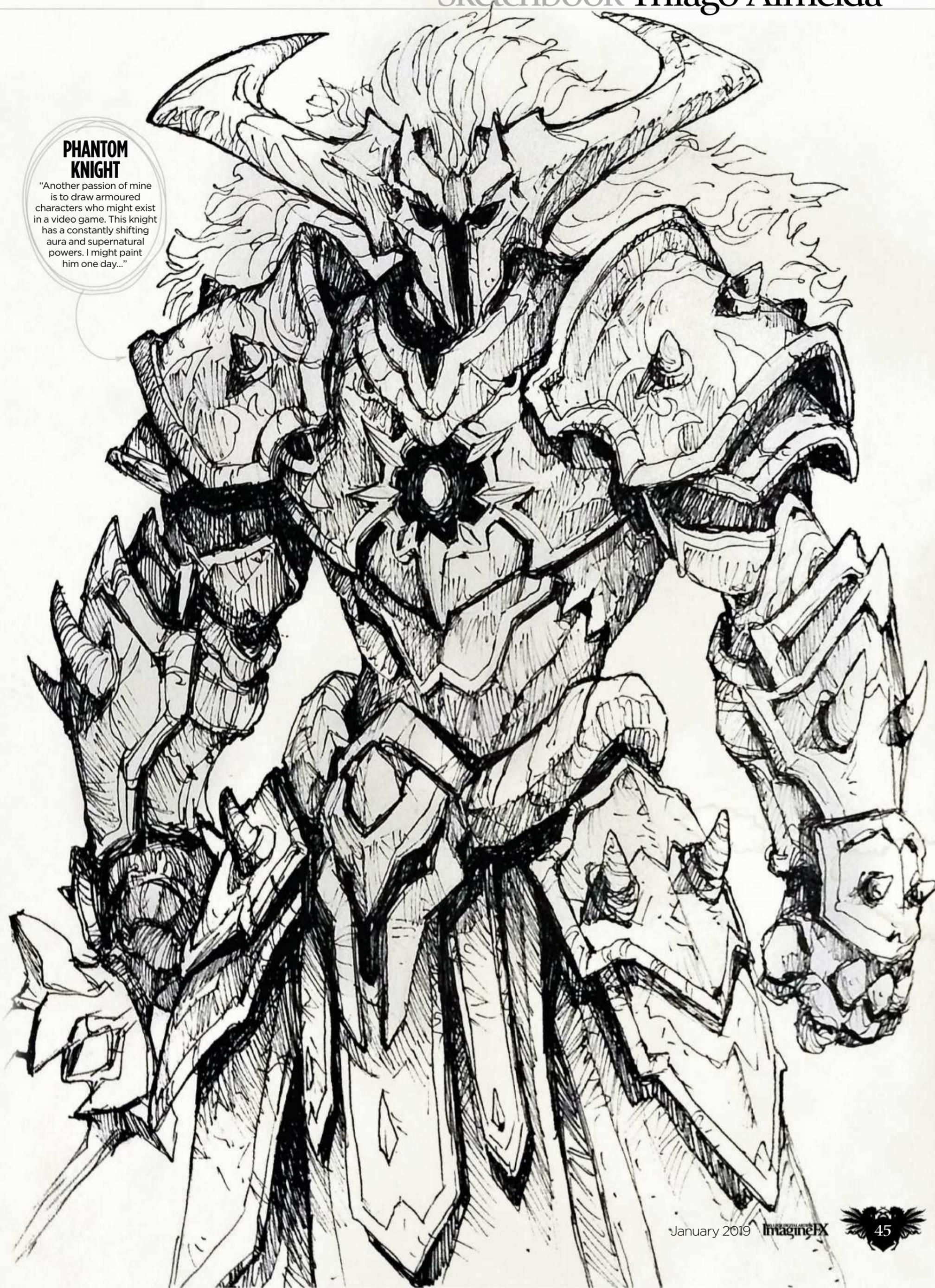
DEAD MACHINE

"At the moment I've found myself drawing robots with more organic characteristics. This is a machine whose AI has failed."



**PHANTOM
KNIGHT**

"Another passion of mine is to draw armoured characters who might exist in a video game. This knight has a constantly shifting aura and supernatural powers. I might paint him one day..."



FROST WEREWOLF

"I drew this for this year's Inktober. I like depicting skeletal creatures, so this design came out pretty easily."



GARGOYLE

"I'm constantly inspired by the designs that feature in Darksiders and Diablo, and I think this character shows influences from both games."



MAD HUNTER

"I draw a lot of characters with post-apocalyptic themes. I enjoy creating and mixing technologies from this particular genre."



THUT'ANAK

"Here's a Dark Lord of Khromorg! I imagined this character to be part of an alien civilisation that's not too dissimilar from the Egyptians. He's a master of fear and prophecy."

XEON|N9

"I envisioned this alien's suit would come in handy when exploring an unknown planet. Extra arms are always a bonus!"

“ I’m always inspired by the designs of Diablo and Darksiders ”



ERRANT WARRIOR

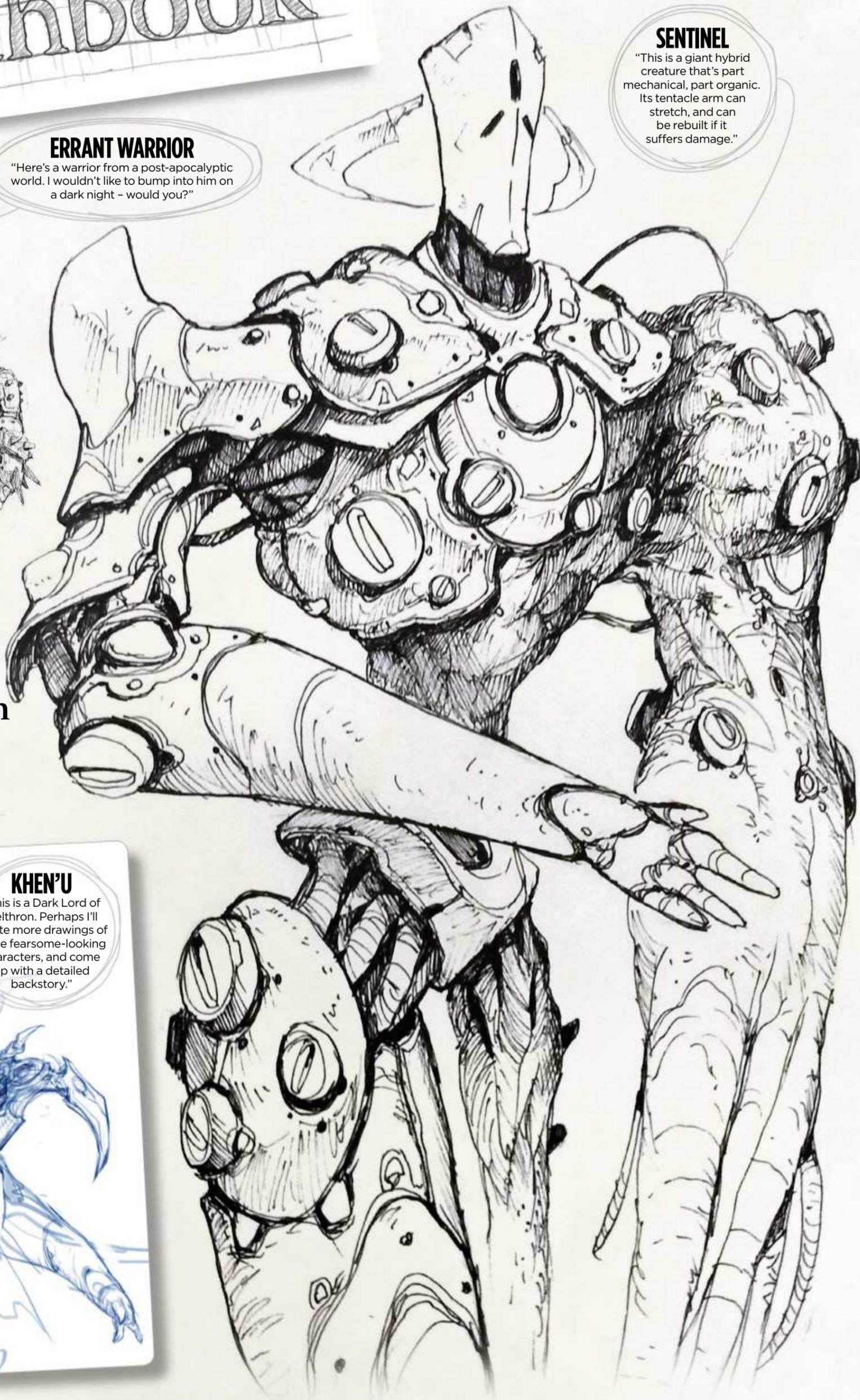
"Here's a warrior from a post-apocalyptic world. I wouldn't like to bump into him on a dark night - would you?"



“I wouldn't like to bump into him on a dark night - would you?”

SENTINEL

"This is a giant hybrid creature that's part mechanical, part organic. Its tentacle arm can stretch, and can be rebuilt if it suffers damage."



KHEN'U

"This is a Dark Lord of Melthron. Perhaps I'll create more drawings of these fearsome-looking characters, and come up with a detailed backstory."



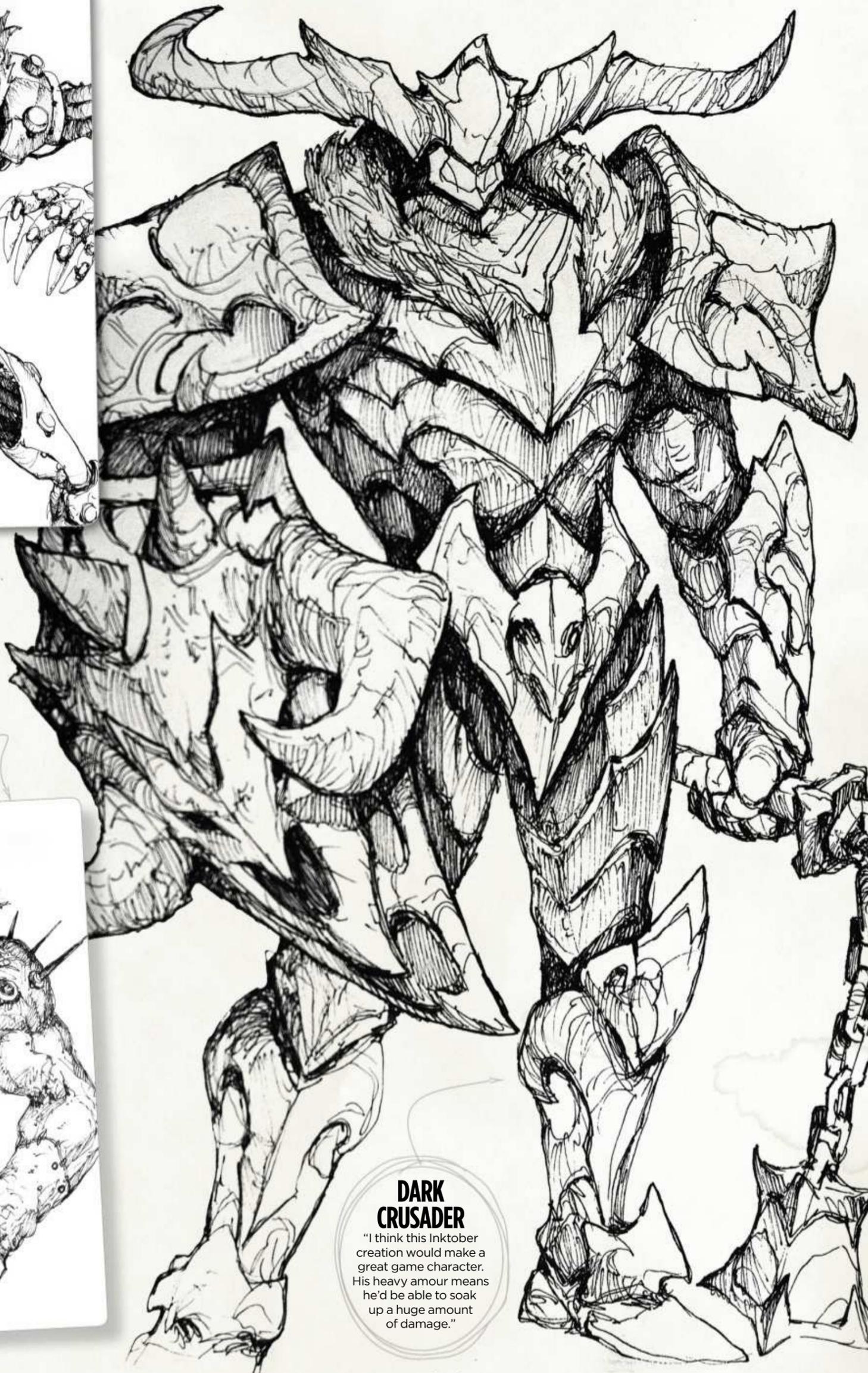


JACK-O'-MAD

"Knowing that this was the last of my 31 contributions of Inktober 2018 was an incredible feeling. I wanted to give it my all, and tap into the Halloween theme for this character's design."

DOOMER

"A creature that's made up of parts from other creatures. It has a high resistance to radiation, and can launch its spikes as a defence mechanism."



DARK CRUSADER

"I think this Inktober creation would make a great game character. His heavy armour means he'd be able to soak up a huge amount of damage."

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



STUDIO
PROFILE

CD PROJEKT RED

The Polish studio behind The Witcher series tells **Tom May** about its move to sci-fi and why it's the fans that matter

CD Projekt Red is the Polish games studio that's best known for The Witcher series of fantasy role-playing games, based on the monster hunter series of novels by Andrzej Sapkowski. It's also moving into the world of sci-fi in the form of Cyberpunk 2077, an open-world role-playing game based on the Cyberpunk 2020 tabletop role-

playing game system that's due for release next year.

With all this creative activity, a wide variety of artists are needed at the Warsaw-based firm, says character art director **Paweł Mielniczuk**. "Our artists' specialities range from concept design, to organic and hard surface >>>



Studio Profile CD Projekt Red



All images © CD Projekt Red



"We've had three games and two expansions to perfect Geralt as a character," says Michał Stec, on the protagonist from The Witcher series.



A dramatic moment from Cyberpunk 2077. Paweł Mielniczuk says that, "If I were to describe our visual style, it would probably be 'extremely detailed!'"

An ice giant from The Witcher 3. "We put a lot of love and hard work into our characters," says Paweł.



Hey look, that's us! Issue 103 of ImagineFX (The Witcher 3 cover) sits proudly on the wall in the studio's reception area.



Yennefer from The Witcher 3. "Sometimes, ideas are instant; in other cases, they require multiple iterations and people," says Paweł.



Concept art from Cyberpunk 2077. "We have one goal in mind," says Paweł. "Make the best RPGs ever created."

»» modelling, to level design, to cinematic and gameplay animation, to promo and DTP art," he says.

At time of writing, the team is working on designing and delivering all characters, weapons and vehicles for Cyberpunk 2077. "Characters are mostly painted and photobashed, weapon design mixes 2D and 3D art, while vehicles are designed entirely in 3D from the very beginning," explains Paweł. "Designs are then forwarded to

“ Designs are forwarded to character, weapon or vehicle artists for further polishing ”

character, weapon or vehicle artists to be further defined and polished during modelling stages.”

WIDE SPECTRUM OF COLOURS

Artists work across a range of visual styles, but one common characteristic is a strong focus on colour. "In both The Witcher's dark fantasy setting and the dystopian world of Cyberpunk 2077, we believe the spectrum of colours should be just as wide as our characters' spectrum of grey morality," says Paweł. The studio also

takes pains to get the look of its characters right. "Until we create a character that we truly love, we keep working on them," he stresses. "When it comes to character designs, we never have deadlines."

While many of CD Projekt Red's artists have been around for a long time, they can't rest on their laurels – particularly at the moment. "The transition from making games in the Witcher universe to Cyberpunk 2077 has been one of the biggest challenges I as a producer and we as a studio have faced," explains lead content producer **Michał Stec**.



"Changing the setting from medieval dark fantasy to futuristic sci-fi, shifting perspective »»

Studio PROFILE

CD Projekt Red

LOCATION: Warsaw, Poland
PROJECTS: The Witcher series, Gwent, Thronebreaker, Cyberpunk 2077
WEB: <https://en.cdprojektred.com>

Studio Profile CD Projekt Red



"Cyberpunk 2077 might have been our biggest challenge since making the first Witcher game," says Michał.

AGNIESZKA MOMOT

The graphic designer on what her job entails...

How long have you been at CD Projekt Red?

I first joined as an intern in 2013. Games have always been a passion of mine and I'd played all of The Witcher games to date, so working here felt like a dream come true. I then worked for another company for about two years, before returning in 2016 as a fully fledged graphic designer for the marketing department.

What's the work like?

It's engaging and creative — whether I'm creating promo assets for our games, designing gadgets and goodies, or working on Esports-related stuff.

What kind of design work have you been up to lately?

Recently, I've had the pleasure of designing ad campaign visuals for Thronebreaker. Also, Gwent's launch involved a huge redesign to make its visuals match the dark and brutal tone of the Witcher world. Shifting our approach was quite a challenge, but a satisfying one.

What have been some memorable moments?

One was having a hand in designing The Witcher 10th Anniversary Geralt pin. Creating a gadget for such a momentous occasion was a big deal and a privilege. I'm also very happy with the work I did on the visual identity of GWENT Masters, the game's Esports series. Keeping things consistent, but at the same time distinct for all tournaments of the series, as well as trying to capture the essence of The Witcher Card Game, wasn't easy!



Foglings get on the wrong side of Geralt, in The Witcher 3. "We put passion into every nook and cranny of our game worlds," says Paweł on the work ethic of CD Projekt Red.

"I like to think of the studio as a big family," says Agnieszka Momot. "The mood here is always so great!"



Previously at Comperia.pl S.A., Agnieszka is now part of the marketing department at CD Projekt Red.

en.cdprojektred.com

Imlerith, one of the bosses from The Witcher 3. "Whatever we're working on, we're determined to give it our all," says Michał.



Hjalmar an Craite, one of the NPCs from The Witcher 3. "We want to match characters' emotions to their faces and outfits," explains Paweł.



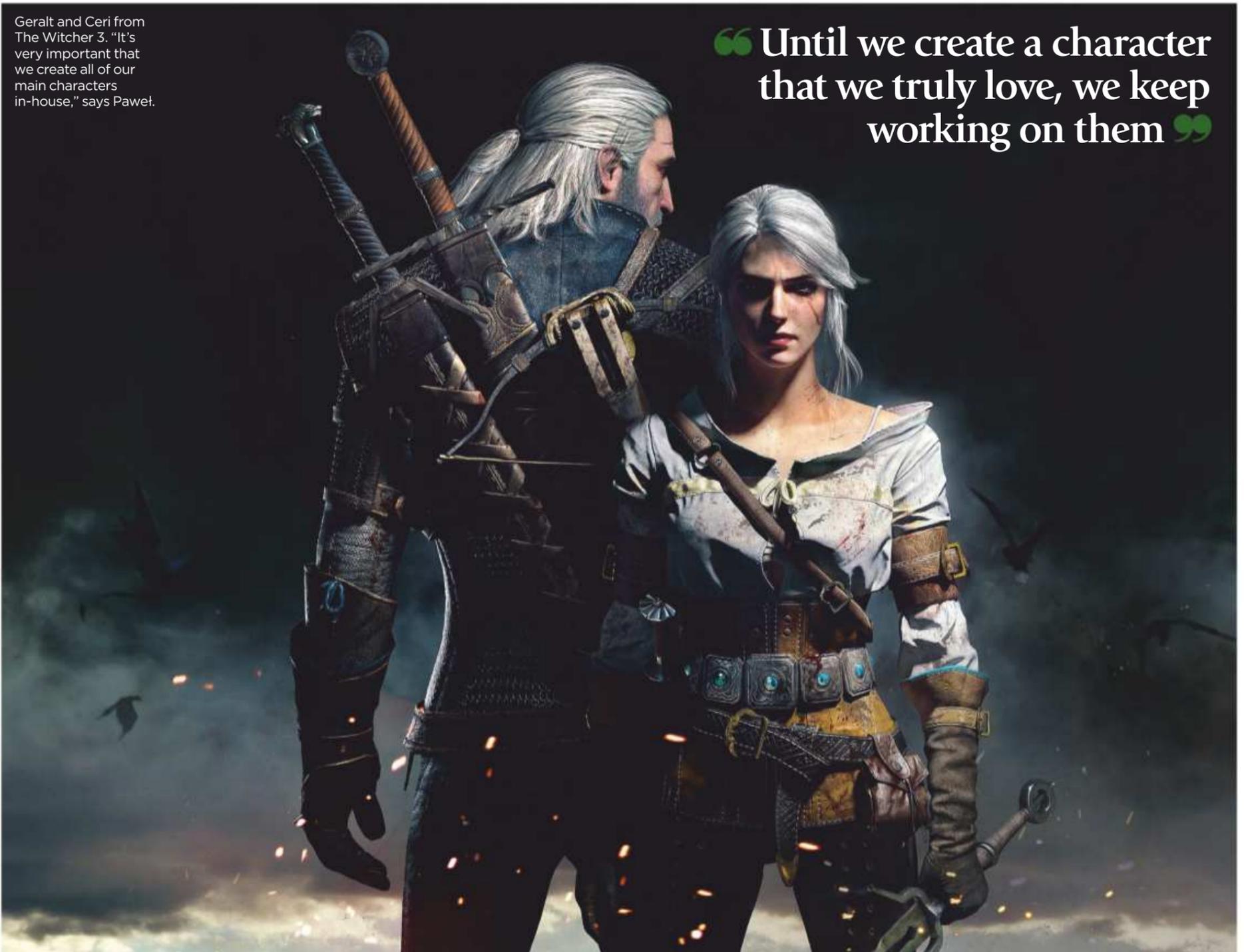
"We ventured into uncharted territory with Cyberpunk 2077," says Michał, on the studio's move away from fantasy-themed projects.

Michał reveals that, "Cyberpunk 2077 has been scary, but also very exciting at the same time."



Geralt and Ceri from The Witcher 3. "It's very important that we create all of our main characters in-house," says Paweł.

“Until we create a character that we truly love, we keep working on them”





Interested in joining the studio? Paweł says that, "We have open positions for concept designers, character artists, environment artists and animators."



Ciri in action, in art created for Gwent. "Our artists know the game, its history and characteristics; they live and breathe it daily," says Paweł.



Michał reveals the scale of Cyberpunk 2077's production: "Well over a hundred artists are working on the game."

➤➤ from third-person to first-person, giving players the ability to shape their own character rather than using an already defined one... in many ways, this has required us to rethink our approach toward making games."

One thing that helps the studio meet these challenges is its democratic approach to ideas-sharing, Michał adds. "It doesn't matter how long you've been at the studio or what position you hold – if you have an idea and want to share it, you can, and people will listen," he says. "And if the idea is really good, it may very well end up in the game and make it better."



Illustrator/illustration coordinator **Bogna Gawrońska** describes the atmosphere at the studio

“If you have an idea and want to share it, you can, and people will listen”

as: "Friendly, constantly motivating, with a pinch of creative chaos and a huge dose of fun. The studio is made up of talented, hardworking people and I think you can feel it being here."

DEALING A NEW HAND

Right now, the biggest part of Bogna's daily work is creating art for Thronebreaker, which recently launched on PC. It's a spin-off RPG that blends The Witcher's in-fiction collectible card game, called Gwent, with an isometric RPG.

"Knowing that this is your game you're working on is tremendously empowering," says Michał.



"It was a challenge and a real blast to be able to work on both projects, as both a card illustrator, and one of the artists creating the redesigned look of the board for Gwent," she says. "It was really cool to see my work and the work of my colleagues come together in such a short amount of time – from prototypes and concepts, to animated, almost living environments featuring fully 3D characters."

Bogna uses a Wacom tablet with Photoshop for painting, and an iPad with Procreate for sketching. "I also do some 3D work; when I do, it's mostly Blender, but not exclusively." But whatever project she works on, her biggest sense of satisfaction comes from feedback from the public. "I have one of these proud moments



Concept art from Cyberpunk 2077. “We try to give our artists the time they need to develop their creative vision,” says Michał.



Art for Thronebreaker, a spin-off set in the world of The Witcher. Paweł tells it like it is: “Working here is demanding, challenging and dynamic.”

every time I read one of the fan letters people send us,” she says. “We often laugh that as artists and game developers we should chill – it’s not like we’re saving lives or anything. But whenever I see that the games we create positively affect the lives of the people who play them, I feel a huge privilege to be one of the people that make them.”

And she’d love you to join them. “If you like what we do, make sure to follow our website for new job openings,” Bogna says. “We’re always on the lookout for talented and friendly individuals who share our passion for games. And even if you feel like you’re not there yet, don’t give up. Starting as an intern might just be the thing that will push your art career forward big time.”

“With Cyberpunk 2077 we’ve had to approach familiar situations in completely new ways, and we’re stronger for it,” says Michał.



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Workshops

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Advice from the world's best artists



This issue:

60 A fresh approach to video game art

Gregorios Kythreotis draws on his architectural knowledge and a wealth of comic influences, including Moebius, to help develop the look of Sable.

64 Turn an idea into a strong concept

See how Lucas Staniec uses a brainstorming technique to flesh out a loose idea for a concept, before taking you through his 3D and 2D process.

74 Concept original creature art

Roberto Padula paints an original creature, starting with sketches that help him to visualise his zoological ideas.

80 Compression and gravity effects

Draw the effects of real-world forces on the body and illustrate more realistic-looking figures. Patrick J Jones is your guide.

Unity, Photoshop, Procreate & Maya LT **A FRESH APPROACH TO VIDEO GAME ART**

Gregorios Kythreotis draws on his architectural knowledge and a wealth of comic influences, including Moebius, to help develop the look of Sable

Artist **PROFILE**

**Gregorios
Kythreotis**

LOCATION: England

Gregorios is the co-founder of Shedworks, an independent video games developer. He's interested in combining architecture with games. www.shed-works.co.uk



Sable is an upcoming open world game set on a mysterious planet. The player controls the young

Sable, who explores her surroundings while learning her people's history.

The game is developed by Shedworks, a two-person indie studio. We made a game that focuses on environment exploration, rather than combat or survival mechanics.

This was partly because my academic background in architecture means I can tackle environments relatively quickly. However, because we wanted the game to have a great sense of scale we knew we couldn't adopt a realistic rendering approach. So we decided to look at other sources for inspiration: Belgian and French 'ligne claire' comics from the likes of Moebius; the works of Studio Ghibli; anime such as Akira; and the

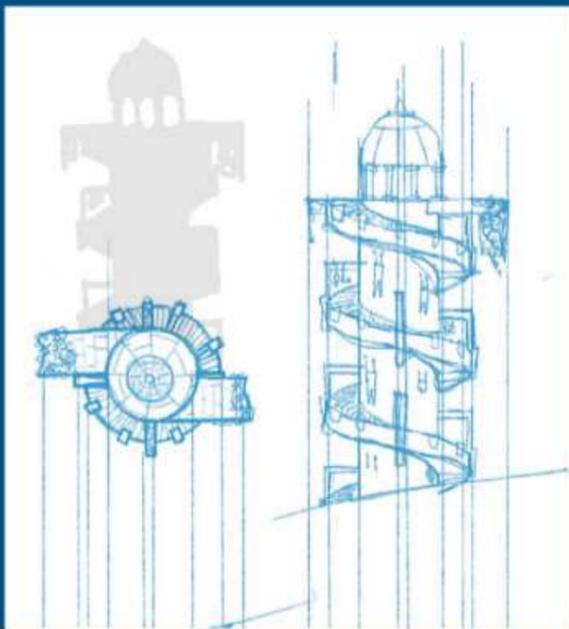
Archigram and Japan's Metabolist architecture movements.

We started work on the game in 2017 and now work with a few fantastic collaborators, including writer Meg Jayanth, musician Michelle Zauner, sound designer Martin Kvale, and artist and animator Micah Holland.

For this promo image we wanted to introduce Sable, while teasing places she could explore in the game. ➔

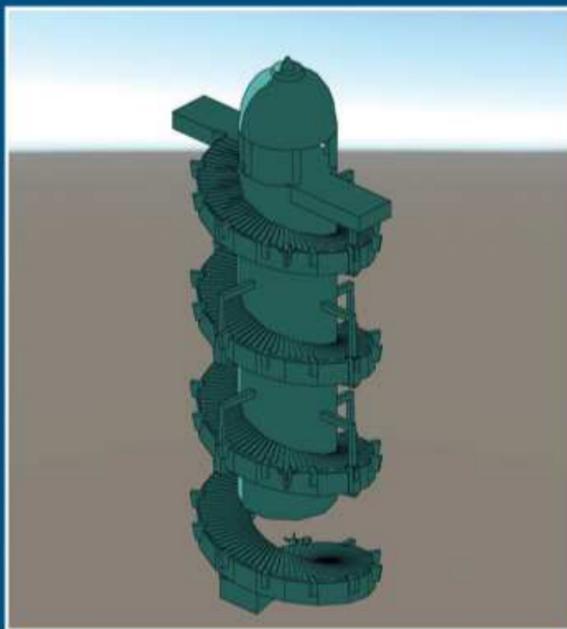
How I create...

A PLANETARY PLAYGROUND



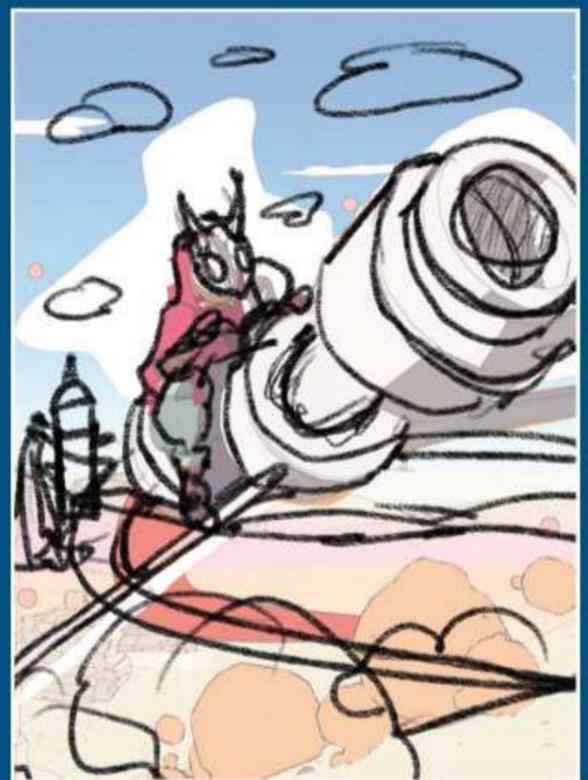
1 From paper to Unity

We produce all our assets in 3D using a variety of tools and then assemble them in Unity. I tend to start on paper, though, exploring different ideas until I'm ready to move into 3D. I'll start by working in Unity using an asset called ProBuilder to whitebox a space and get a feel for how it works as a navigable level, the scale of everything and how it silhouettes from different angles.



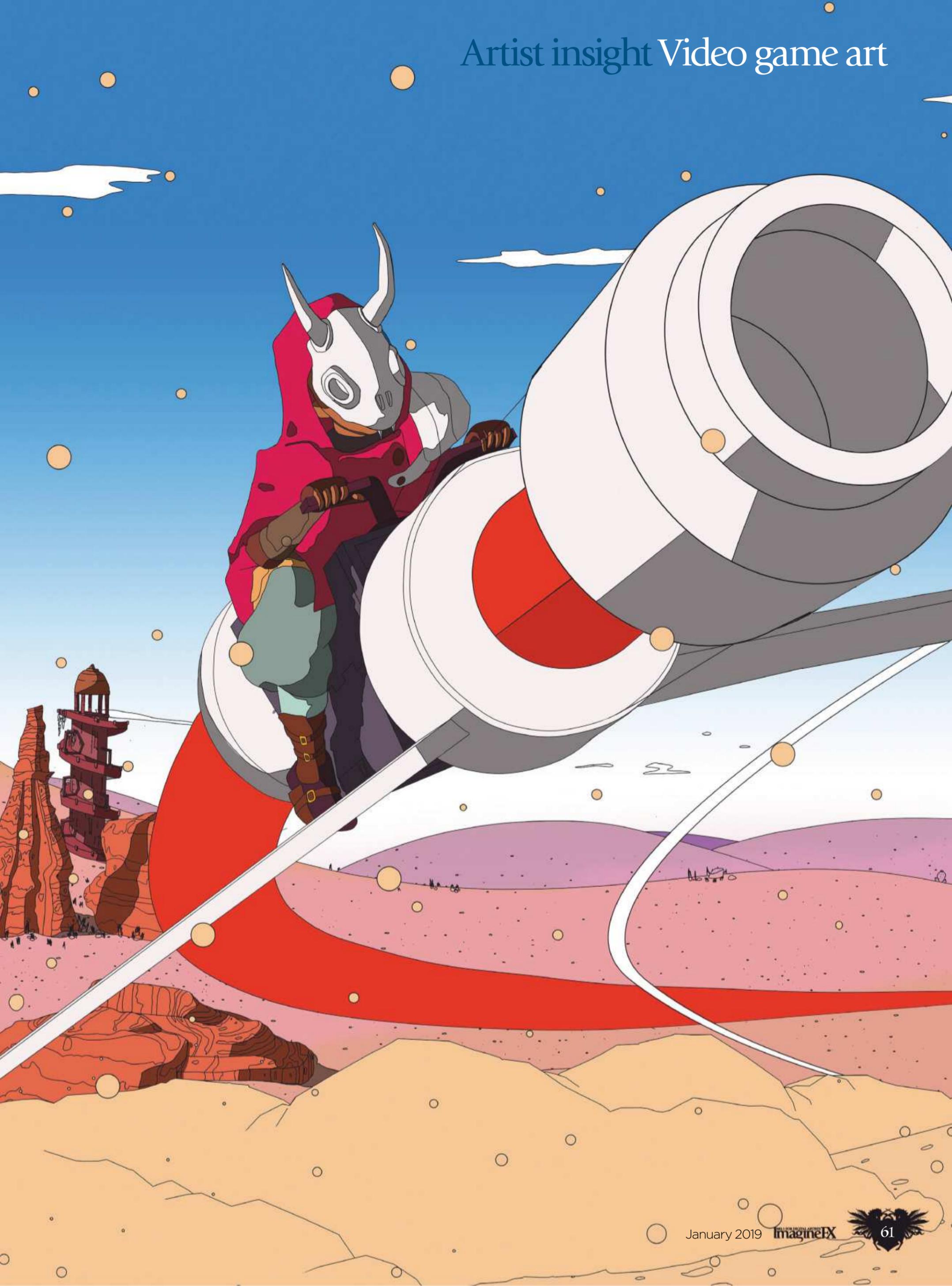
2 Produce and test assets

Once I've made the first whitebox iteration I'll set up the ProBuilder object as a linked prefab between Unity and Maya, and export it as an FBX file. This now means I can update the model and see the changes in the project instantly. This is crucial for our art style, because the post-processing we use isn't replicable in Maya - so I never know how an asset will look until it's in-engine.



3 Composition requirements

Once everything is textured and modelled the process becomes about composition, meeting ImagineFX's requirements for their cover. I use Procreate to hand draw the line-work and do colouring before bringing it into Photoshop for clean-up. The brushes I use are basic gel pens or fine tips with Smoothing enabled to emulate the way the game is rendered in-engine.



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FLIGHT OF FANCY

Particle art

For our dust particles we look to the greats like Studio Ghibli. The particles help us generate a constant sense of motion in the game, and can give a static scene a real sense of life. For the bike trails I wanted to make them look almost edible and solid – like candy floss!

Masks save time

The mask Sable wears in the game is a crucial component of the society she lives in, but also helps me as a designer to create a multitude of interesting characters without having to animate faces.

Distance gradients

One of the most important elements of our art style is the distance gradients. In a static image this is less important. However, when the game's in motion and if you use a flat rendering style as we've done, it can become extremely hard to read depth. Distance gradients are one of the tricks we use to solve this issue and create depth in a scene.

Architecture training kicks in

I approach designing buildings like an architectural project. I always think of a building's origins. Where did it come from? Who commissioned it? What sort of function did it have? And then I look to what's happened since. Is it still in use? How did the construction materials weather in the environment? Answering these questions creates limitations that I can use to make design and aesthetic decisions, helping me introduce a sense of depth and nuance to a space.

Photoshop & Blender

TURN AN IDEA INTO A STRONG CONCEPT

Lucas Staniec uses a brainstorming technique to flesh out a loose idea for a concept, before taking you through his 3D and 2D painting process



Artist PROFILE

Lucas Staniec
LOCATION: Poland

Lucas is a concept artist working on Dying Light 2 as well as a freelance artist on the Warhammer 2 Total War series. In his free time he's developing some personal projects, including a bestiary of Slavic monsters.
<https://ifxm.ag/lucas-s>

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 8 now!



As you consider pursuing the path of a concept artist, you'll no doubt be assessing the quality of your art skills. Yet one of the most important things you'll need is not a specific technique in your artistic box of tools, but rather the right mindset.

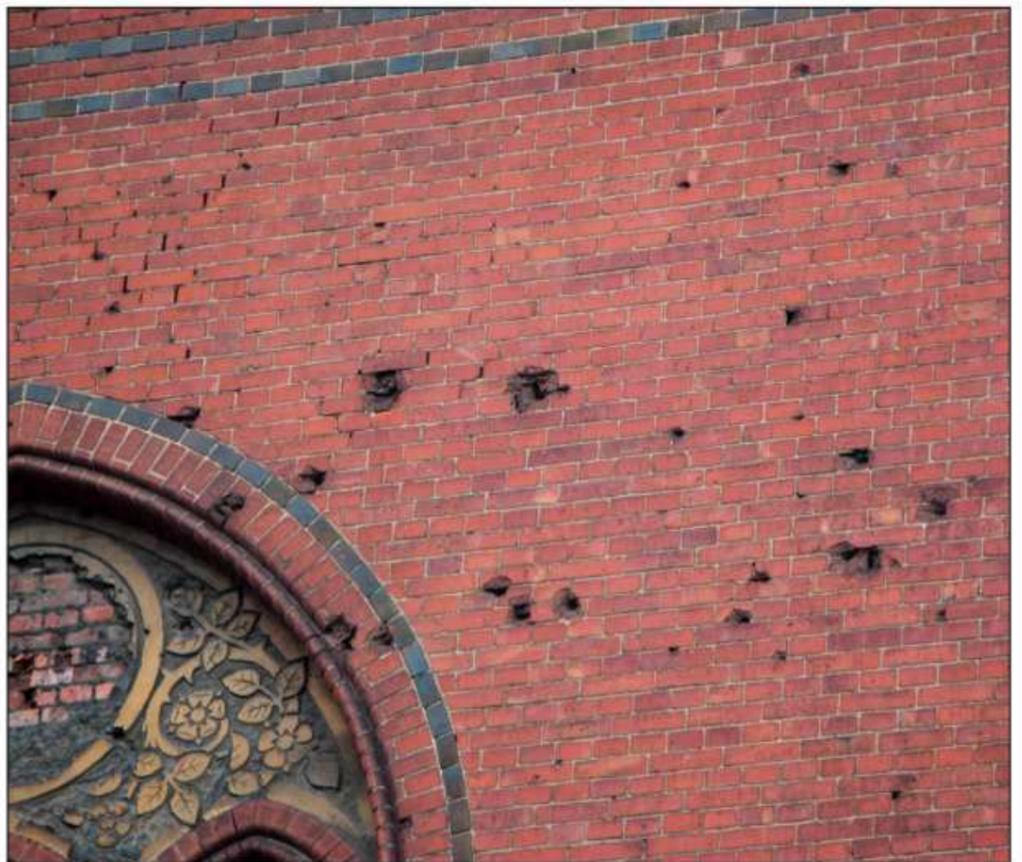
As a concept artist you'll be required to deal with a lot of problem solving. To do that, it's crucial to observe the world around you and

try to understand how things work. Not only will your designs be based on the things we know, but you'll be able to use your awareness for inspiration. Knowledge will help you geek out about your own designs and make them better. Put simply, the more you know, the better!

Creating a good-looking picture can be challenging, but what's even harder is coming up with a good idea or design that could serve as a starting point. This could lead to an original

location, a complex piece of machinery or even an entire universe.

The design process is time consuming. As a concept artist you'll have to do hundreds of exploratory sketches before that 'eureka' moment. Your job will require you to do things over and over again, so brace yourself! I'll show you how I get inspired and how to proceed with a concept illustration task. I'll also give you some insights into what to pay attention to in your own work.



1 Recognising the marks of history

Staring at a blank page can be frustrating. So I pick one topic that I love: history. I take some photographs of building that show the effects of gunfire from World War II. These marks tell me stories about the locations, and I immediately try to imagine what these places used to look like. I'm inspired to show the passage of time and loss.

PASSAGE OF TIME (GENERAL IDEAS)

People and technology will always lose when pitted against time and nature.

Ruins of a city with an astronomical clock.

Man kneeling down, acknowledging the power of nature and the achievements of previous civilisations. He's less skilled than those who came before him, yet he's the master of his environment. He holds a cog, which symbolises thought and serves as a visual link to the clock tower.

Astronomical clock represents both technological advances and time itself.

Trees symbolise long life and nature reclaiming the environment.

Connection between man and the clock, indicating that humans will endure no matter what their circumstances.

Environment feels familiar - connects the viewer with nature,

2 Creating a mindmap to visualise my ideas

I spend a fair amount of time trying to figure out what I want to show. I write down notes to help me get things moving in my head. They enable me to come up with a specific idea to show that humans and technology will be always overpowered by nature. However, we're always a part of this planet (nature continues to feel familiar).

RESOURCES WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

**CUSTOM BRUSHES:
SAMPLED BRUSH 2 28**

This brush leaves painterly edges. Good for removing photo textures.

AS 2

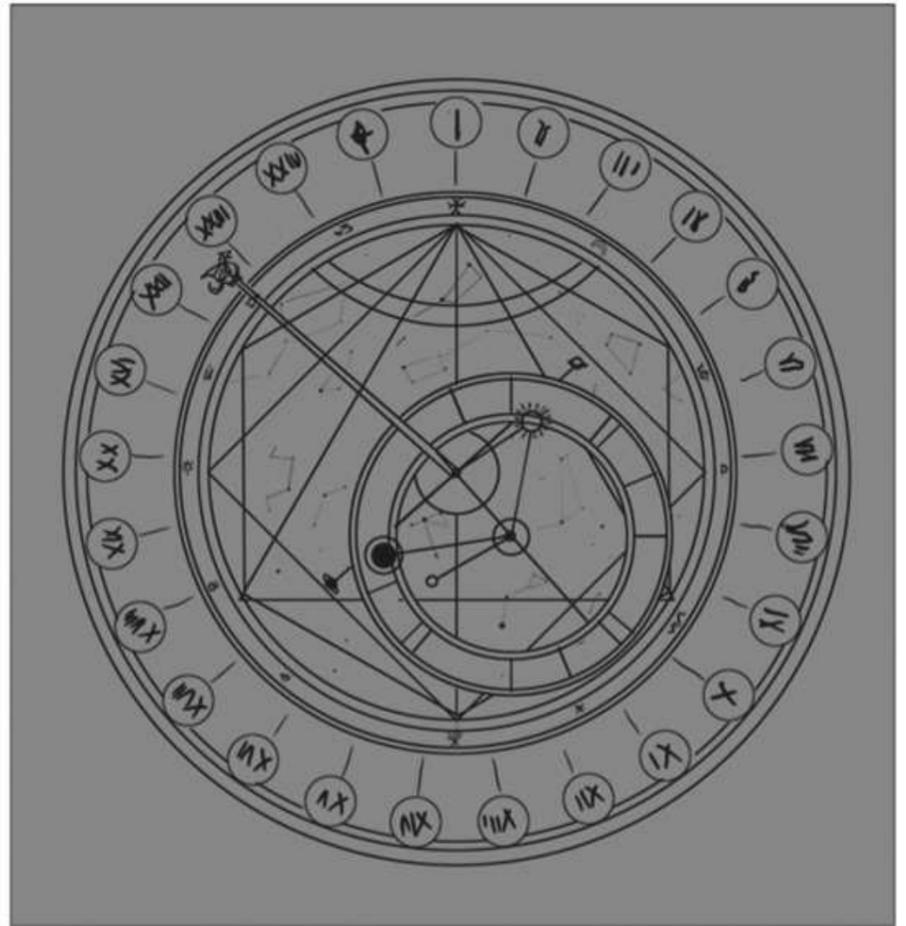
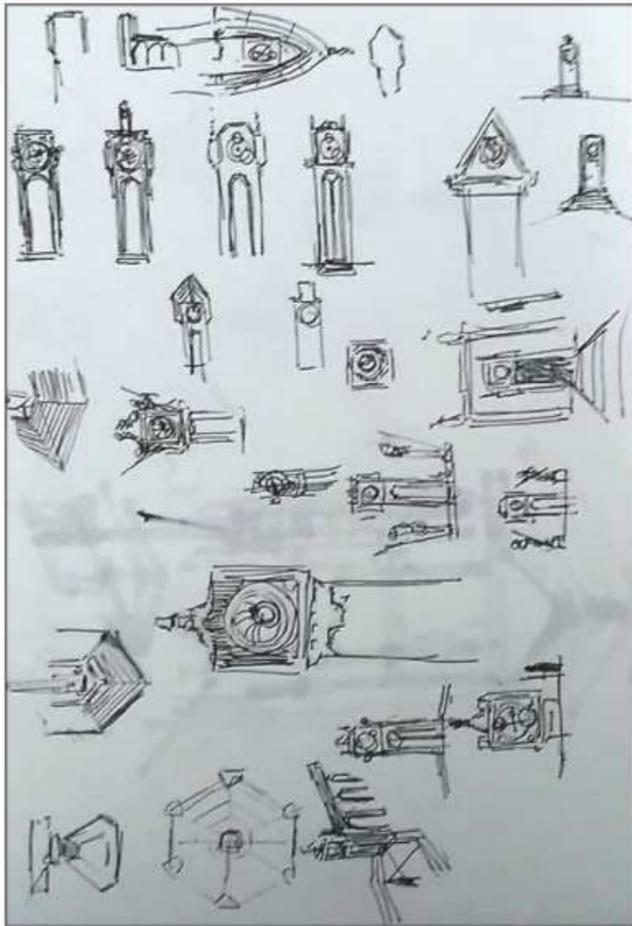
This creates nice edge variation - perfect for material folds and leaves.

OIL PASTEL LARGE #40

I used this brush for refining the clock's gold elements.

SOFT ROUND 125 1

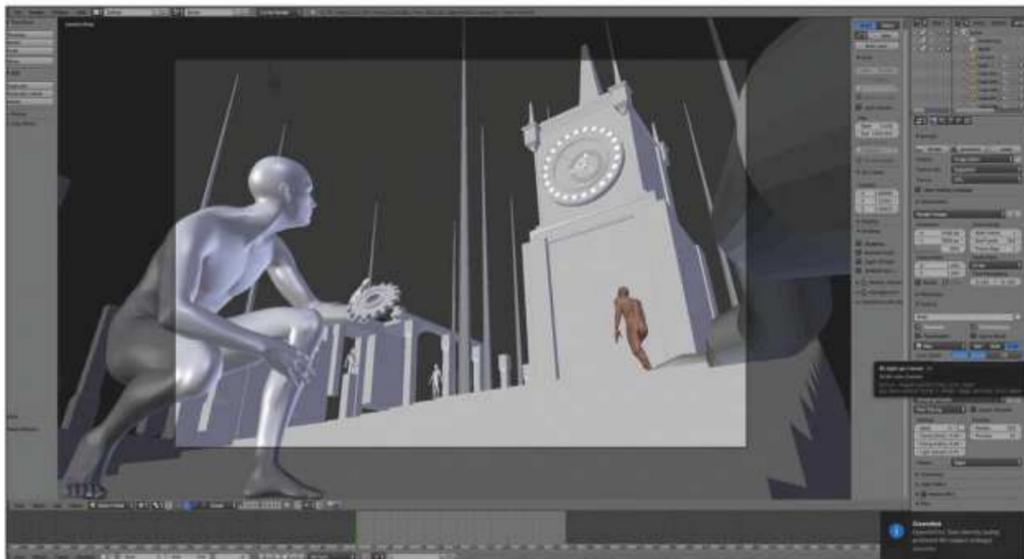
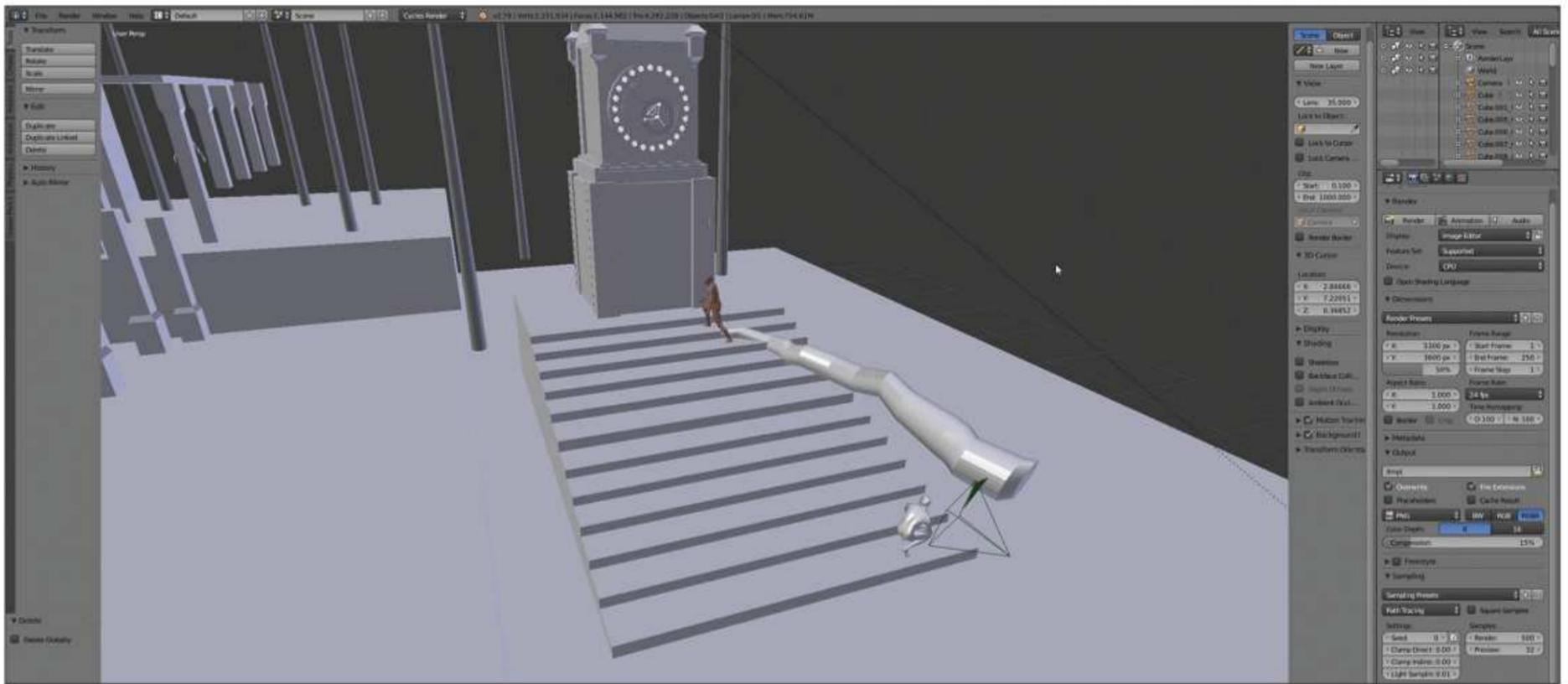
Because this brush creates texture it's ideal for leaves or rocks.



3 Sketch out the story elements

I produce some rough sketches. I decide to show an astronomical clock rather than just a simple clock face. The device not only is a representation of time but also of human advancement, because it identifies the position of the sun, moon and planets. For the main design of the clock shield I combine three different clock designs and try to give it a backstory. I know that the clock will be the main focal point. ➡

Workshops



4 Begin modelling in 3D to obtain the best viewpoint

I model the clock in Blender. I do this so that later I can adjust the final composition. I place the camera low on the ground to show the clock looming over the figures. If I wanted to draw this angle in 2D software it would take me ages; working in 3D means I can adjust the camera as much as I want. Next, I take the composition into Photoshop and set the light as Directional Soft Light, to give the scene an overcast feeling.



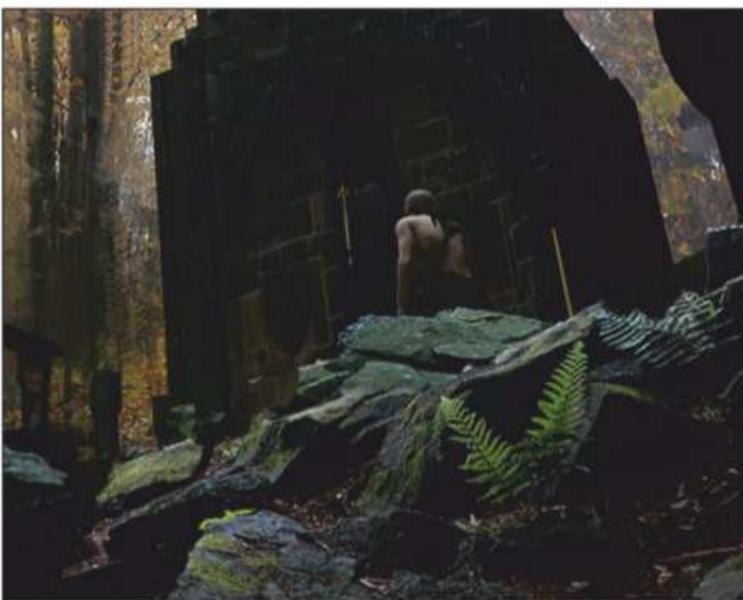
5 Develop contrasts within the composition

After I've chosen the background colours I adjust the contrasts for different planes to ensure there's a clear division between them (you can accurately check the values by selecting View>Proof Setup>Device to Simulate – Working Gray>OK. The shortcut for that is Ctrl+Y. Once I'm happy with my values I add some shadows to the right-hand wall of the tower, to describe the forms better.



6 Start photobashing to save time

When time is of the essence you don't want to paint everything from scratch. I chose to use some photos I have of an autumn forest – I feel this time of the year would perfectly highlight the passing of time and things coming to an end. Remember to think about the perspective and light information that photos carry, and how they may be different from what you already have. You want your painting to look consistent!



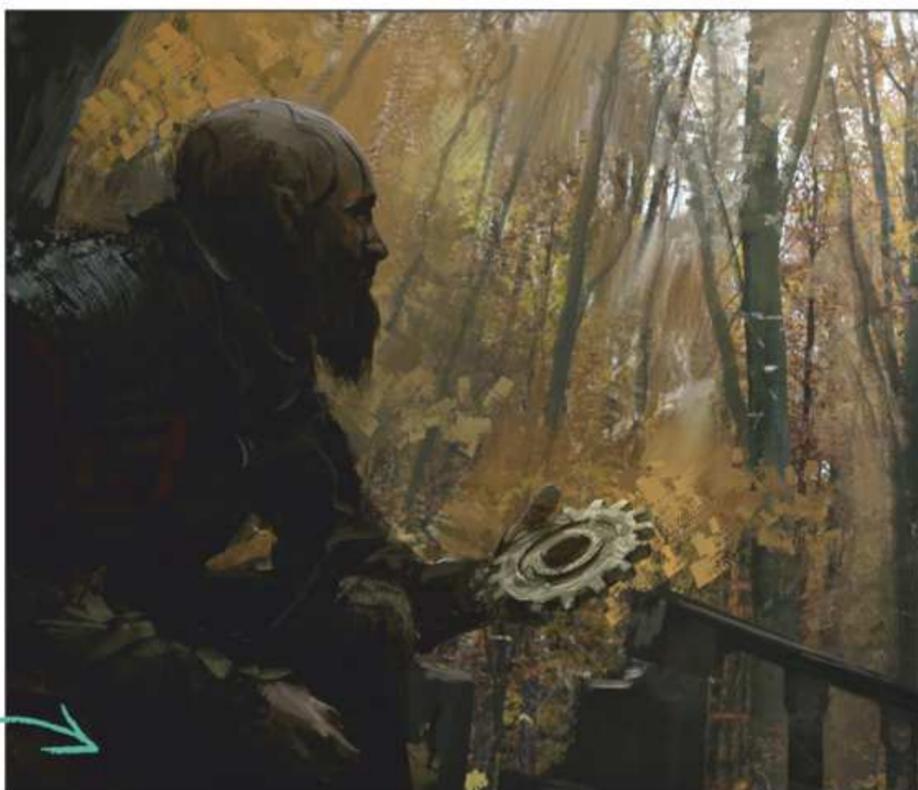
7 Painting over elements

Now it's time to start painting over these textures. As I lay down my brush strokes I think about the shapes I'm creating and level of detail I'm suggesting, and how they interact with each other. You want these factors to support your composition. Some forms will need simplifying. I'll be overpainting and checking contrasts from this point right up to the end of the painting.



8 Refining the forms of the clock tower

I tend to jump around the canvas as I paint, moving from one part of the painting to another. At this stage the background is locked in, my main character is dressed and general contrasts are in check. It's the perfect time to paint over the photos I used earlier and describe the forms a little bit better by creating highlights. Remember it's overcast, so surfaces facing up will feature highlights. ➤➤



9 Detailing the main character and adjusting his beard

I spend some time painting the main character. I try to keep him visually subtle; the thing that should pop is the metal cog. I don't like how his beard was covering some of his arm. It was a flat and uninteresting shape, so I shorten it and create an engaging negative space.



10 Build up a sense of tension and visual interest

I add a spear to help the composition. The spear, along with the other figure's spear, develops some tension between the two of them, separating them from the forgotten and organic world. This spear also helps to ground him in the scene.



11 Adding trees for greater depth

Now I go around the canvas and paint over the textures I applied earlier. Sometimes I try to add more, but generally I try to balance it out. I modify and add shapes to enhance the general composition, such as trees behind the back of the tower. They help to add some depth to the painting and guide the viewer's eye to the tower.



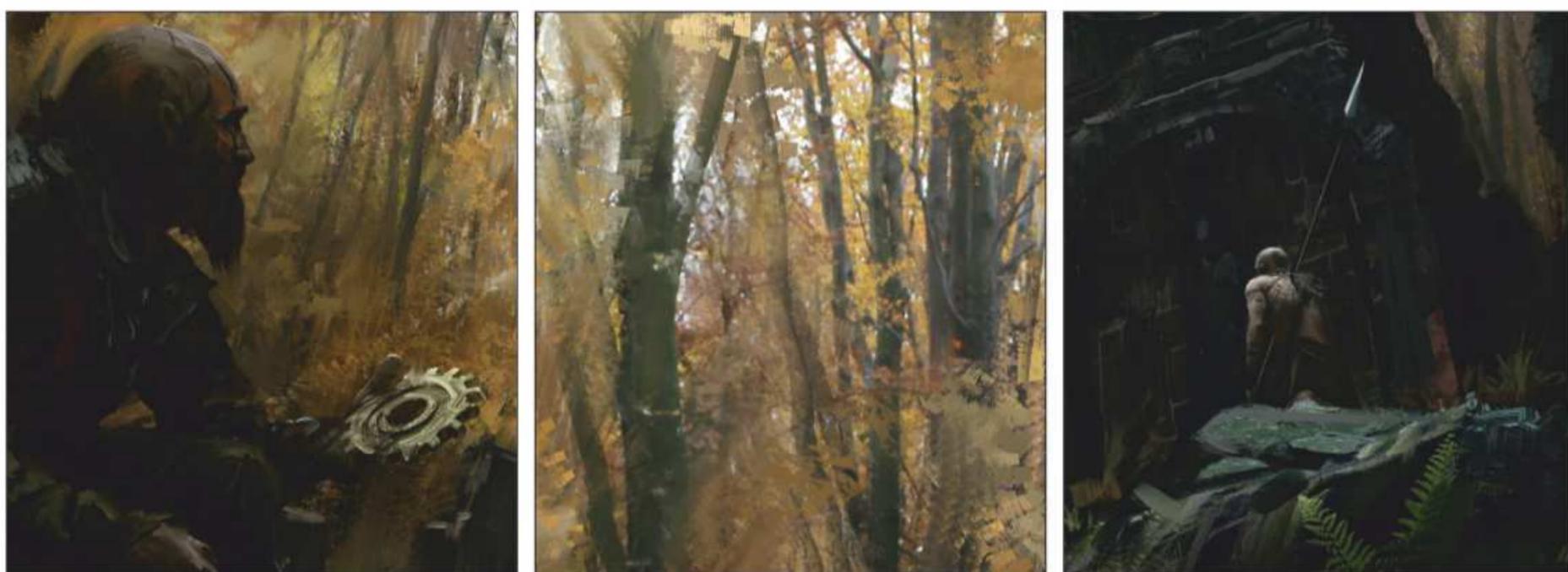
12 A leaf canopy helps to frame the composition and advance the storytelling

I want to give this environment a sense of being enclosed, so I add some leaves at the top of the image. The leaves also help to add a feeling of weight and drama, as if the scene is leading up to a specific storytelling moment. When I paint such supporting elements I always try to see them as shapes and how they relate to the entire scene. It's not an easy skill to grasp, so it may take you some time to get it right.



13 Time to paint the clock face

I refine the clock with the design that I came up with earlier. I think small details like the clock shield give a greater sense of believability to your work. The more things like that you can add, the better. It's always worth spending time designing different elements of the scene before you start modelling or painting. Don't forget to add behind-the-scene sketches to your finished artworks on your website. It may help you get a job!



14 Final touches and correcting elements

I try to see what needs to be refined and what needs to be dialled back slightly. I add contrast if it's required, and play around with the Curves tool, adjusting the appearance of the trees slightly. It makes their colour pop just that little bit more.

Next month

Award-winning
book illustrator
Jon Foster paints
our cover and
produces a must-
read workshop!



Next month in...
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ImagineFX

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We talk to one of the giants from the publishing and gaming industries.

Figure drawing part four

Patrick J Jones explores the rhythmic nature of muscles in motion.



ISSUE 170 ON SALE IN THE UK 28 December

Workshops



Photoshop CREATE ORIGINAL CREATURE ART

Roberto Padula paints an original creature, starting with sketches that help him to visualise his zoological ideas



Artist PROFILE

Roberto Padula

LOCATION: Brazil

Roberto is a creature design enthusiast and a freelance artist. He spends almost all of his time painting weird creatures or thinking about them.

<https://ifxm.ag/rob-p>



Painting a fantasy creature can be a lot of fun. In my opinion you'll struggle to find any subject that gives

you more freedom to explore your ideas than creating a creature. Yet it's this same freedom that can overwhelm many artists and lead to some serious design issues.

Once you accept the fact that you're not bound by previously established notions of how your painting should

look, you then become responsible for defining every single detail about this life form. Where does it live? What does it eat? How does it move? Where does it sit in the food chain?

It's in this moment that most mistakes are made. The two most common ones are either copying a real-life animal too much and ending up with something that, say, looks like a horse in a different colour, or creating something so alien-looking that no one knows what it is.

The key to solve these problems is information. Study as many types of animals as you can and their evolution process will give you the understanding that you need to apply this same logic into your creature's development. You'll then be able to create something new, yet relatable.

In this workshop I'm going to discuss my design choices as well as my painting process and, if I'm lucky, by the end of it I'll have painted a cool-looking creature!

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 8 now!



1 Establishing the origins of the creature

The first thing I need to do is to define my creature. I want to paint a small creature, somewhere between an iguana and a medium-sized dog. I also want it to have a beak to feed on the shellfish that it hunts for on beaches and shallow waters. Finally, I want it to be a male. ➡➡



2 Nothing comes from nothing

Try and imagine a new colour that you've never seen, that isn't the mix of any colours you recognise. It's impossible, right? Same thing with creatures. I need to base my creature on creatures that I already know. So I design my creature while thinking of monitor lizards, otters, macaws and other types of parrots as reference.



3 Fear the chimera

While I use these existing animals as references I try my hardest not to just copy them. It would be easy for me to just select elements of real animals, put them all together and call it an original creature, but that's just a chimera. I'm not Doctor Frankenstein or an alchemist, and simply mashing pieces together isn't good design.

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

PAPAPICHU 2



A simple, flat elliptical brush for quickly building up values.

GIMBOCA 2



This brush is ideal for creating subtle variations while painting.

GIBIMBA 2



A good brush for creating skin textures and blending values.

SOFT NOISY SCATTER



I use this brush to create subtle textures and value variations on my creature.



4 Strike a pose

Posing a creature can be tricky. With the exception of a few photogenic animals, most critters just don't care about looking good in photos! So I decide to pose my creature as if he's showing himself off, using his chubby tail to balance his body on his hind legs. He's also opening his decorative "wings" to attract females while scaring off rival males.



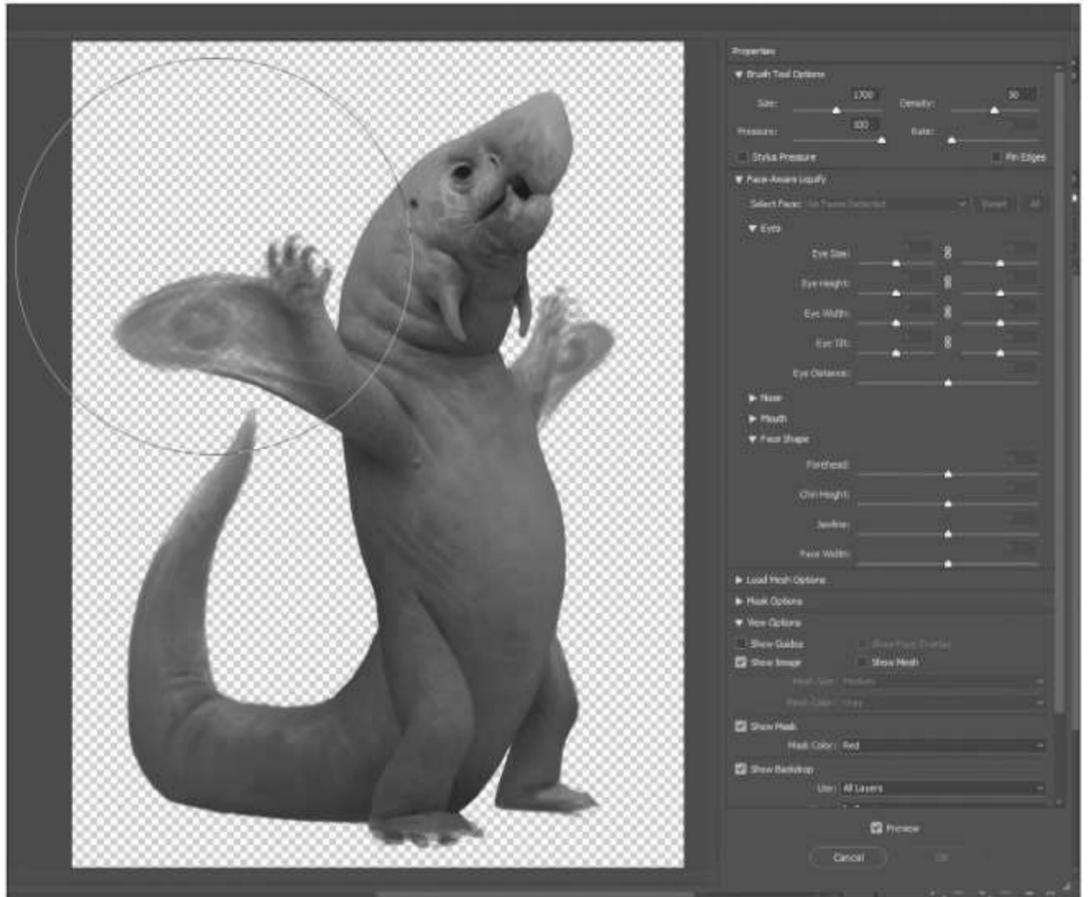
5 Setting up a background

Because the main focus of this workshop is the creature, I decide to paint just a simple background, similar to a studio photo shoot. But don't mistake its simplicity for irrelevance – even the simplest of backgrounds can and will affect your entire final image. So I treat it with the same respect as I treat my creature.



6 Starting the heavy lifting

Now that the design, pose and background have been decided, it's time to get to work. Whenever I'm painting I focus on three main things: shape, values and edges. A well-defined shape, control and understanding of values together with well-placed hard and soft edges is essential if you're aiming for a realistic 3D look.



7 Adjust the shape of the creature

During this process I often use the Liquify filter (Ctrl+Shift+X or Cmd+Shift+X) to make adjustments to the shape of my painting. I also use Preserve transparency (/) and clipping masks to prevent me from painting outside the limits of my creature when I don't want to lose the shape that I already have. I also duplicate my main layer before making any big changes.



8 Working in greyscale

For this part of the process I prefer to work in greyscale. This means I don't need to worry about colours or saturation – I just focus on my values as I define the shapes, create textures and work on the lighting. Trying to fight a war on too many fronts is a sure way to lose. Minimise the problems you have to deal with.



9 Finishing the base painting

I now paint the hands and feet, tidy up areas that might have been left too loose and build up the textures and different materials. I paint most of the textures by hand, but also use an Overlay layer together with my texture brushes on a low Opacity level to build subtle variations and to add interest to my painting. ➡➡



10 Introduce some colours into the creature design

Now all that greyscale painting pays off. Using a new layer set to Color mode, and with a clipping mask to avoid spills, I start painting the colours. First I do some underpainting with some reds, particularly on areas with high concentration of blood vessels. Then, on another Color layer, I paint the colour scheme that I've chosen for my creature.



11 Adjustment layers are helpful

I like to use adjustment layers, especially Levels and Brightness/Contrast, to further enhance my values and lighting. And the best part is that they already come with their own masks so I can control which areas of my painting I want them to affect. I then create a new Normal layer on top of everything and start rendering again. This helps me blend in all the new visual information.



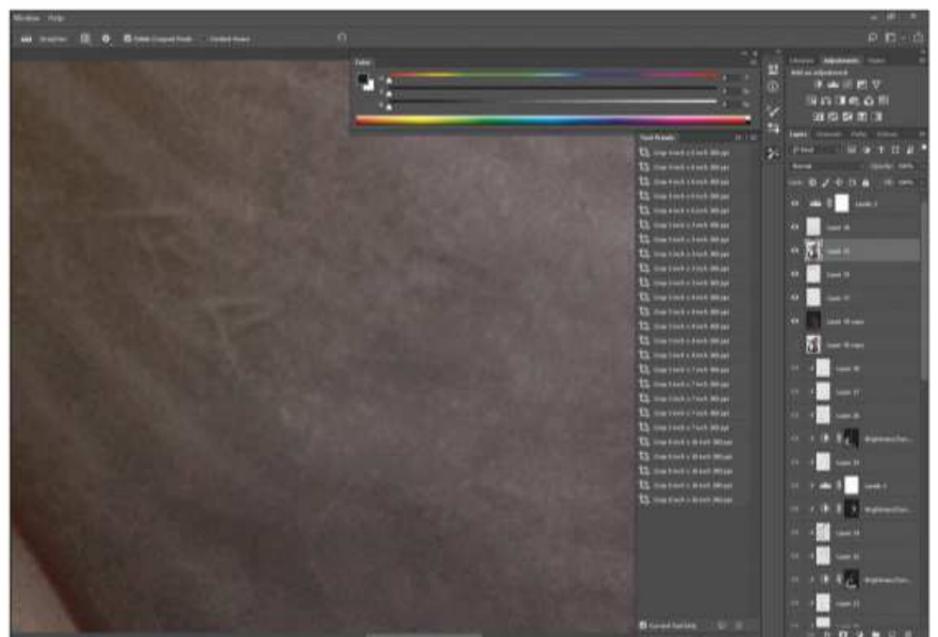
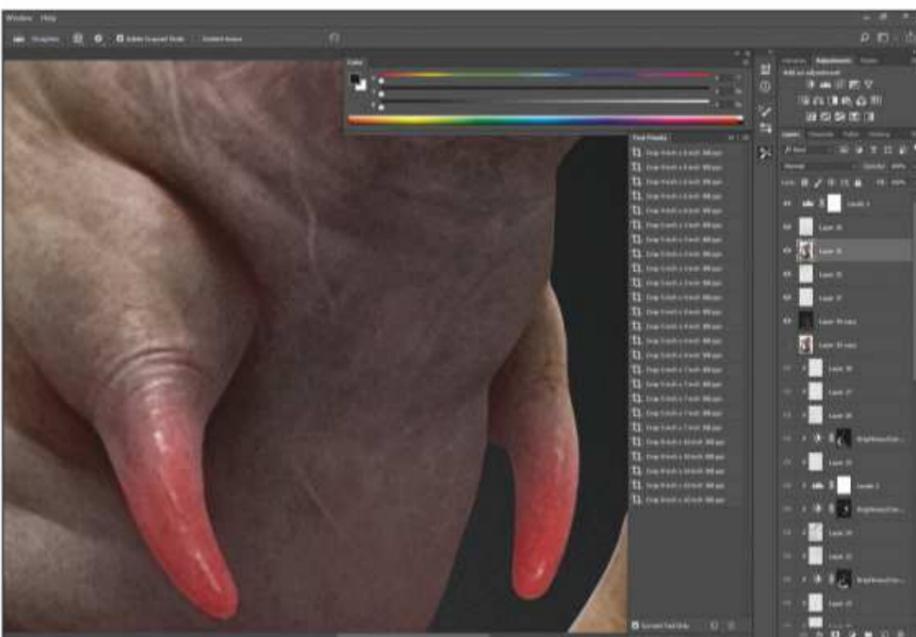
12 Playing around with lighting

Now it's time to fix any lighting problems that have occurred and make the whole lighting scheme coherent for both the background and foreground. Multiply and Overlay layers are great for this. I then paint a subtle rim light to help my creature pop, making it more 3D. I also use a layer set to Screen underneath my creature to paint in some very faint glow emanating from the rim light.



13 Applying my favourite filters

I'm almost done now, so it's time for filters. First I add some grain with the FX tab of the Camera Raw Filter (Shift+Ctrl+A or Shift+Cmd+A) and then fade it (Shift+Ctrl+F or Shift+Cmd+F) until it's looking subtle enough. Then I use the Unsharp Mask to sharpen my painting: 80 per cent is enough, and finally a soft Iris Blur helps to direct attention to the focal area.



14 Final touches and details

I check that my highlights are set correctly, whether I need to add more veins or wrinkles, and if my most vibrant colour is on the neck tendrils that he uses to attract mates. I then add scars of fights against rivals and sneak in my initials just for fun – shhh, don't tell anyone! I add a final Levels adjustment layer on top of everything and it's done. It was fun, and I hope you enjoyed reading about it! ●

Figure drawing: part 3

COMPRESSION AND GRAVITY EFFECTS

Patrick J Jones reveals how to draw the effects of real-world forces on the body, resulting in more realistic-looking figures



Patrick measures the proportions of his regular life model Alana by eye, for an online class.



Detail from Patrick's painting Oblation, which has its foundations in standing and reclining poses created by Alana.

Artist PROFILE

Patrick J Jones
LOCATION: Australia

Patrick is a figurative artist, author and teacher. His art technique books, *The Anatomy of Style* and *The Sci-fi & Fantasy Techniques of Patrick J. Jones* were both award-winning best sellers. His next book on drawing the figure, *Figures from Life*, is now on sale. www.pjartworks.com

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 8 now!



Welcome to part three of my eight-part series for ImagineFX on drawing the figure. Today we'll draw Alana

and focus on the torso and breasts, particularly on how the breasts change shape due to compression and the effects of gravity.

On first impression these simple forms look easy to draw, and for that reason they're often drawn poorly. A common mistake is treating them as solid globes, instead of shape-shifting mounds that move, fall, bounce and flatten out. Another common error is drawing them as if both are facing front like a pair of eyes, when in fact each breast sits on the curve of the

ribcage. I've chosen this pose to demonstrate the changing shape of the breasts due to their shifting weight against a solid rib cage, and the pull of gravity, evident even on a young, physically fit woman.

THE EFFECTS OF SHIFTING FORMS

Apart from drawing the illusion of soft flesh against a hard surface, we'll also deal with relationships of form. Although the ribcage expands when we breathe, the hips and ribcage are basically solid, with all the twisting done by the abdominals and obliques (the waist side muscles). These hard shapes against soft shapes cause pinching flesh, most noticeably at the waist.

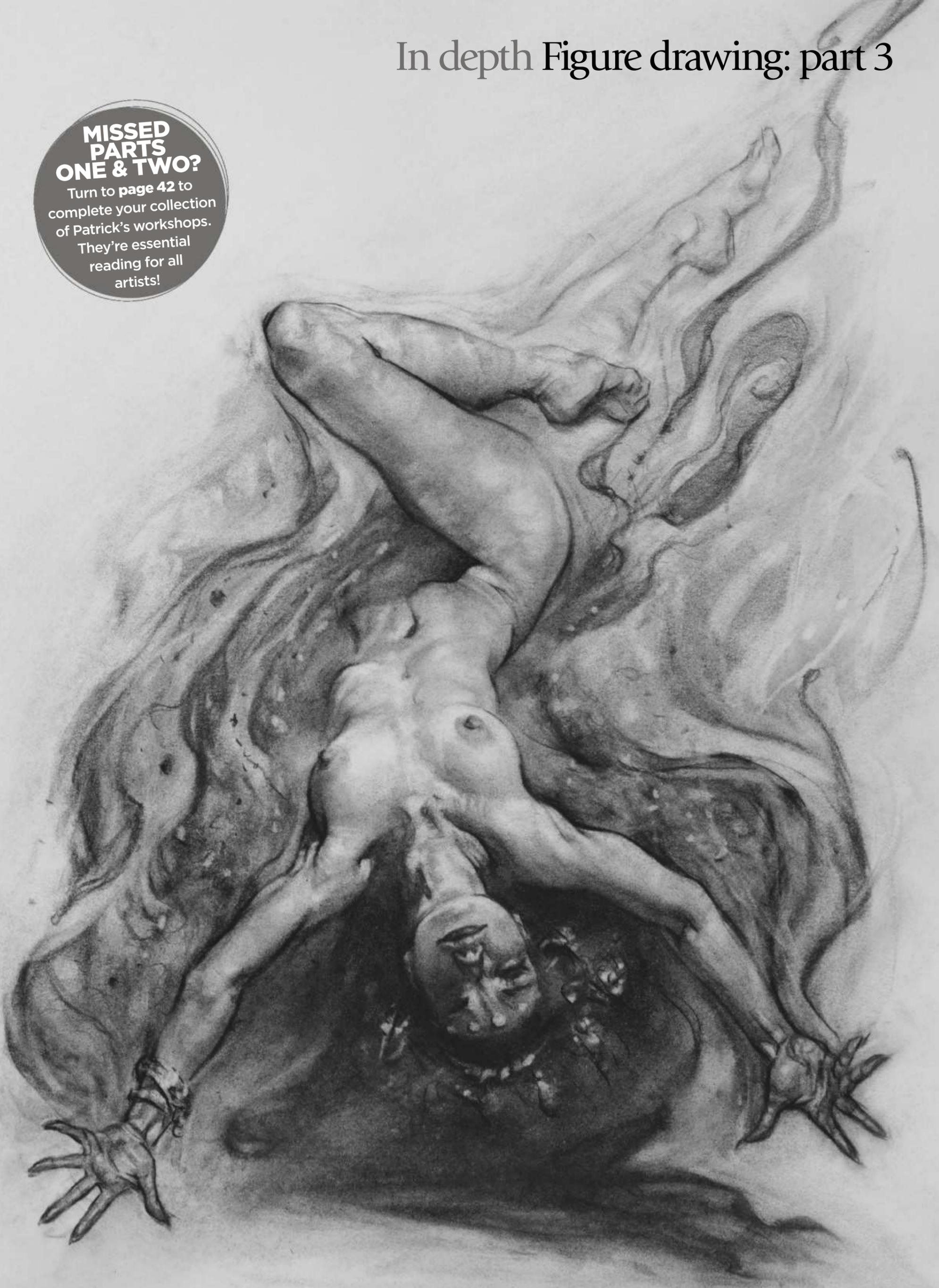
In the photo (above left) I'm measuring Alana for an online classroom. I measure the forms by eye, compare their shapes – their boxy or tubular nature – then draw the biggest shapes first and measure on the pinch side of the figure where shapes are closer together. Learning proportions is important for the figurative artist, but I don't see it as an inflexible rule.

If we keep all these ideas in mind as we draw, we'll create a fluid-looking figure that still feels as if it's composed of flesh and bone. Above is a portion from a large oil painting featuring Alana, to show what can be achieved by learning how to draw the figure. Okay, let's get started... ➤➤

In depth Figure drawing: part 3

**MISSED
PARTS
ONE & TWO?**

Turn to **page 42** to
complete your collection
of Patrick's workshops.
They're essential
reading for all
artists!



1 Learning to really see

When it comes to drawing the figure, I think of how the basic structures work together. Making structural drawings such as this one helps me understand how everything locks together. Learning to see structure as a form of simplified anatomy is the key to drawing with confidence.



WORKSHOP MATERIALS

PENCIL

General's soft charcoal pencil, Pitt charcoal pencil

CHARCOAL

General's compressed charcoal sticks

ERASERS

Kneadable eraser, mono eraser, electric eraser, pencil eraser, grip eraser

MISCELLANEOUS

Paper stumps, tissue, shammy leather cloth, newsprint



2 The power of Austin

In this photoshoot I direct Alana, using emotional themes. I call out, "Cruelty, spite, anger, joy, elation!" while Alana moves from one pose to another. As fun and Austin Powers-like as this may sound, it works. With this sorcery pose Alana becomes a raging symbol of creation. I've often found that enthusiastic and confident art direction results in an energetic, productive photo session.



3 Act suspicious

I draw lightly using a small piece of willow charcoal. As usual, I treat the photo with deep suspicion. The arms look too long and the head feels too small. I want the body to be flying rather than lying over a support, so I lengthen the foreshortened midsection.



4 Harness the force

With our motivational theme of 'creation' in place I think on what kind of supernatural being Alana is as I draw, and decide she is a witch conjuring spells. I name the drawing, *The Wake of the Black Witch*. With a title and motivation the drawing gains a driving force.



5 Chasing echoes

I smudge tones around using the charcoal that I've already laid down on the newsprint paper. It's important in the early stages to keep the drawing light, because this method allows for changes. I'm chasing the echoes of similar forms as I go, blending nature's rhythmic shapes down the body.



6 A sense of movement

I step back from the drawing and take time to evaluate before committing to darker lines. I feel the overall drawing has solidity, and more importantly, a sense of movement. I lay in darker lines, placing a sheet of paper under my hand to keep the surface clean.

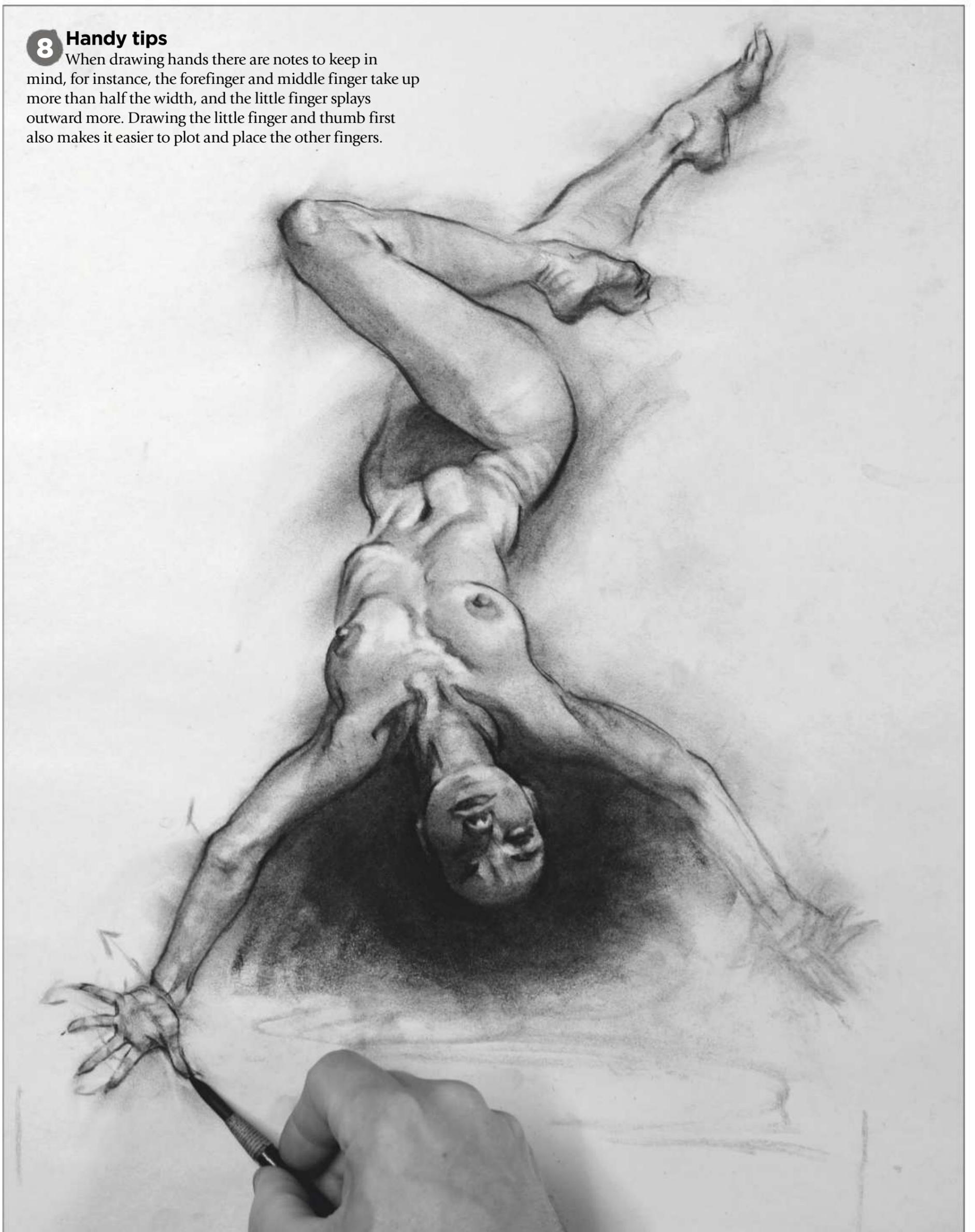


7 Gravity calls the shots

Add gravity to the situation and the breasts change shape. See how each breast is slightly different – because they always are. Note also how the nipple changes shape as the breasts stretch or flatten out. Take time to study these ever-changing forms. I'd advise drawing the breasts after you're happy with the shape and position of the ribcage, rather than draw them first. ➤➤

8 Handy tips

When drawing hands there are notes to keep in mind, for instance, the forefinger and middle finger take up more than half the width, and the little finger splays outward more. Drawing the little finger and thumb first also makes it easier to plot and place the other fingers.





9 Blend and draw

There is enough charcoal on the newsprint paper for me to blend with a paper stump, and I improve the forms as I push the charcoal around. I also dim the torso area by lifting off some tone with tissue. This suggests a central light source that draws our eye.



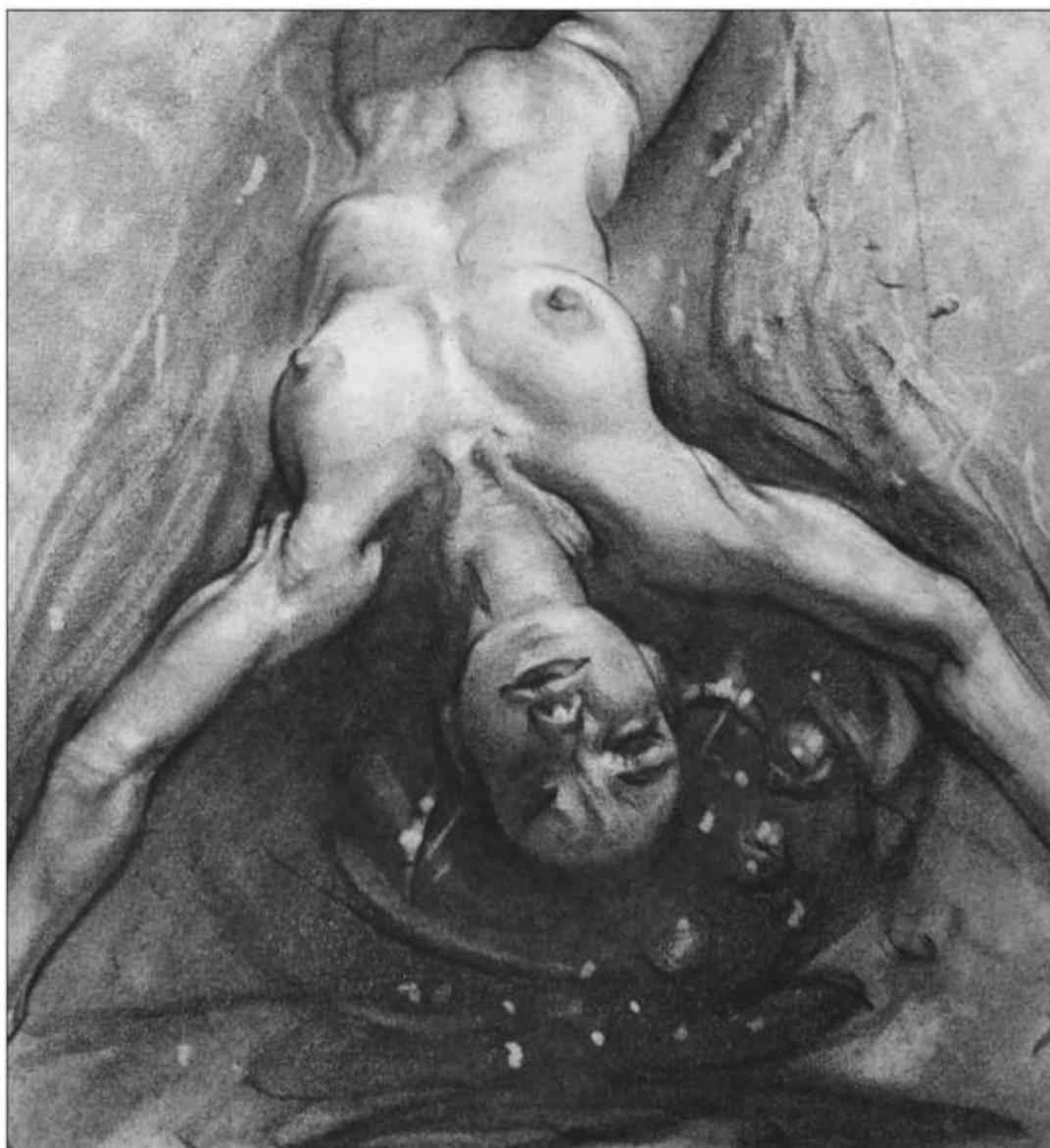
10 Making use of leftovers

I blot texture down with tissue dipped in charcoal powder. You can buy charcoal powder, but I use the stuff already on the sandpaper pad left over from sharpening my pencils, which saves money and a trip to the art store. I then use a kneadable eraser to pull out highlights.



11 Sorcery afoot

With the figure work mostly behind me I come back to the story of the witch casting spells. I use swirls to suggest sorcery afoot and engage my electric eraser to suggest crackling energy. This also frames the figure and adds contrast, bringing the figure more into focus.





12 Vary the shape of swirls by erasing into them

Using a large compressed charcoal stick I draw large swirls, twisting the stick as I draw for thick and thin marks, I then use a Faber Castell grip eraser to change the swirls into more interesting shapes. Note how the figure appears brighter now against the outside dark tones.



13 Smudgy fingers inject gesture into the swirls

With smudgy fingers, thumbs and tissue I make the swirls more gestural, then using a kneadable eraser and grip eraser I further reshape them. Finally, I carry the swirls upward with compressed charcoal. We're working with composition here as our eye will track from the dim foot toward the more contrasting torso.



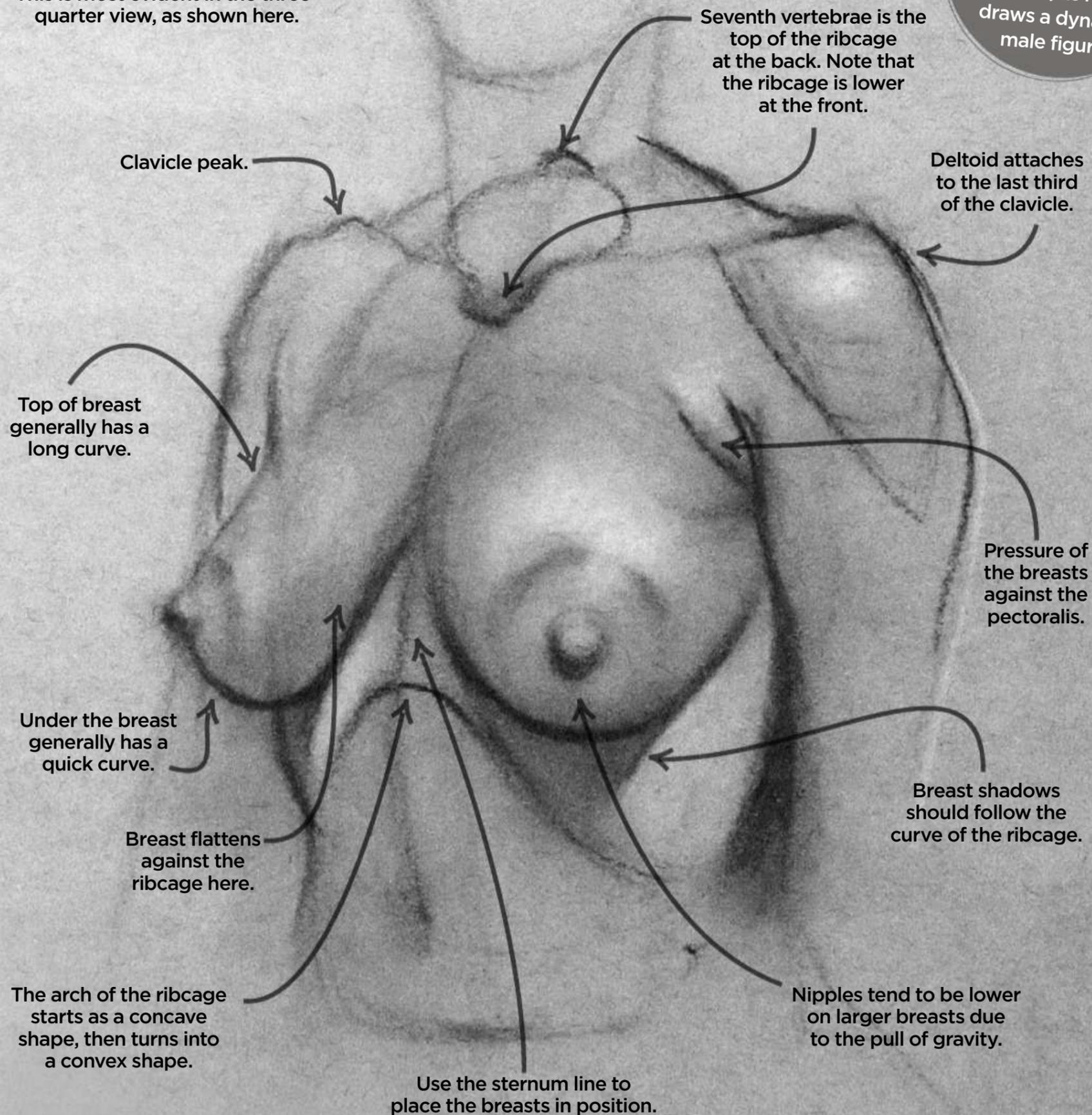
14 Adding small stuff where necessary

Putting in the small stuff is always a danger, because we tend to tinker and lose sight of the big picture. I'm feeling that it's time to stop before the drawing suffers. Was this drawing better than the step before? Perhaps. The main thing is we explored further and by exploring further we get to feel when it's time to stop.

GRAVITY AND COMPRESSION STUDY SHEET

Study how both breasts are never seen straight on, because of the curved ribcage. This is most evident in the three-quarter view, as shown here.

NEXT MONTH!
Part 4: Learn how to show muscles working together, as Patrick draws a dynamic male figure.



15 Gravity and compression study sheet

Learning to see the breasts as soft forms compressed against a hard, curved surface will help us draw forms that convey both weight and movement. Lots of life drawing will help further as we have the chance to study how the breasts change shape as the model changes their pose.

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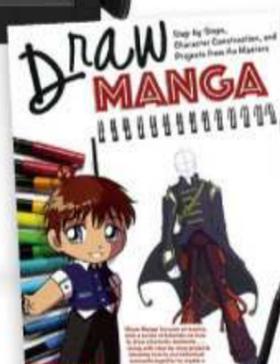


Artist's Choice Award
Art resources with a five-star rating receive the ImagineFX Artist's Choice award!

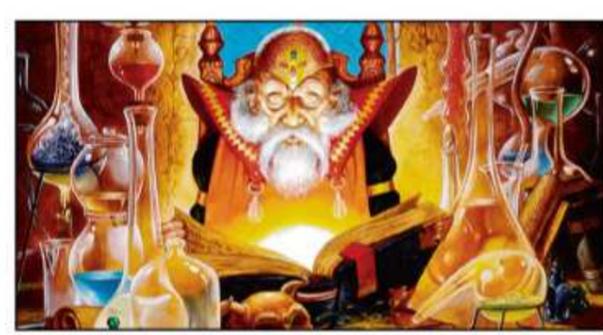
The latest art resources are put to the test by the ImagineFX team...



5
PRODUCTS
ON TEST



HARDWARE
90 SW2700PT monitor
One of the most affordable 10-bit LCD displays on the market is perfect for colour-obsessed artists, but have compromises been made elsewhere?



TRAINING
93 Advanced Concept Art
Games artist Jakub Kowalczyk puts together a dizzying fantasy landscape.

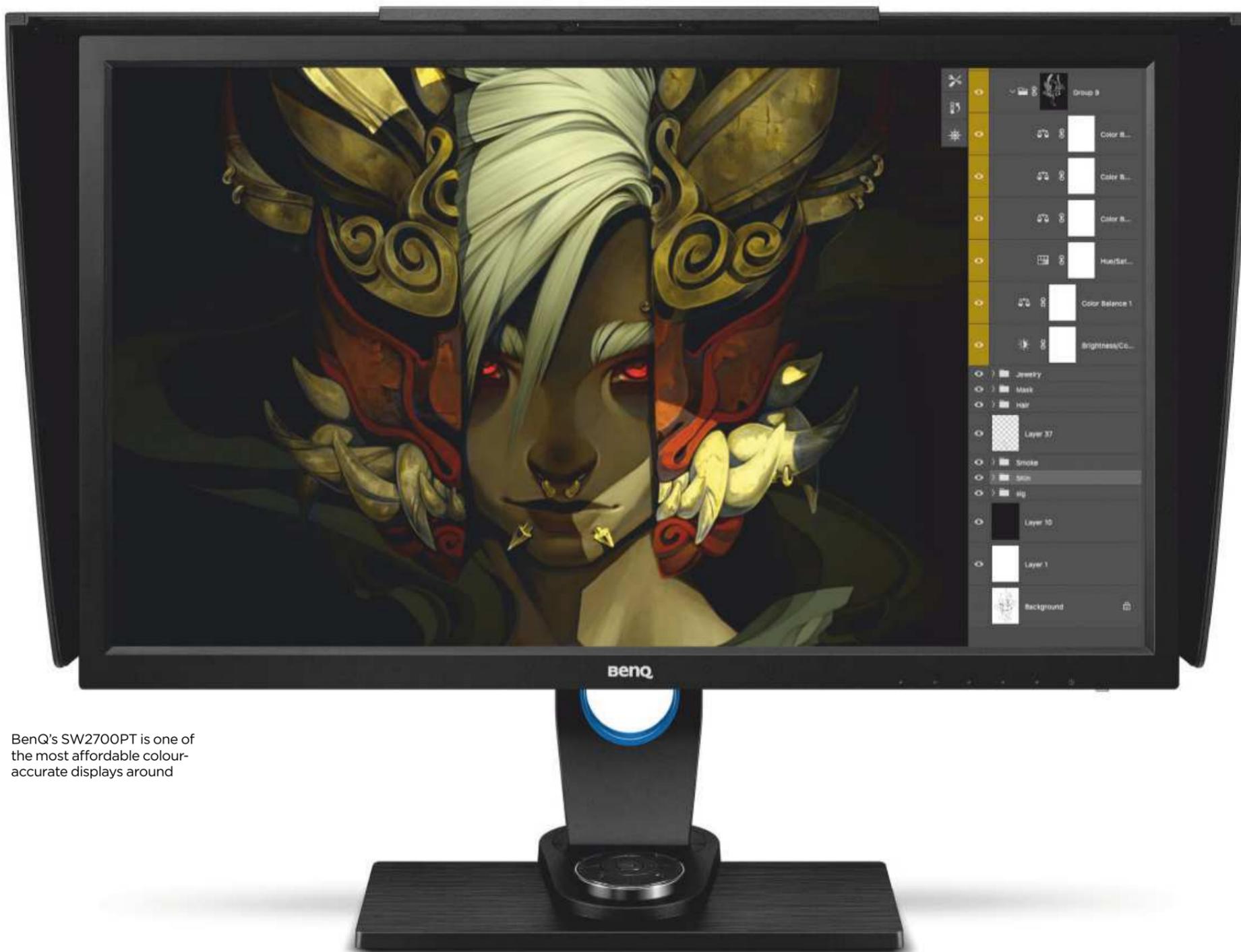
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94 Dungeons & Dragons Art and Arcana: A Visual History
See how the tabletop game grew from homemade hobby to fantasy franchise.

95 Draw Manga
Master the manga drawing basics with this guide to the iconic Japanese comic style.

95 Star Wars: Women of the Galaxy
This art book brings balance to gender representation in a galaxy far, far away...



RATINGS EXPLAINED ★★★★★ Magnificent ★★★★★ Great ★★★ Good ★★ Poor ★ Atrocious



BenQ's SW2700PT is one of the most affordable colour-accurate displays around

SW2700PT monitor



PICTURE THIS One of the most affordable 10-bit LCD displays on the market is perfect for colour obsessives, but have compromises been made elsewhere?

Price £599 **Company** BenQ **Web** www.benq.com

Digital artistry depends on using a display that offers high colour accuracy, bright colours and wide viewing angles. The good news is that even relatively affordable modern monitors with IPS panels are excellent to work on.

You can pick up a well-built 24- or 27-inch screen that will be perfectly suitable for around £250. In this price range you can expect full sRGB coverage and general image quality that will be absolutely fine for day-to-day painting use.

However, real colour excellence ain't cheap. Full AdobeRGB coverage is a far more significant benchmark, because the wider gamut delivers a notably superior picture quality, which is immediately noticeable as soon as you turn on the screen. Reds that you could just cuddle up to on the couch, greens that make you want to lie in

“Art that looks washed out on a standard screen receive an injection of vibrancy”

meadows on a sunny day. Images come alive, and it's hard to go back to using a standard screen after using one. But good luck finding any display in this category for under £1,000... and some can cost significantly more.

That explains why we're reviewing BenQ's SW2700PT, a very high-quality 27-inch display that can go a long way towards all the lovely imagery we describe, with full (99 per cent) AdobeRGB coverage, at a more palatable £599 price point. This makes it one of the most affordable full-colour monitors on the market.



The shading hood reduces ambient light and reflections, although it can be removed if you prefer.

In use, the eye-popping colours will definitely impress in whichever screen configuration you opt for.



The selection of ports isn't quite as generous as on other displays.

The secret sauce is the SW2700PT's 10-bit colour accuracy and 14-bit look-up-table (LUT) that really delivers the goods. Art that appears washed out on a standard screen receive an injection of vibrancy here. This will help you to choose better, more accurate colours to ensure your work retains its eye-popping beauty elsewhere, thanks to a bigger palette than you might be used to. Its 350-nit brightness is fairly average compared with other displays, and it doesn't do HDR, but it still looks great.

The ergonomics are fantastic, too. In addition to the screen's full tilt, rotate and height adjustment, the OSD is simple and easy to navigate, with image presets for Adobe, sRGB, Rec. 709 and DCI-P3. The physical controls

are located within easy reach on the lower edge and best of all, BenQ has a clever wired remote control that sits in the base, enabling you to flick through the various options without having to fiddle with the buttons. Hardware calibration is built in, and it comes with a monitor hood for reduced ambient glare.

The BenQ SW2700PT is a winner then. It's absolutely great value for money and the colour accuracy it offers will make a difference for any artist still working within the confines of a standard monitor. If you can afford them, alternatives do have more bells and whistles, higher resolutions and larger display areas, but if not, the SW2700PT is a great shortcut to getting high-end image quality.

DETAILS

- 2,560 x 1,440 display resolution
- 10-bit colour accuracy with 14-bit LUT
- 350-nit brightness
- Removable shading hood
- Wired remote control
- Single HDMI, single DisplayPort, single DVI input
- Two USB 3.0 ports

Rating



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SW320

Web www.benq.com

Price £1,399



Artwork: Aaron Griffin

This slightly larger 32-inch BenQ model has a few more bells and whistles on it, including HDR, 4K resolution and an all-digital set of display inputs that might make it worth the significant outlay.

VP3881

Web www.viewsonic.com

Price £1,099



Artwork: Luisa Preibler

The 38-inch VP3881's 3,840 x 1,600 desktop resolution doesn't look quite as good as the SW2700PT, but it offers a huge range of settings to customise the image to your preference.

UltraSharp U2518D

Web www.dell.com

Price £286



Dell's 25-inch carries a much lower price tag, and lacks support for premium AdobeRGB coverage, but it's a superb IPS screen, with 1,000:1 contrast ratio a wide selection of input options.

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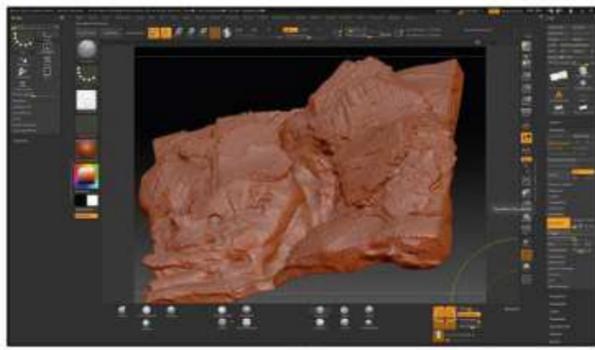
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Jakub uses KeyShot to try out different materials and lighting schemes for the models.



The work of four programs comes together in Jakub's final impressive composition.

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HIGH CONCEPT Games artist Jakub Kowalczyk takes you from virtual reality to Photoshop as he puts together a dizzying fantasy landscape

Publisher Jakub Kowalczyk **Price** £23 **Format** Download **Web** www.gumroad.com/jakubkowalczyk

There's no time to waste in this video tutorial, as Jakub Kowalczyk explains the concept art process he used for his work on the hit game *Frostpunk*. The video chapters divide neatly between four different programs: indeed, you can choose to buy smaller, cheaper downloads featuring just the content for an individual program if you prefer.

Jakub begins with Gravity Sketch, an app that's almost as much a game as it is a creative tool. This is 3D modelling software within a virtual reality environment; it's sold for just £23 through online platforms and works through a VR headset like the Oculus Rift. Watching Jakub work in VR to build his 3D model of a windmill is literally and figuratively dizzying: the sudden changes in viewpoint can make you feel a bit queasy, but you'll want to try it for yourself.

Jakub next works in the 3D sculpting package ZBrush to craft his terrain for the windmill. This 20-minute



DETAILS

Topics covered

- Concept modelling
- Modelling an object in virtual reality
- Sculpting a realistic organic terrain
- Preparing sculptures for export
- Working with textures and material
- Staging the lighting
- Exporting complete render passes
- Composing finished render passes
- Photobashing skills

Length
97 minutes

Rating



instalment whisks you through the process, offering good tips for making the surface look truly organic rather than man-made, and explaining key ZBrush processes such as reducing the number of polygons in the model before export.

The models are now brought into KeyShot, a more specialist tool that helps you lay the groundwork for high-quality renders. Jakub shows how you can add and manipulate textures and materials on the models, control the lighting and export various render passes. The artist finally brings the various renders into Photoshop, showing how each might be used within a composite image, before finishing the piece with a photobashing session to place the windmill within a mountain range.

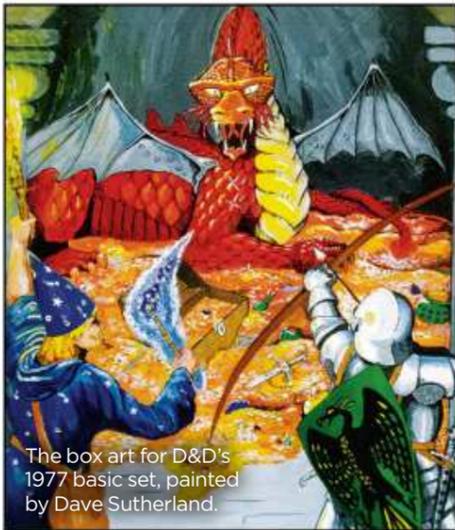
Placing an emphasis on technique, Jakub says little about the creative side of concept art, but offers a nuts-and-bolts overview of a highly effective workflow that's accessible to 3D newcomers. ●

ARTIST PROFILE JAKUB KOWALCZYK

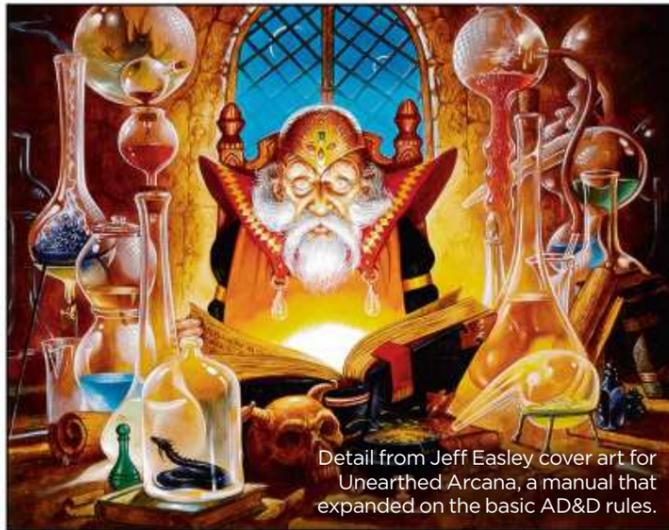
After studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice, southern Poland, Jakub is now a senior concept artist and illustrator at Warsaw-based 11 Bit Studios, where he's worked on titles including *Frostpunk* and the award-winning *This War Of Mine*. His concept art skills include atmosphere and stylistics design, environments and photomontage. Working with both game developers and marketing teams, Jakub is able to generate the visual language of in-game artwork, and illustrations used to promote titles.



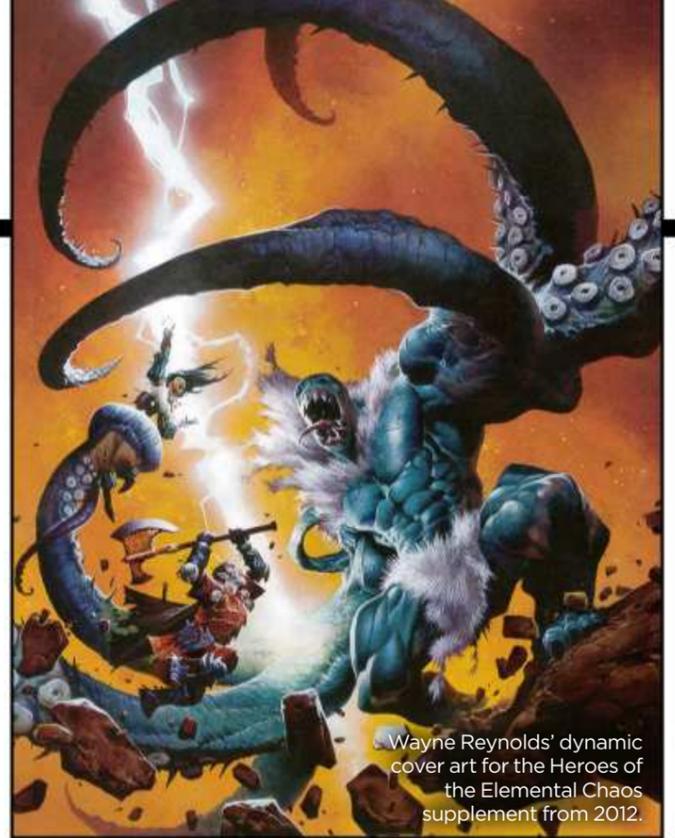
www.artstation.com/jakubkowalczyk



The box art for D&D's 1977 basic set, painted by Dave Sutherland.



Detail from Jeff Easley cover art for Unearthed Arcana, a manual that expanded on the basic AD&D rules.



Wayne Reynolds' dynamic cover art for the Heroes of the Elemental Chaos supplement from 2012.

Dungeons & Dragons Art and Arcana: A Visual History

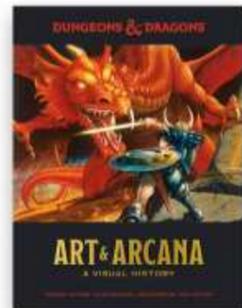
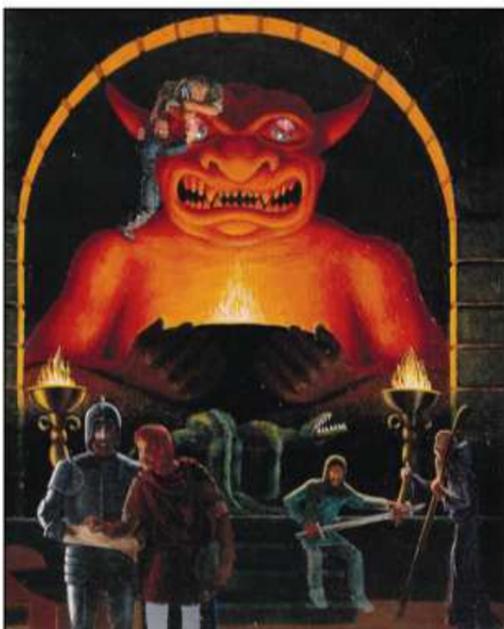


ILLUSTRATED HISTORY Track the development of the tabletop game from homemade hobby to fantasy franchise with this unparalleled artwork collection

Authors Michael Witwer, Kyle Newman, Jon Peterson and Sam Witwer **Publisher** Ten Speed Press **Price** £35
Web www.crownpublishing.com **Available** Now

While not necessarily an out-of-the-box success with mainstream audiences, **Dungeons & Dragons** has gone on to become the definitive role-playing game. Even if you're not familiar with the game's lore and mechanics, chances are you'll be familiar with the image of players crowded round a table of miniatures, rattling dice and updating character sheets, such is its impact.

To tell the story of how the monumental franchise evolved, *Dungeons & Dragons Art and Arcana: A Visual History*, takes the somewhat surprising route of explaining it with



Dave Trampler's cover art for the Advanced Dungeons & Dragon Player Handbook, published in 1978.

the game's art. Surprising because, especially in the 1974 original edition, *Dungeons & Dragons* was primarily a story created in the imaginations of the players.

This doesn't mean that this comprehensive book is slow out of the gate. Instead, it opens with a brief look at the state of tabletop gaming at the time, and reveals how the creators of *Dungeons & Dragons* cleverly worked

“Page after page of fantasy imagery chart the progression of character designs...”

rules around existing figurines. This is accompanied by charming art from early versions of the game that, while a little amateurish compared to what was to come, showcase the passion and DIY graft that went into getting the game off the ground.

With the help of never-before-seen sketches, rare photographs and other elusive paraphernalia, the *Dungeons & Dragons* story is told over nine chapters that cover all five editions of the game, the ups and downs in between, and its expansion into online realms. Box art, hand-drawn documents and fanzines are also present and correct to help give a



Many versions of the Beholder have been designed since its appearance in 1977's first edition of D&D.

broader appreciation of the RPG's cultural impact.

For D&D devotees, this is a beautifully presented telling of a tale they'll know all too well. And for those unfamiliar with TSR's hottest property, the book provides a fascinating account of how a passion project grew into a property that today boasts up to 15 million active users.

Artists are also spoilt, with page after page of fantasy imagery that charts the progression of character designs and the aesthetic of the genre as a whole. Though in a telling quote from the game's co-creator, Gary Gygax, it seems the more things change for illustrators, the more they stay the same: "Each time we reprint we have to shell out more beans to some grubby artist, but that is life."

RATING ★★★★★

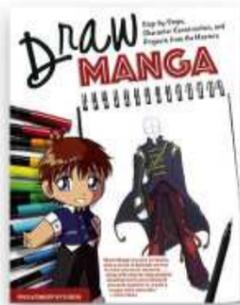
Draw Manga

DON'T SWEAT IT Master the manga drawing basics with Sweatdrop Studios' beginner's guide to the popular Japanese comic style

Editor Sonia Leong **Publisher** IMM Lifestyle Books **Price** £18 **Web** www.sweatdrop.com **Available** Now

Sweatdrop Studios is a UK-based comic collaborative group that specialises in manga. Created by lifetime devotees of the medium, it's the wisdom of these experts you'll be learning from in this book.

Guiding would-be manga artists through the basics of tools, head shapes and action lines, Drawing Manga progresses to projects set by master artists via character design and



colour theory. Each section is broken down into easy-to-follow steps, so artists will have no trouble bringing the lessons to life on the page.

Note that Drawing Manga is pitched squarely at beginners. Regular ImagineFX readers with even a passing awareness of the medium will be familiar with the theories and stylistic quirks that are clearly explained here. They'll soon be reaching for the next book that will help them take these concepts to the next level.

Although not necessarily thorough, Drawing Manga does an admirable job of laying down the medium's core techniques, along with useful insights into drawing figures and proportion that should provide a strong foundation for further development.

RATING ★★★★★



Selina Dean uses traditional media – pencil, ink and watercolours – to create this young adventurer.



Morag Lewis' fairy princess is used to highlight the thinking behind colour choices.

Star Wars: Women of the Galaxy

REBEL GIRLS Celebrate the female characters of the Star Wars universe with this book that brings balance to gender representation

Author Amy Ratcliffe **Publisher** Chronicle Books **Price** £22 **Web** www.chroniclebooks.com **Available** Now

Star Wars hasn't always led from the front when it comes to gender representation, with the original trilogy's Princess Leia almost single-handedly ticking the female demographic box.

Since then though, the galaxy far, far away has introduced plenty more female heroes and villains via films, games, animations and other tie-in media. It's these characters who are



celebrated in Star Wars: Women of the Galaxy, which sees 75 personas profiled with 100 all-new illustrations by female and non-binary artists.

Each character gets at least a double-page spread, while big-hitters like Leia, Rey and Jyn Erso get more space to tell their stories. There are some deep cuts here that are sure to satisfy fans, with the likes of Evaan Verlaine and Ewok princess Kneesaa getting a mention.

The illustration quality is high, but it's the story of R2-KT that drives home the book's importance. Created for Katie Johnson, a young girl with terminal brain cancer, this protective pink astromech made the leap from fan creation to legitimate droid after it appeared in The Force Awakens.

RATING ★★★★★



Karen Hallion illustrates Queen Amidala, who's also depicted by three other artists in the book.



A close-up of Kneesaa defending Bright Tree Village from the forces of the Empire, as painted by Jenny Parks.



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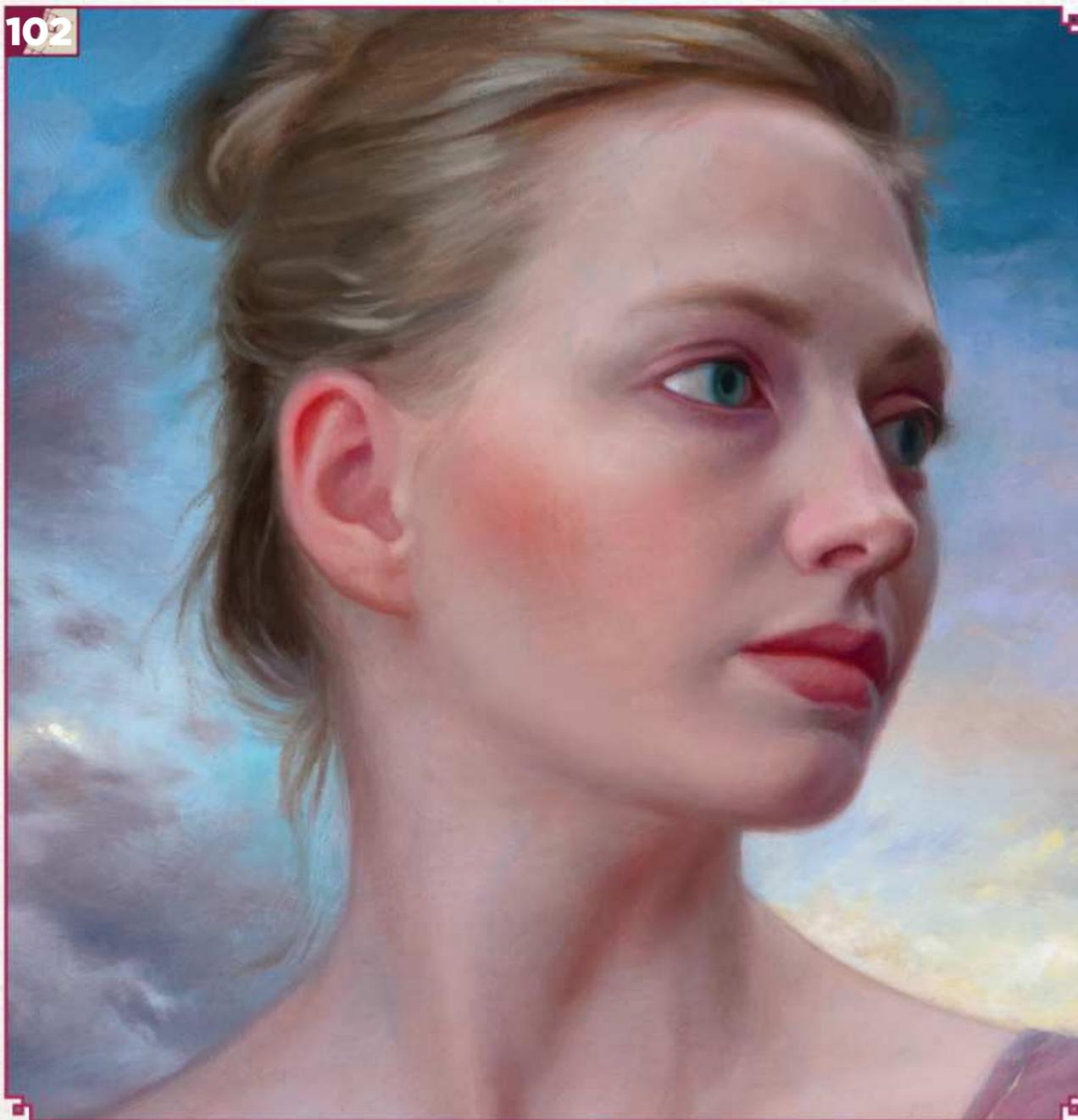
Just search for 'ImagineFX' on these selected platforms...



Traditional Artist

Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists

Workshops assets are available...
If you see the video workshop badge then you can watch the artist in action. Turn to page 6 to see how you can get hold of the video.



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Explore this month's selection of the finest traditional art, which has been sent in by you!

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Discover why birds feature heavily in the work of this Vancouver-based fantasy artist.



FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS



Lioba Brückner

LOCATION: Germany **MEDIA:** Oils, watercolour, pencils, gouache **WEB:** www.lioba.info

Lioba grew up with fairy tales and 1980 fantasy films like Labyrinth and The Dark Crystal. Her favourite subjects are women from enchanted yet eerie worlds.



1 UNE NUIT D'ÉTÉ

"I underpainted my canvas with silver oil paint before adding the portrait and flowers. When tilted in light, the silver creates a beautiful effect and contrasts with the black of the model's hair."

2 MEILLANDINA

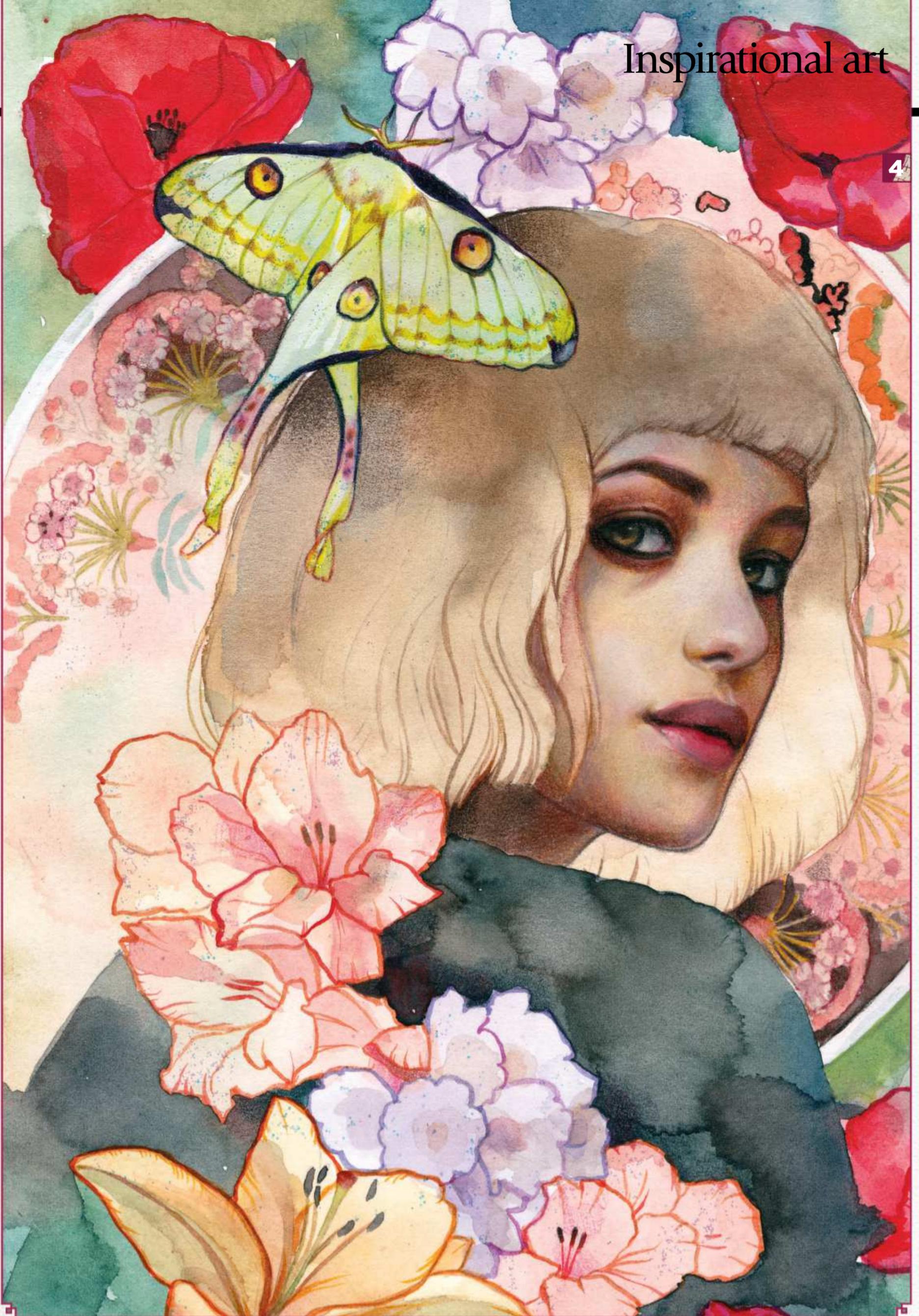
"For this painting I did a portrait of a ball-jointed doll. These look like a cross between a manga figure and a human, and they make beautiful models for paintings."

3 THE IMMORTAL BIRD

"The beautiful modern geisha of this commissioned oil painting reminded my collector of a phoenix, hence the title."

4 SUMMER AWAIT'S YOU

"I created this for an Alphonse Mucha-inspired gallery show. I used a variety of different mediums to depict the intricate details of the Art Nouveau patterns."







Steven Hughes

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Watercolour, gouache WEB: www.primaryhughes.com

Steven is best known for his colourful acrylic portraits, which have appeared in numerous gallery exhibitions in California and New York. His work revels in the interplay of light and colour, and he's especially keen on plein air painting.



1 DAUGHTER OF THEMYSIRA

"The DC comic heroine has long been a favourite of mine. I find the depiction of quieter moments of determination or thoughtful reflection has the most impact."

2 EMERGENCE

"Part of a series exploring the juxtaposition of abstraction and realism. Floral imagery is overlaid to obscure, replace and even highlight elements of the figure."

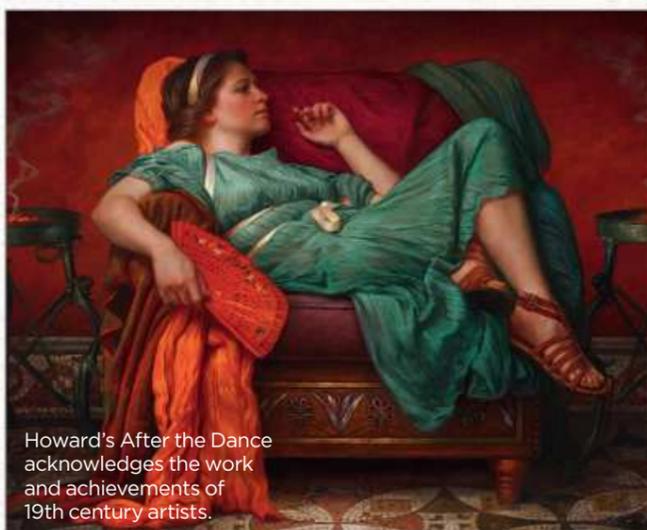
3 BUSY, BUSY, BUSY

"In Cat's Cradle, Kurt Vonnegut writes: 'Busy, busy, busy, is what we Bokononists whisper whenever we think of how complicated and unpredictable the machinery of life really is.'"

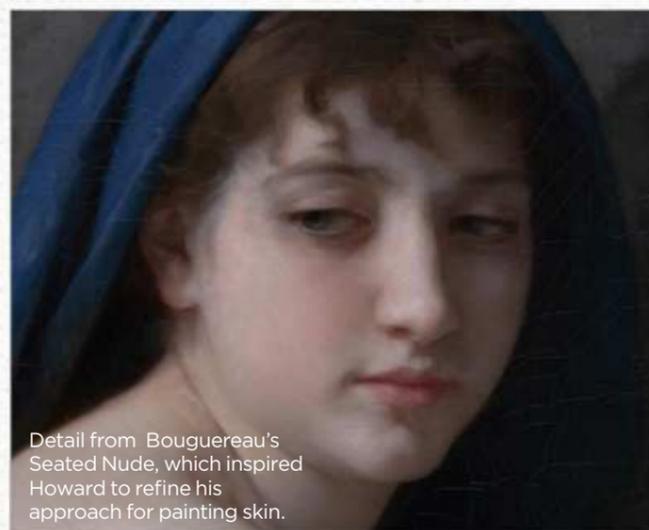
4 BEYOND THE WALL

"The gallery wanted to see new interpretations of George RR Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire series. Coincidentally, a friend happened to be letting his hair grow out, so I had a model for my version of Jon Snow."





Howard's *After the Dance* acknowledges the work and achievements of 19th century artists.



Detail from Bouguereau's *Seated Nude*, which inspired Howard to refine his approach for painting skin.

Oils

CLASSICAL PAINTING WITH PURPOSE

HOWARD LYON describes his process of creating a portrait in oils with symbolic meaning, using an academic approach

My workshop is about creating a portrait with meaning. It's also about my idea for a series that dealt with the decline of academic principles and beauty in art.

It started with a painting titled *After the Dance*, done in 2017. The 'dance' referred to the amazing period of artistic creation at the end of the 19th century, when Sargent, Bouguereau, Waterhouse and Leighton were all at the top of their game. The 20th century saw some incredible innovations and diversity in art, but for me didn't offer as much beauty or skill as the 19th century. I wanted to express my passion for the principles espoused by the artists I love and apply it to a series.

I created another work titled *Observing the Past*, which depicts a woman looking to the left with small embers floating past her. The embers are the principles and ideas of the past being consumed by progress. I knew that I wanted to create a companion piece of the same figure looking to the right and trying to discern the future. She would be hopeful and some small shifts in the palette and pose would hopefully generate a sense of contrast with the first painting.

We don't know what kind of art will be created in our future, but I do see a trend towards beauty, craft and skill that wasn't sustainable through the middle of the last century. I started the series by looking at the artists I admire and picking out qualities I wanted to capture. I've been collecting books over my career that I turn to regularly. It is important to surround yourself with inspiration.

I like to start the day going through photos I've taken of inspiring paintings or browsing my books. I have always been drawn to William-Adolphe Bouguereau and in this case the face of the woman in his painting *Seated Nude* stood out as something I wanted to study further. I love the subtlety in the way Bouguereau painted flesh. The palette of this painting is designed to complement the way the skin is painted. As you look to develop your own paintings, identify the images that inspire you and try to break them down into the elements that are most important.



Howard paints for various galleries, clients and collectors. Recently he's enjoyed working on *Magic: the Gathering* cards and Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* and *The Way of Kings*

book series. See his art at www.howardlyon.com. >>



Traditional Artist **Workshop**

MATERIALS

OILS AND MEDIUM

- Utrecht Gamblin oils
- Holbein Foundation Ground oils
- Utrecht Gamblin gamsol
- Rublev Colors oleogel

BRUSHES

- Rosemary & Co Artist Brushes

SURFACE

- Linen

MISCELLANEOUS

- New Wave artist's wooden palette
- Golden's GAC 100 adhesive
- Sony a6500 camera
- Paul Buff Digibee strobe lights



1 *Preparing the linen*

I purchase a large roll of raw linen. It's a cost-effective way to work on linen, but it does take some time and effort to prepare. Golden's GAC 100 is a great adhesive and comes in a decent-sized container, and will glue linen to wood, metal and plastic.



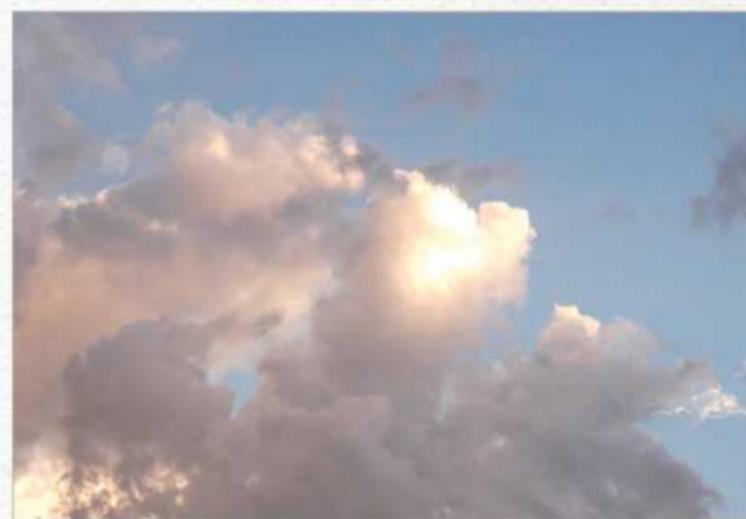
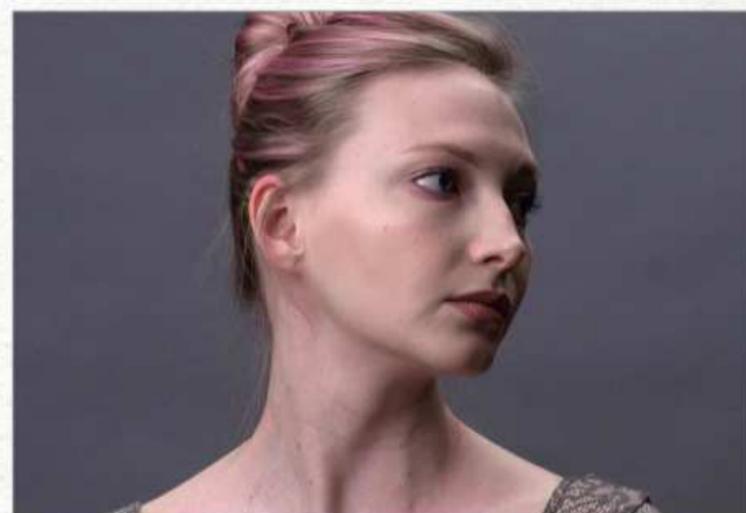
2 *Applying a ground*

Once the linen is glued down to the panel, I coat it with GAC 100 as well to protect the linen from the acidity of the oil primer. I like the slight tinting of Holbein's Foundation UMBER. It's lead based, so use with care. I apply it with a palette knife to achieve the texture I want.



3 *Thumbnailing the idea*

I think the thumbnails might be the most important step in the process. Don't skimp on this step. Do dozens of thumbnails as you explore your idea. Don't worry if they're ugly. Just get your ideas down. You can produce simple line drawings or work with big shapes. I tend to do a combination of both.



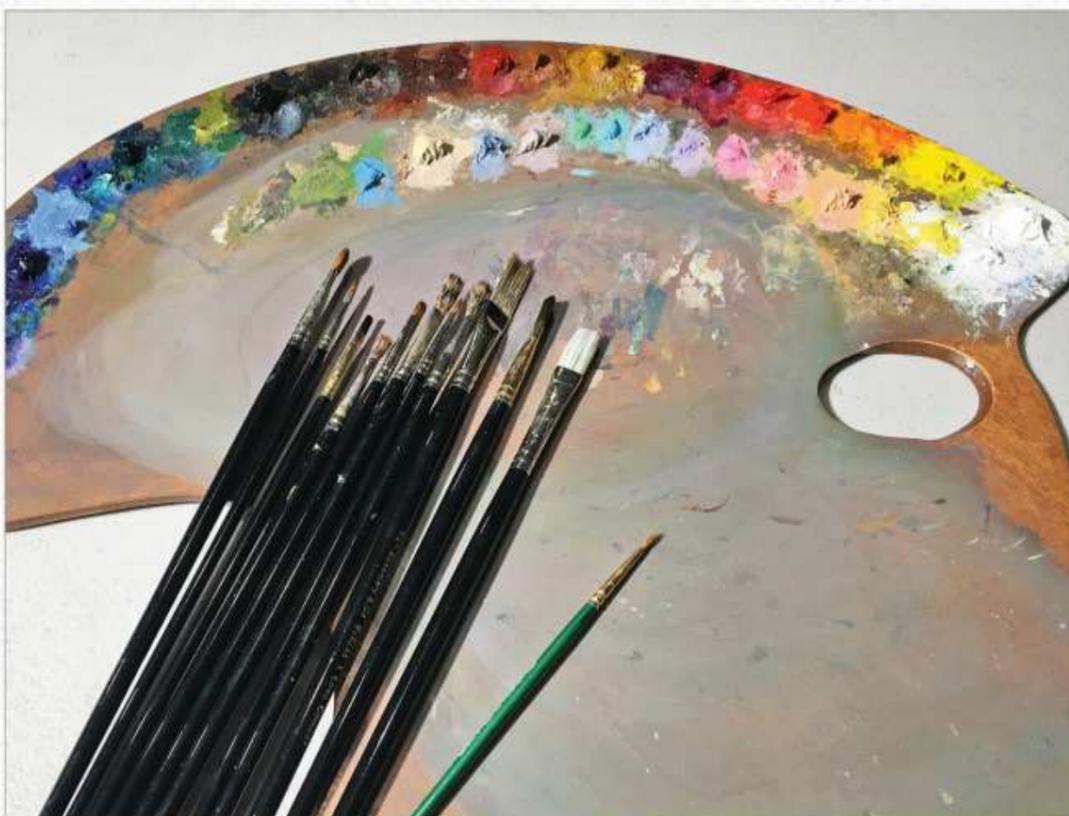
4 *Gathering reference*

I'm always looking for models and references, which means bringing my camera with me as much as possible. You never know when you'll see the perfect cloud, tree or texture. I used two flashes in this shoot to provide a subtle rim light in addition to the main light.



5 *Creating a digital comp*

Photoshop is ideal for exploring your composition. It's based on my thumbnail, but brings together the images from my photoshoot and reference. I don't think you can overdo this stage. The better the reference, the stronger your foundation will be for your final work



6 *Choosing your tools*

With a few exceptions, almost all my brushes are from Rosemary & Co, and my artist's palette is from New Wave. It enables me to hold a nice range of colours including the Radiant colours produced by Gamblin. I try to have warm and cold versions of each colour and the Radiants are convenient for the higher values.



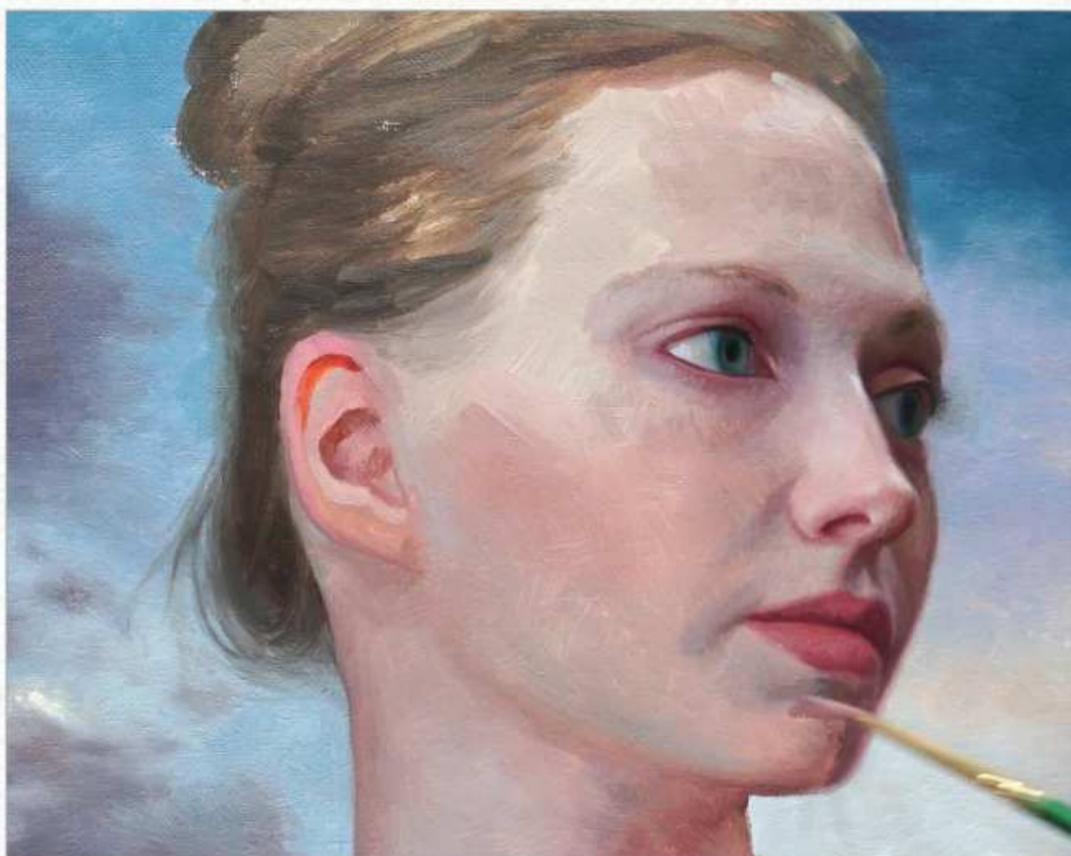
7 *Blocking in the sky*

Once I've drawn the composition directly on the canvas, I start by doing a quick colour block-in. I try to be very accurate with my colour, but I hold back just a bit with the darkest and lightest values, saving those for the finishing stage. This enables me to make ongoing decisions about where I want the most contrast.



8 *Putting the parts together on the canvas*

I call this the Frankenstein stage, because all the parts come together, but it isn't pretty. Don't panic! Don't overwork this stage. Layering oils will add depth and richness, but you don't want to try and finish the painting in the first pass. Learn to be efficient by doing this pass quickly and then build on it. ➤➤



9 *Second pass refinements*

Now the fun begins and I start to push values to their full range. I like to do the first pass in one day if possible and let it dry overnight. Then you can work over the first pass without removing it. I love the second pass because each stroke, put down over the rougher first pass, brings polish and finish.

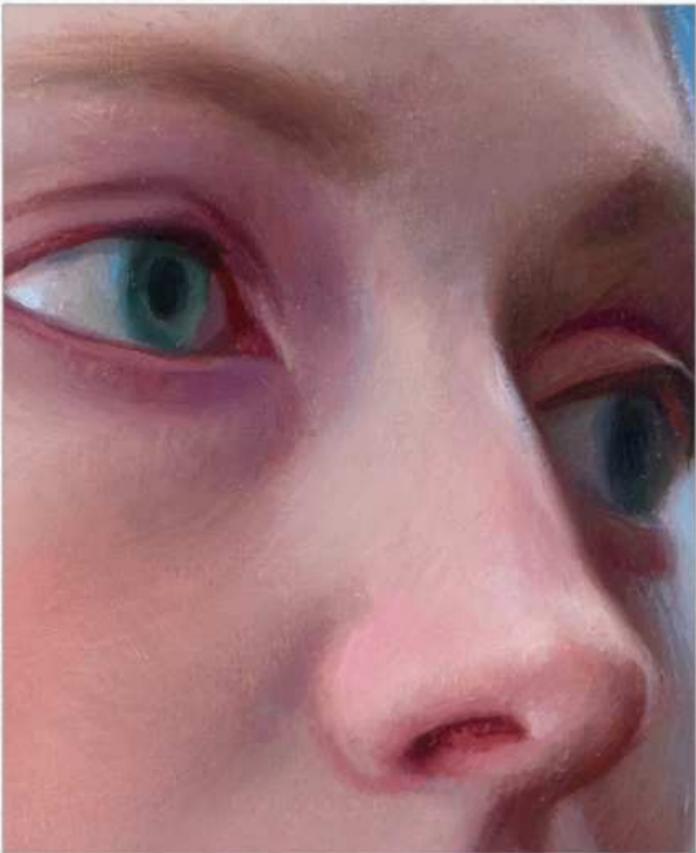
10 *Edges equal vitality*

Don't let all your edges be hard or soft. Contrast creates interest. Use soft edges to ensure your forms merge and turn, and use hard edges to advance forms and draw the eye. Note the softness of the hair generally, but there are a few harder strokes. The ear has a soft outer edge, but some harder internal edges.



11 *Clouds equal freedom within your composition*

I love painting clouds. You can make them almost any colour and value. They can create whatever shape you need to complement your design. I put them in rough at first and then use a soft brush, like Rosemary & Co.'s Masterstroke long flats to blend them.



12 *Rendering the face*

Keep the warmth in the skin. Note where skin touches skin, or is translucent. This is where you'll get your highest points of saturation in flesh. Look at the light bouncing through, or within the ear and nose. In addition, the line where the lips meet can often have very intense warm and cool reds.

13 *Finishing touches*

At this stage I like to put my reference away and make my decisions based on what I think would enhance the painting. It's often this last five to 10 per cent of work that really makes the painting come together. I like to add spots of intense colour, and refine edges and values.



14 *Assess your work*

When you decide that the painting is complete, take some time to review your efforts. Compare it to your inspiration and let yourself be critical and kind. Identify your successes and shortcomings so that you can apply that experience to your next painting. Learning and improving is one of the great pleasures in life!



15 *Choose a worthy frame*

Nothing is sadder than a great work, poorly framed. Find a good framer and they can take a good painting and make it great. In this case, Michael Graham at Masterworks Frames created this beautiful custom frame with 16k gold leafing. He also cut the panels for the frame where they 'float' when mounted with velcro. ●



Oils

HOW TO DEPICT A CHEMICAL ELEMENT

MARK ZUG completes his project of painting figures based on the periodic table of elements, transforming chemical properties into personality traits

My career spent creating fantastical beings for books and games does not scratch every creative itch that I have. One such itch has been my Noble Gases series of paintings, which I conceived nine years ago. In them, I imagined those six chemical elements coming to life as female icons. For every one of those paintings, I took the properties of the element and conceived it in both human and artistic terms.

To start, the palette of all six pieces reflects their respective emission spectra: the colour of light the gases emit under electrical stimulation. Neon emits red-orange, so I had my palette for this character. The names of the gases are based in Greek, and evince something of their qualities; neon comes from neos, or the new. Xenon is from xenos – the strange, or

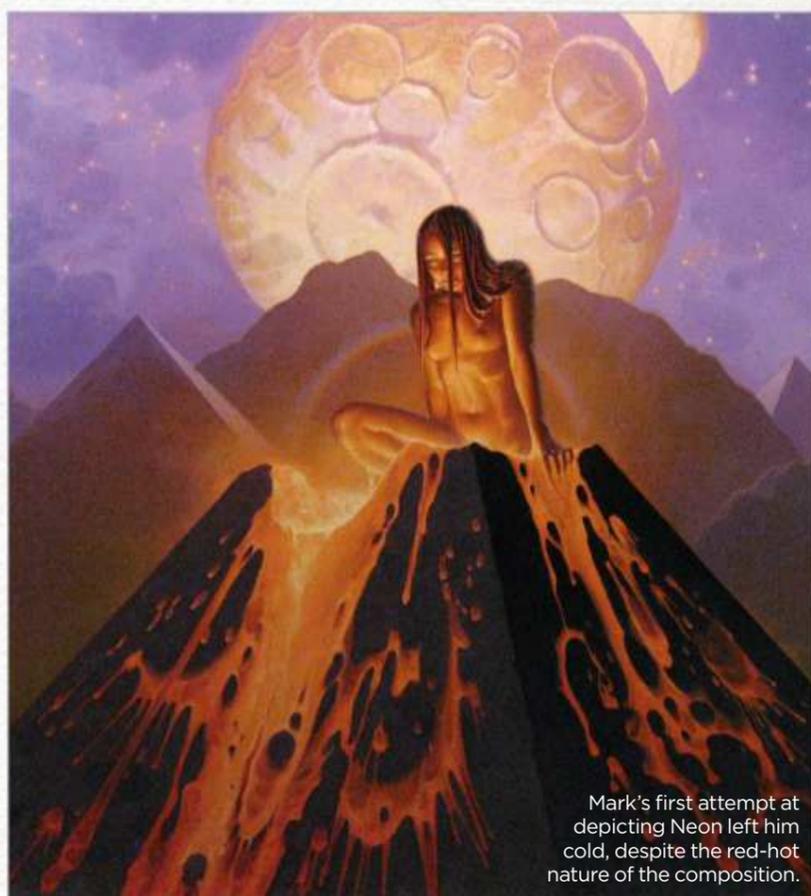
alien, owing to its rarity here on Earth, so for that noble gas I painted an alien physiology. And so on.

The red-orange palette of neon and its theme of newness suggested lava. In fact, Neon was the first piece of the series I completed, but for a number of reasons it was a creative miss for me. I didn't like it thematically or visually, so I put it away and went on with the rest of the series.

For this workshop I'll take a fresh run at it. I'll create a new round of thumbnails not at all similar to any I've done before, while keeping the theme of lava as an elemental force representing renewal.



Mark's an award-winning book and magazine illustrator. He's also painted card art for Magic: The Gathering and Dune. Visit his website for more examples of his art, including his Noble Gases series: www.markzug.com. >>



Mark's first attempt at depicting Neon left him cold, despite the red-hot nature of the composition.



Traditional Artist **Workshop**



1 **Thumbnailing some possibilities**

I decide on black skin and bright red hair for my female character from the beginning, and circle around to my other elements. I want her to be doing something in the composition, rather than looking passive. Finally, I have a good technical drawing to work from.



MATERIALS

OIL PAINTS

- Griffin Alkyd Titanium white
- Old Holland Cadmium yellow extra deep and Transparent Oxide Yellow Lake
- Winsor & Newton Titanium white, Cadmium yellow, Winsor yellow deep, Winsor orange, Winsor red, Cadmium red, Alizarin crimson, Burnt sienna, Brown madder, Raw umber, Mars black and Prussian blue

LIQUIDS

- Gamblin Refined linseed oil
- Weber Odorless turpenoid (solvent)
- Winsor & Newton Damar varnish and Distilled turpentine
- Weber Turpenoid natural (brush cleaner)

BRUSHES

- Winsor & Newton Series 7 sable rounds, sizes 1, 2; Monarch filberts, sizes 2, 4, 6; Monarch extra-long filberts, sizes 4, 6; Monarch rounds, sizes 8, 10
- Princeton Catalyst Polytip bristle brights, sizes 2, 4; Polytip bristle round, size 4; Polytip bristle filberts, sizes 2, 4, 6, 8
- Princeton Elite rounds, sizes 2, 4, 6
- Langnickel 5000 Royal Sable rounds, sizes 4, 6
- Blick Master synthetic bristle rounds, sizes 4, 6; Mega bristle filbert, size 50; Series 292 hake brushes, 1.5 inch, 3 inch
- Daler-Rowney Robert Simmons Signet brights, sizes 7, 12
- daVinci Top-Acryl bristle filberts, sizes 8, 16
- Langnickel 5530 Royal Sable fan blender, size 6

MISCELLANEOUS

- Steel palette knives
- Kemper rubber wipe-out tool
- Paint scraper

2 Transfer the drawing to the canvas

I prepare my gessoed and stretched 24-inch canvas with a layer of oil/alkyd colour related to my final palette – in this case, a pale orange. On this I do a tracing in pencil, using an Artograph projector.



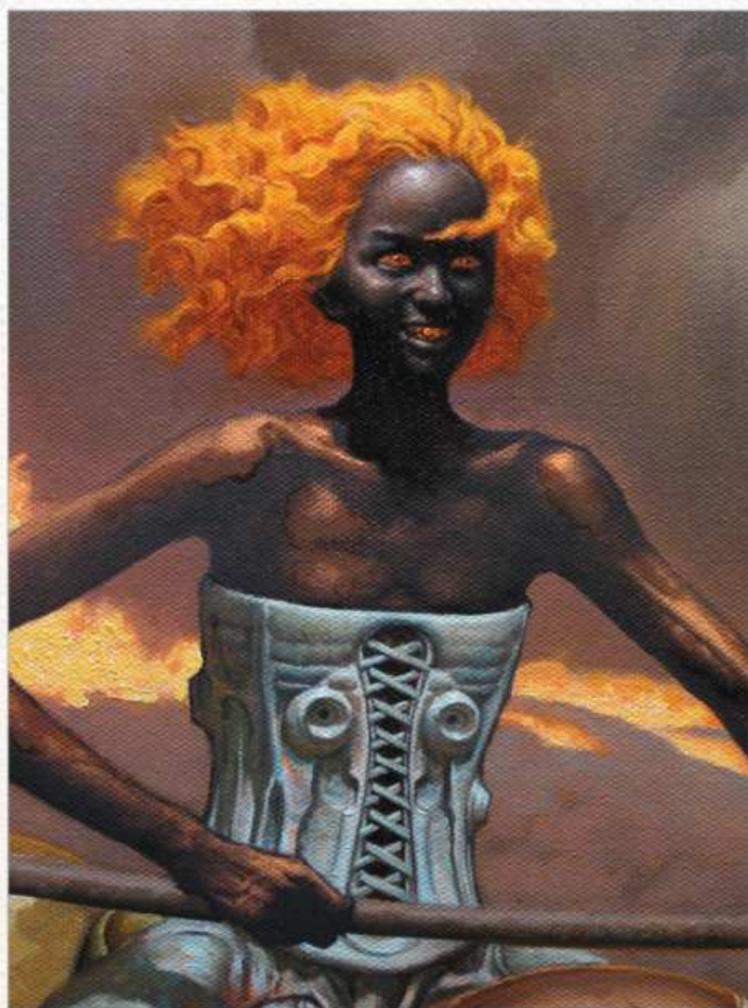
3 Establish the underpainting and background palette

On this drawing I do a monochromatic underpainting using black oil paint diluted with solvent. I let it dry, then go over it with a semi-opaque layer of wet-into-wet oil paint. I'm painting all the lava areas back to white, so that they will have plenty of brightness built in. This is also the stage where I establish the background palette. ➤➤



4 *Using paints that bring extra vibrancy to the composition*

I give the lava its first colour using cadmium reds and oranges – toxic pigments that I don't usually use. But in this case, I need their extra intensity. Note how the first cool colour on her scythe-like tool reacts with its warmer underpainting.



5 Refining the figure's appearance

I begin the figure's flesh tones in fully rounded colour, using as reference any images I can find of the darkest people on Earth.



6 Pick and choose from my reference sources

Do more of the same, everywhere. My reference is omnipresent, and never explicitly resembles anything in the painting.



7 Pushing the background

In the final stages, I bring the background into sharper focus, give the ash plume some extra definition, and add the diaphanous curtains of falling ash that I had seen in my mind's eye.



8 Varnish enhances the painting's contrast

The last stage is retouch varnish - a 1:1 dilution of damar varnish with turpentine - applied with a hake brush after the painting is fully dry to the touch. This brings back a uniform gloss and deepens the contrast. ●

First Impressions

✧ Socar Myles ✧

Discover why birds feature heavily in the work of this Canada-based artist



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

I grew up by the sea and in the suburbs: in Prestwick, Scotland, and in Fonthill, Canada. Whenever I was in Scotland, I wanted my Canadian dog and my Canadian friends; whenever I was in Canada, I wanted to swim in the sea and listen to the birds of the British hedgerow. So a lot of my art's about longing and nostalgia, and that irritating feeling of having left something behind.

Can you describe the place where you usually create your art?

I work at a drafting table by the window, with a can of pens at my elbow. I like to keep the TV on in the background, so it feels like I'm in a workplace with other people around.

Do you have an art tool or ritual that you simply can't live without?

As far as art tools go, I only use three: a pen and a ruler, and a computer for scanning things. I can get by without the ruler and the computer, but there's not much I can do without the pen. My favourite nibs are Hunt Artist Pen 100s.

What, outside of art, has most influenced your artwork?

My artwork is mostly about preserving what's in my head, so it won't be forgotten. I want to hold onto very nearly everything, so a variety of subject matter finds its way into my art: friendships I've made; birds I've found on my morning walks; ideas and dreams and disappointments; silly things



SERGIO'S CLOCK

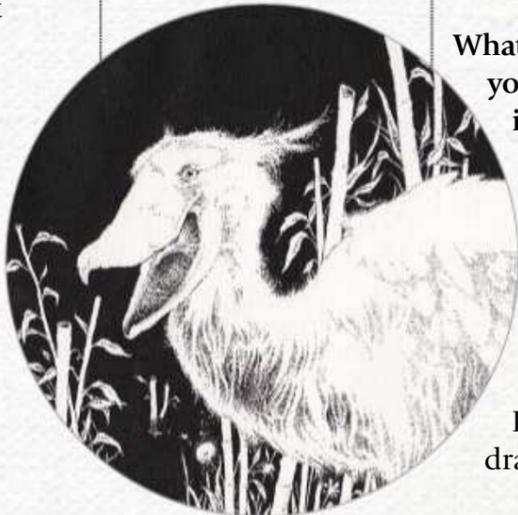
"One of my favourite recent illustrations. I like drawing people with memorable faces."

“ My artwork is mostly about preserving what's in my head ”

people have said in my presence. I also like to depict the world as I see it, so everybody else has to look at the same blurry, confusing no-specs maze I blunder through every day.

MAJESTIC

"Artwork of my favourite bird: the shoebill stork."



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

I don't have a good answer for that. They're all self-portraits, in a way – even that time I drew Donald Trump with tentacle hair, and it was hilarious, and everyone laughed. But I will say that I feel very much at home drawing birds. Probably because

birds are always there. They live everywhere human beings live, so they're there in all my memories.

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

Well... I mean, I certainly enjoy it. I love to draw. But it took me 20 years to save up for a very, very tiny home, and I have horrible teeth because I can't afford a dentist. I'd recommend that anyone who wants to make a living as an artist go about it better than I did. Take some business classes. Develop your own intellectual property early, and be diligent with your self-promotion. If you're the sort of person who just wants to sit and draw, consider an in-house job.

None of this is intended as discouragement: if art is what you love, be an artist, and keep being one as long as it brings you pleasure. But be an educated one with a business plan. You'll need that.

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

You don't need to have a recognisable or consistent style right out of the gate. Experimentation is fun, and it's how you figure out what you like, what you're good at, and what your audience responds to. Try everything.

What does the future hold for you?

I don't know. I've been thinking about drawing maps, lately – decorative ones, not utilitarian ones. I've always liked maps. I used to go and look at old ones, from before the world had been plotted out, and admire the fanciful borders and embellishments. Maybe I'll try some of that, only with modern places that I simply haven't explored yet.

Socar is an artist who enjoys birdwatching, peoplewatching, and playing jokes on the neighbours. (Harmless ones, of course.) She believes that people don't reach out to each other often enough and that art's a good way to change that. You can see more of her work at www.gorblimey.com.

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