NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX

WORKSHOP

15 CONCEPTUAL DESIGN TIPS
Visualise and generate original ideas for clients

NEW SKILLS IN

CHARACTER DESIGN
Use Photoshop to paint unique and colourful creations from scratch!

HOW TO USE REFERENCE
The non-cheating way to use photos and guides

"Take a look at Aleksey Baydakov's character rendering process on page 60!"

INSIDE

BRILLIANT BRUSH PEN TECHNIQUES

VINOD RAMS' GNARLED SKETCHES OF PEOPLE

THE HAUNTING AND DARK ART OF ELIZA IVANOVA

FUTURE

ISSUE **177**

KARL KOPINSKI THE BRITISH ARTIST TALKS ABOUT HIS CAREER-DEFINING WORK

FLAME PAINTER 4

**DISCOVER THE BRAND NEW VERSION
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flame.escapemotions.com

Painted by Harvey Bunda

Welcome to…

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

Do you like the two cheeky stars on the cover? Wait, not those ones, I mean the circus performer and the horse… Aleksey Baydakov's art really makes me smile. His cover art has an abundance of attitude and charm, and I think it's the perfect introduction to the rest of this gloriously packed character design edition.

Top marks goes to Serge Birault who put together a character art tips feature (page 74) with a twist: he takes a wry look at what it's like creating art while working for clients. If you're producing art for someone else's vision, or would like to know what it's like, I recommend taking a look at what Serge has to say.

Also inside, there's a sketchbook from Vinod Rams – I love his work! – and a peek inside an artist's studio that's got more charm and space than my entire house. Yes, I am jealous!

I have some jaw-droppingly good artists lined up for the next few issues (see page 72 for next month's details). So if you're not already a subscriber then I would run, not walk, to our subscription pages overleaf as we have a good offer for you.
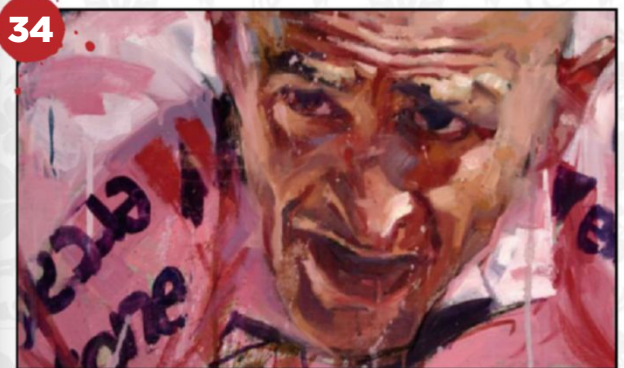
Claire

Claire Howlett, Editor
claire@imaginefx.com

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

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Points of view
We really love to hear from you. Tell us what you want to see more or less of in the mag to: mail@imaginefx.com.

34

The Kopinski version
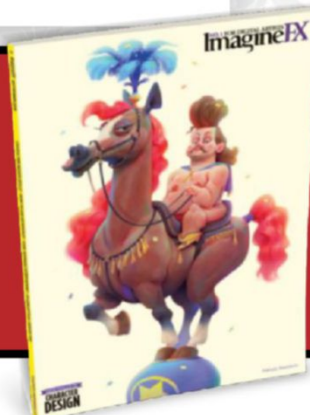We ascend the vertiginous talent of Karl Kopinski and hand him the yellow jersey for his contribution to art.

50

My, my, my, Eliza
I am totally blown away by the line work in the personal art of Pixar animator Eliza Ivanova.

Cover art for
issue 150 by
Loish

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"I guess my style is pretty European"
Karl on his artistic influences

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Eliza adds the personal touch

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Traditional Artist

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS 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/character177design**

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

How to render colour in Photoshop

In his video you can see how Aleksey Baydakov steadily builds up colour on his circus duo, using selection techniques and textures, while keeping layers to a minimum. Turn to page 60 for more.

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/character177design

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

3 Download what you need...
Download the files or watch them via a bespoke YouTube link.

WORKSHOPS

Sculpt and light a model for the perfect reference source

Peter Polach's video gives insights into how he's inspired by a diorama. More on page 66.
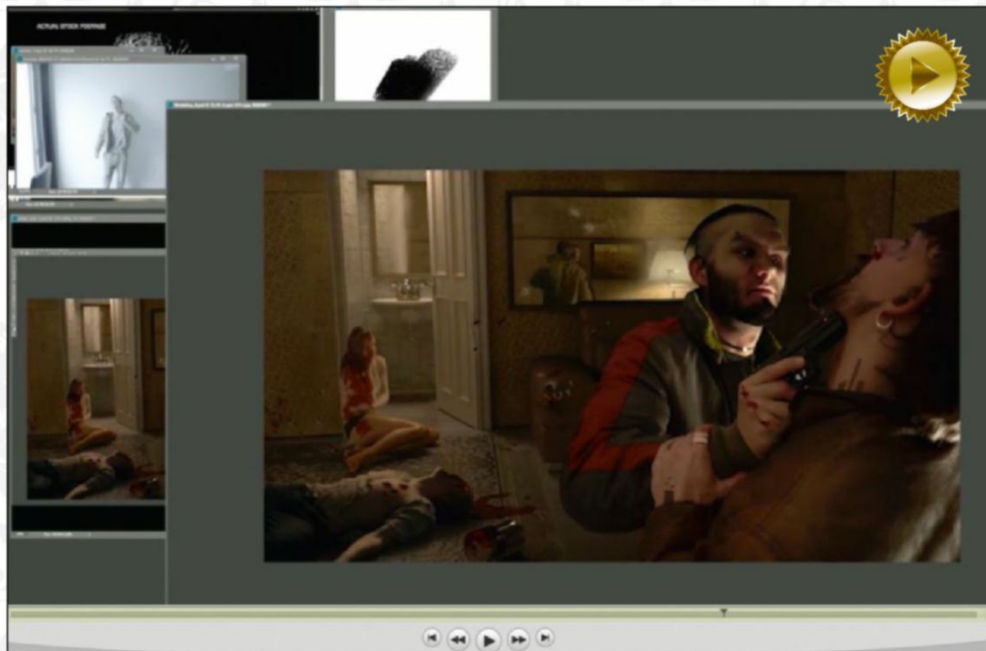
Think cinematically while developing a keyframe

Watch Ivan Khomenko use 2D and 3D tools to create a dramatic scene. See page 80.

TRAINING Unconventional Oil Techniques

Watch a clip from James Gurney's latest instructional video, which we review on page 99.

PLUS 7 CUSTOM BRUSHES, INCLUDING…

SOFT BRUSH
Ivan Khomenko's brush for building up atmospheric depth and haze in his keyframe art.

THE ONE I USE FOR EVERYTHING
Peter Polach uses this brush when he wants to add colour variations with a hint of texture to an object.

MARYBRUSH
This is Mary Glaid's brush for bringing a traditional media feel to her art. It creates a light texture with soft edges.

FXPosé

THE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR DIGITAL ART

Torben Weit

LOCATION: Germany **MEDIA:** Cinema 4D, Photoshop **WEB:** www.instagram.com/torbenweit

Torben worked as a 3D artist in advertising for over six years, before leaving to pursue his love of illustration. His art combines 2D and 3D techniques.
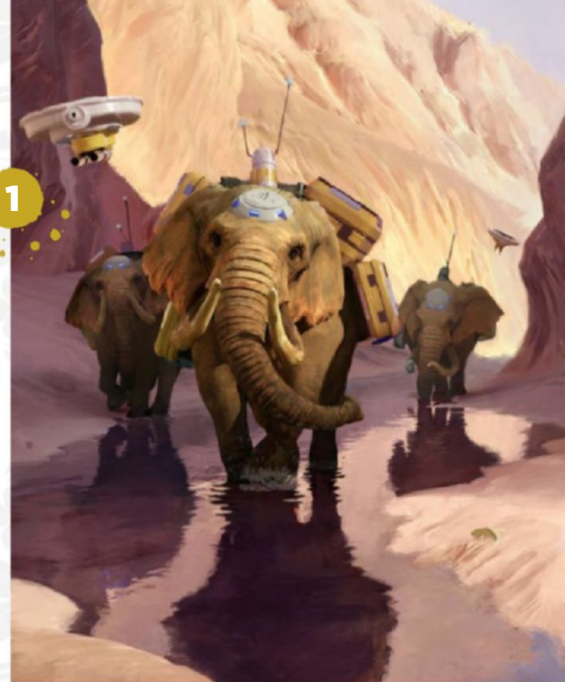
1 **CARGO**
"This painting went through several iterations. In my first version, the elephants were knights on horses, but I felt it would be better to explore another direction."

2 **PARTED**
"My main focus with this painting was on strong emotions and storytelling."

3 **WANDERING**
"Storytelling is always a fun art activity to do. I enjoyed creating subtle clues to what had happened in this world."

4 GUARDIAN
"I decided to keep a lot of the underlying 3D rendered image to give this clean look in the end, but there was still a lot of overpaint and editing involved."

Laura H Rubin

LOCATION: Switzerland **MEDIA:** Procreate, Photoshop **WEB:** www.laurahrubin.com

"I love mysterious people who don't always reveal everything about themselves," says Laura, a graphic designer, and film and VFX artist. "These are the kind of people I try to depict in my art."

1 NOOR & NOOMI
"I created these two figures separately, but wasn't satisfied with the results. Months later I drew them again, combined them in one image and suddenly liked it."

2 NYX
"I've always been fascinated by Greek mythology, which is why many of my drawings have a mythological background. Nyx is the Greek goddess of the night."
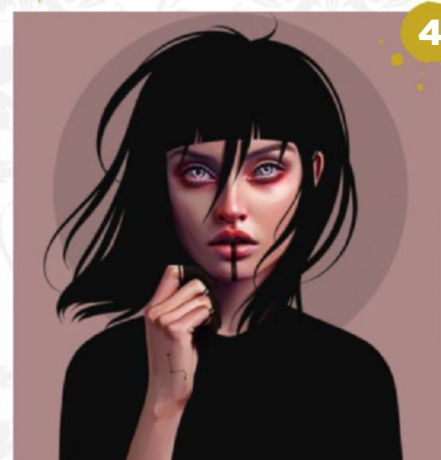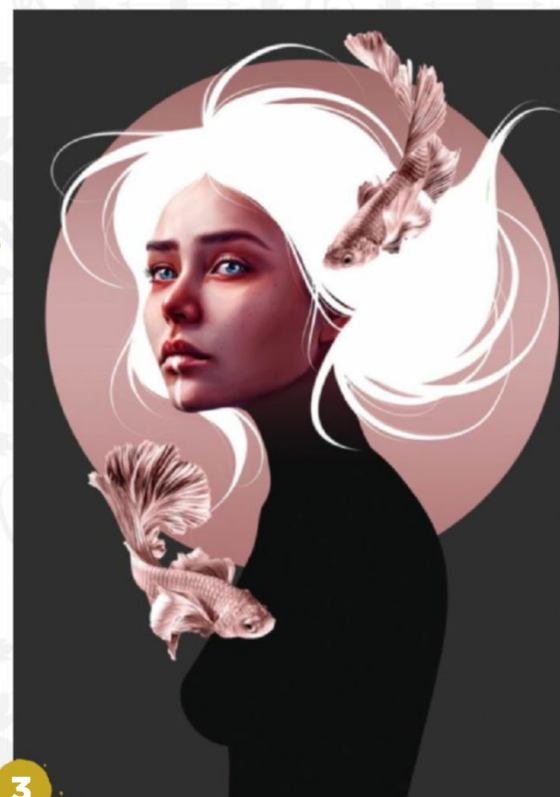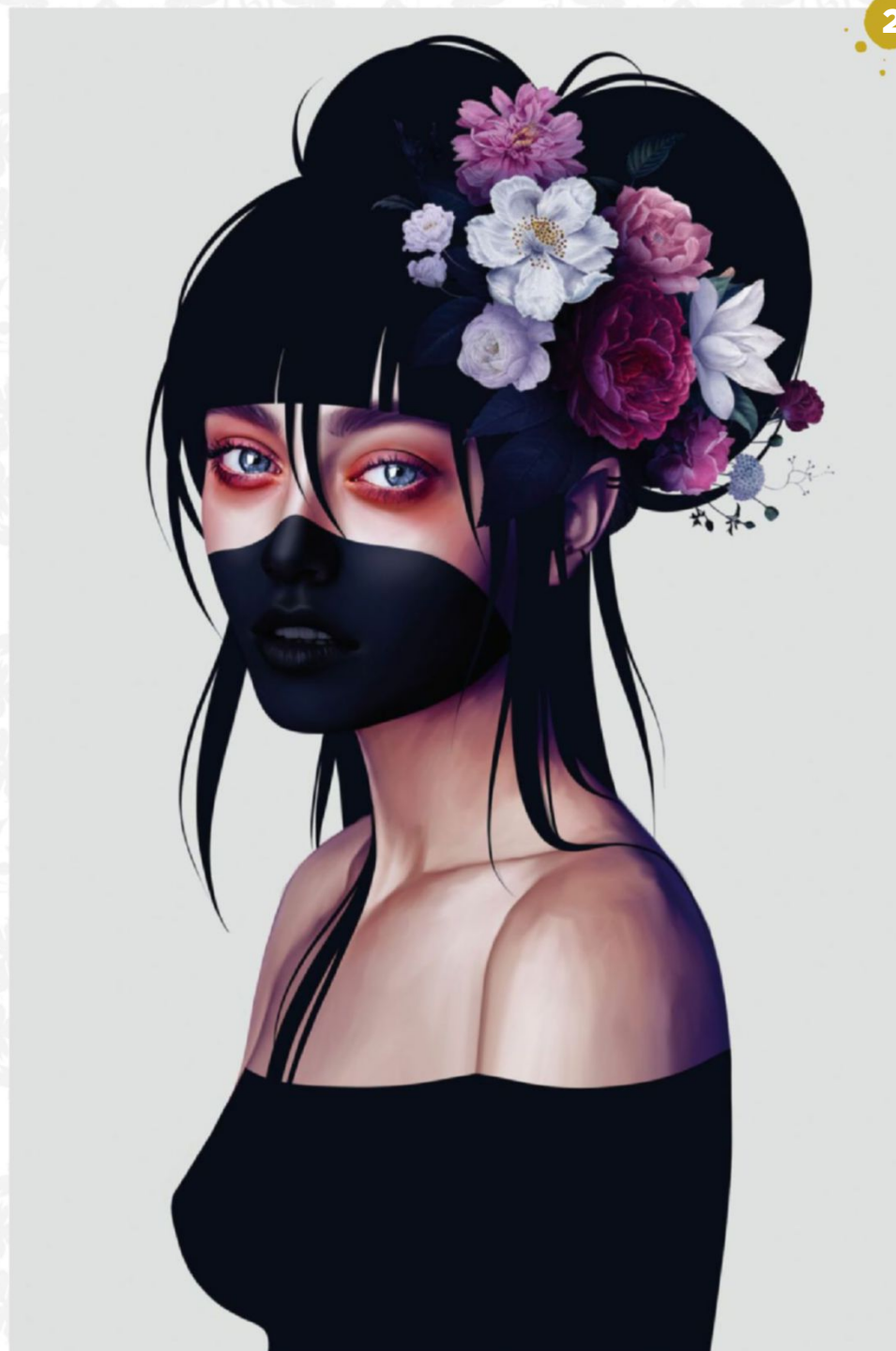
3 CLIO
"Clio is one of the 50 nereids in Greek mythology. The nereids are sea nymphs who protect shipwrecked sailors."

4 GENESIS
"The beautiful model Sade Hugo inspired me to draw this picture. Her expression in almost all of her photos has something mysterious about it…"

FXPosé

Natalie Behle

LOCATION: Germany **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Procreate **WEB:** www.nataliebehle.com

Natalie designs slot machine games and works freelance on mobile games and children's book projects. She mostly uses Photoshop, but will sometimes start paintings using Procreate on her iPad Pro.

© Bergis Medien

1 K.O. COVER
"The cover art for a radio play about teenage detectives. I learned a lot doing cover art, because I'm usually lazy when it comes to backgrounds."

2 YORA ADVENTURES
"This is a key visual for the mobile game Yora Adventures from Triclap, and the biggest group picture I'd ever done. It was a big challenge for me."

3 KOBOLD MAGE
"A cute little goblin mage girl. She's the first character design from my personal RPG project. I really hope I have the time to continue this project soon."

4 K.O. COVER 2
"More cover art for the radio play. I'm glad that I was able to work on so many covers, because I learned so much about lighting, composition and backgrounds."

© Triclap

© Bergis Medien

①

Igor Lomov

LOCATION: Russia **MEDIA:** Photoshop **WEB:** www.instagram.com/blik_47

Igor studied fine art and worked on design and illustration projects, before moving over to digital art. "I don't aim for realistic representation," he says. "Rather, I strive to strike a balance between realistic and exaggerated forms."
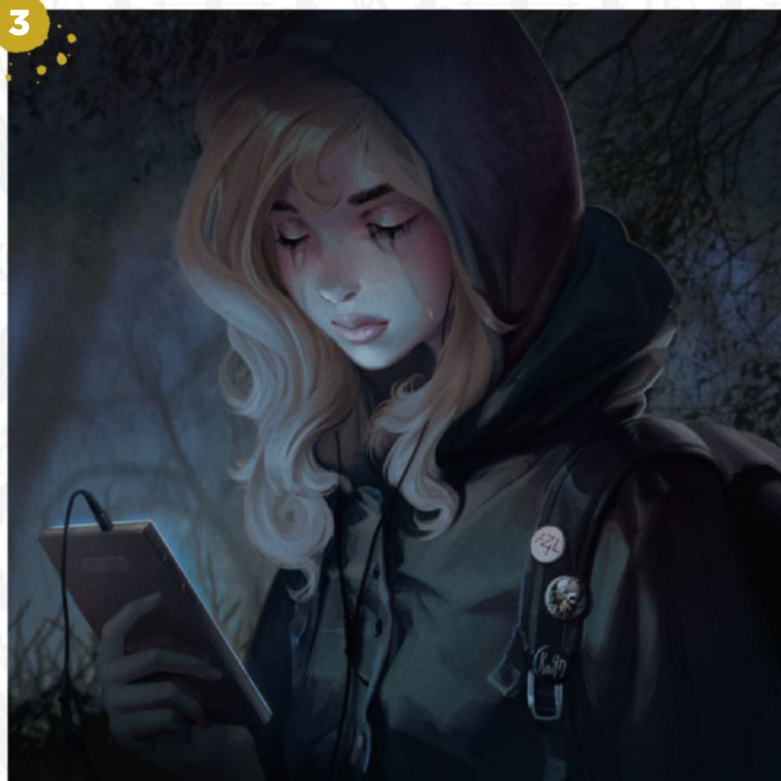
1 TORA
"Tora the cat is trying to get attention of her owner, who is too busy getting ready for a date. Tora can't appreciate make-up – she just wants to be stroked."

2 LONGBOARD GIRL
"A girl is practising her longboard dancing moves. The work was inspired by one of my friends, who lives by the ocean and practices longboarding on a daily basis."

3 LIFE IS PEACHY
"If you look closely then you might see yourself in this portrait. If not, you will see me. This painting is about infinite despair."

4 AZIL TIME
"An illustration from my board game, Azil. This red-haired girl is trying to hide herself from the cruel world of augmentation experiments and forced body modifications."

Artwork for Suzanne Helmigh's book Caldyra. Suzanne creates her own reference packs, and sells them to other artists too.

Kelley McMorris has been shooting her own reference photos since she was in art school.

The artist's guide to using reference

Supporting material Making use of reference is something to be celebrated, not embarrassed about, as pro artists tell **Tom May**

Twitter can be a great place for artists to interact, but sometimes it can spread some odd ideas. For example, recently the hashtag #ArtistConfessions took off, and one of the most popular confessions artists shared was "using references".

Which is bizarre, because as British illustrator and caricaturist **Neil Davies** pointed out, that's exactly what artists should be doing. "That's not something that needs to be confessed, we all use reference!" he tweeted. "Look at probably the most famous American illustrator, Norman Rockwell: I have a book just of his reference photos! Or Drew Struzan: he didn't make up poses, he took photos of himself!"

So where has this idea – that using references is bad – come from? "There's a kind of purist mindset on certain parts of the internet that says using reference for anything more than studying is disrespectful," says North Carolina artist **Ivy Dolamore**. "I think it stems from a frustration with people who trace and recreate what they see without really understanding it. Being a 'copier' isn't flexing your creativity."

IDENTIFYING A GREY AREA

Using references isn't the same as simply 'copying', of course, but there can sometimes be a grey area between the two. "The biggest problem is when artists adhere too closely to the reference image," says California-based illustrator **Kelley McMorris**. "Sometimes a pose or perspective can look natural in a photo, but awkward and stiff in a drawing. It's important to modify the reference ➤➤

> **"There's a purist mindset that says using reference for anything more than studying is disrespectful"**

Alternative film poster for Black Widow by Neil Davies. "You need a decent understanding of the information reference photos are showing you," he says.

Mistborn: personal work by Kelley. "I never thought using references was cheating," because my art professors encouraged it," she says.

"I do historical sword fighting as a sport, so naturally I've used it as a theme for my reference shoots," says Suzanne.

to serve your drawing, not the other way around. Or as my professors sometimes said, 'Don't be a slave to your reference!'"

Suzanne Helmigh, a concept artist and illustrator working in the game and film industry in The Netherlands, agrees. "The key is to understand what you're looking at and not simply draw what you think you see," she says.

"I used to teach people how to paint portraits and I made them study the skull and facial muscles before portraying actual faces. This helped them tons in understanding the proper volumes and proportions."

COMBINE YOUR REFERENCES

Neil feels it's important to use more than just one reference. "I'll always try to find a good selection of images to look at, even when I'm drawing from

> ## " Understand what you're looking at – don't just draw what you think you see "

one main one," he says. "I'll often use one reference photo for drawing a face, for example, then another for a lighting reference, and maybe another for a colour scheme idea. Combining lots of different references is a great way to be creative."

Speak to most pro artists and you'll hear a similar story. Admittedly, one notable exception is Korean comic artist **Kim Jung Gi**, who famously doesn't use references. Even he, though, doesn't purely rely on his imagination. As he explains in an interview on his website: "I observe things all the time. I don't take references while I'm drawing, but

"For this piece I used both lighting and 3D reference, because I had a perspective in mind that I'm not very used to," says Ivy Dolamore.

Dave-o the necromancer by Samuel Read. "Reference is essential in creating believable characters, props and environments," he says.

I'm always collecting visual resources. I observe them carefully on a daily basis, almost habitually. I study images of all sorts and genres."

WATCH OUT FOR COPYRIGHT

So where can you find references? Google Images and Pinterest are the obvious go-tos, but don't forget about copyright. "Sometimes I worry that I've stuck too closely to a photo that I found online," says Kelley. "So if I do use photos from online sources, I try to find copyright-free stock photos, and I always try to change the reference substantially. For example, I might change the model's costume, or only use their hand for reference rather than the entire pose."

Alternatively, she'll simply cut out the middleman and shoot her own references instead. "I usually just dig through my closet for something
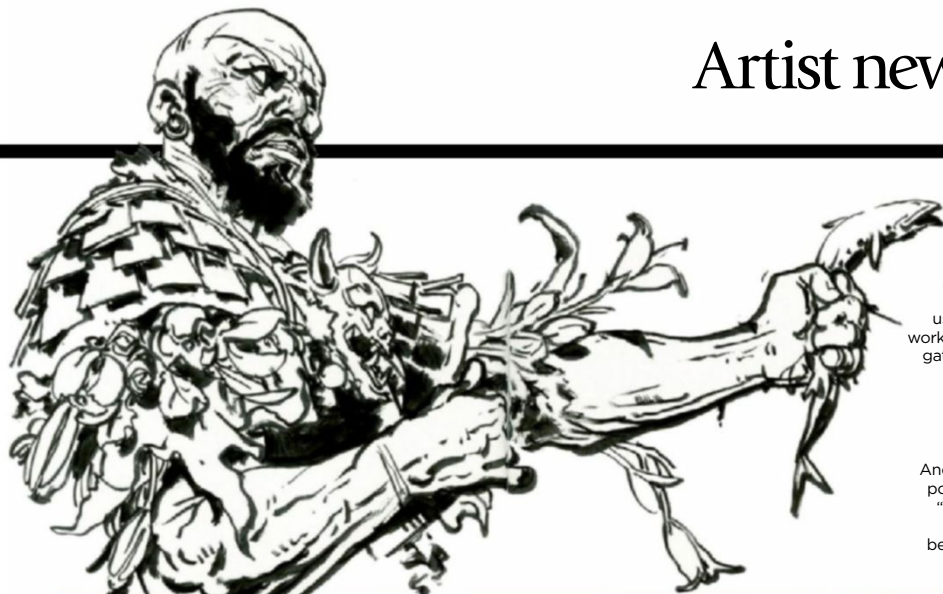
Artist Kim Gung Gi famously doesn't use references in his work, although he does gather visual material to inspire it.

Another personal film poster piece, by Neil. "The only danger in using references is becoming too reliant on them," he says.

JOAQUIN PHOENIX

PUT ON A HAPPY FACE

JOKER

OCTOBER 4

SUZANNE HELMIGH

The film and game artist explains how she uses references

What would you say to an artist who thinks using references is "cheating"?
Is it cheating for a doctor to learn what's inside a body by actually looking inside a corpse? Text-based knowledge can only get us so far. We need as much real-life reference as we can to properly understand how things work. Working with reference doesn't mean you'll copy what you see. It's about learning to understand what you see, and alter it where needed. Using multiple references is often the most beneficial.

When and why did you start using references in your work?
After getting through a rather stubborn phase on my learning curve, I started looking more and more at reference, both from photographs, and actual props and fabrics. As I went to work for bigger game studios, my work had to become even more realistic. Eventually an art director from Wizards of the Coast, for whom I do Magic: The Gathering illustrations, advised doing photoshoots with people in costume, to achieve that next-level of realism.

Why did you start sharing your reference packs?
I uploaded my first reference pack in 2016, because people kept asking me to share my private reference photoshoots. Myself and my friends do historical sword fighting as a sport, so naturally I ended up using it as a theme for my shoots. I've seen many people use them for anatomy studies as well as illustrations for book covers and card games, and even as base models for game concept art.

Suzanne's worked on video games such as Horizon Zero Dawn, and painted for League of Legends and D&D.

www.gumroad.com/refpack

Deep below the blue surface, there lies a place no one has ever dreamed of...

"References enable you to inject a real-world feeling that people can relate to," says Samuel.

➤➤ I can use as a costume, grab whatever's lying around the house as a prop, and take a few shots with my phone," she explains. "It only takes a few minutes, but can save me an hour of struggling to draw from imagination. By taking your own photos, you'll not only avoid any copyright infringement, but you'll also learn about what kinds of poses, angles and lighting work best for reference."

"For alternative film poster projects, websites such as Movie Stills DB are useful for digging up images you might need," says Neil.

CREATE YOUR OWN POSES

That said, photography is just one way to create your own references. Ivy, for example, creates her own 3D model references using DesignDoll, helping her to map out poses, perspective and shadows. "This gives me a result I like, although you can't just copy what DesignDoll gives you, either," she says. This does, of course, take a little time. And Samuel Read, a concept artist at Mighty Kingdom based in Adelaide, admits that until recently

Scared Ghost by Samuel. "As a young artist, I learned pretty quickly that the best artists make use of reference," he says.

66 Listening to professionals saying they use reference has helped me immensely 99

time pressures dissuaded him from using references as often as he should, even while he was recommending the practice to others.

As **Samuel** explains, "Although I used reference for things like inspiration and developing ideas, I was lacking in using photos and life drawing for tasks such as posing my characters, making expression studies, and designing different kinds of hands, feet, eyes, noses, mouths and so on."

But then the #ArtistConfessions hashtag made the artist rethink his process and focus more on these areas – and this approach has made an impact in his work. "The use of more varied reference photos, as well as drawing from life, have started to teach me more about the different ways in which people are constructed, and methods of communicating ideas, such as making someone's hands read as old, weathered and tired, or hard and strong," Samuel says.

In conclusion, using references can be full of pitfalls, but done in the right manner it'll make you a better artist. "Listening to professionals proudly saying they use reference has helped me immensely," says Ivy. "Learning that work I admire isn't created out of thin air gives me the confidence to think, 'Oh, I can do that, too'. I've stopped thinking as much about the purism and more about how I can achieve that initial vision. Why not use the tools available?"

Reference photos and finished art of The Moon Knight by Kelley. "People on social media seem to enjoy seeing my photo references," she says.
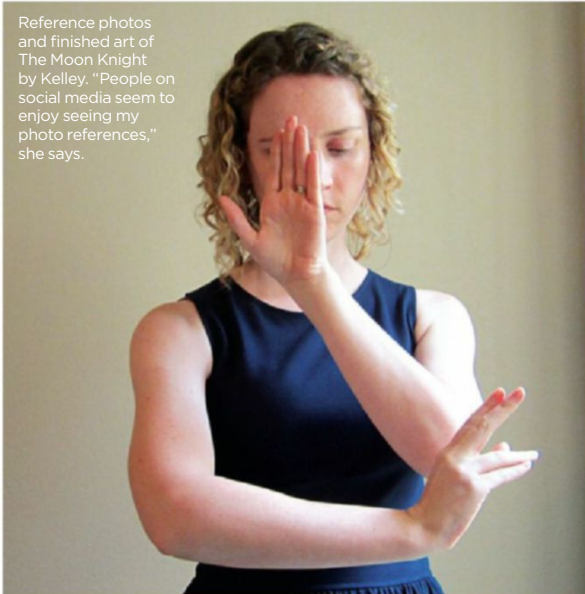
In the past, Suzanne's persuaded friends to "strip to their undies for anatomical photo-shoots".

Disney artist Mingjue Helen Chen created this year's event poster for Trojan Horse Was a Unicorn.

This is the second year that THU will take place in Malta – previously the event had been held in Portugal.

The talk programme includes some of the biggest names in the art industry.

Trojan Horse Was a Unicorn taps into the tribe mentality

Horn of plenty We find out what attendees can expect at this year's highly anticipated art event, and learn the story behind the stunning new poster

Trojan Horse Was a Unicorn (THU) will be returning to Malta on 23-28 September. The event aims to provide a "transformative experience" for digital artists and creative professionals, through a packed programme of talks, workshops and activities led by some of the biggest stars in the industry.

Since its launch in 2013, THU has built up a devoted community of attendees, referred to by THU's

organisers as the tribe. It's an element captured in this year's stunning event poster by Disney art director **Mingjue Helen Chen**. Based on the theme Legend of the Seventh Unicorn, the poster (above) shows the tribe celebrating

Running alongside the talks are workshops, recruitment sessions and demonstrations to inspire and inform the THU 'tribe'.

the unicorn's arrival and embarking on their seventh journey of self-discovery.

"From the prompt there was a sense of mystery and discovery," says Helen. "I went with a bright colour palette and a lot of magical cloud elements to give it that sense of wonder." She also avoided showing the faces of the tribe

members, so anyone who saw the poster could imagine themselves as one of the group.

"I attended THU a couple of years ago and since have been a fan of the event and of the wonderful people who put their heart and soul into creating such a unique experience," Helen adds.

This year's THU is shaping up to be another inspiring event, with confirmed speakers including veteran illustrator Greg Manchess; Vaughan Ling, who won an Academy Award for his work on Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse; and Andrew Gordon, known for his work on A Bug's Life, Toy Story 2 and 3, and Monsters Inc.

For more details and tickets, go to **www.trojan-unicorn.com**.

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I've been tackling this watercolour painting on and off for a few months now. I love creating large mixed-media works, with coloured pencil and gold leaf as well.

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

Jacquelin de Leon

Lights, camera, action The artist and YouTuber shows us around her studio she uses to create paintings and videos

I've had this studio for about two years. It acts not only as my workspace and inspiration, but as a filming area for my YouTube videos. It's part of an old converted canning factory, which is located in the heart of San Jose, California.

This is just one corner of the 1,000 square foot studio, the rest of which is filled with a screen-printing area, and a packing and shipping station for online orders. I've moved studios several times in the past five years, and this is by far the most open and inspiring space that I've been blessed to work in.

Because this old building gets pretty hot in the summer, I usually end up painting at night. I used to have my digital art workstation set up here, but have since moved it to my apartment because it gets so warm. Here, I mostly ➦

My enamel pin collection is spread over two pin boards, I love collecting pins from my artist friends. And I hope that one day I can display more awesome statues, but for now it's just Chun-li and Ramona Flowers.

ImagineNation Artist in Residence

In the evening when I'm working on my computer I leave these string lights turned on – they set a nice, relaxing mood.

I like to display some of my favourite artists' work with some of my own that I'm proud of. It's like curating a small gallery.

I keep a small easel for working on acrylic or gouache pieces. It makes a change from hunching over my watercolour art.

I have a watercolour palette addiction: there's a box full of palettes on my shelf. I love using different brands and testing them on my YouTube channel.

I keep a stock of large wooden and gessoed panels next to my desk. It's motivating to see unopened canvases ready for paint!

We have a screen printing setup here as well (not pictured), where we print the shirts and tote bags for my shop.

❝ This is by far the most open and inspiring space that I've been blessed to work in ❞

I have a guardian llama figure that I bought from a thrift store. His name is Paco and he watches over the studio.

I love keeping my YouTube silver play button award on show. It's a constant reminder of how much I love making videos and storytelling through my process.

I have a few of those useful Ikea wheeled carts, where I keep my house paint buckets and water while painting on large canvases and murals.

I turned my flat file into a rolling work table. One day I hope to hold life-drawing nights, painting workshops and crafting parties in this space, so having large tables is a must!
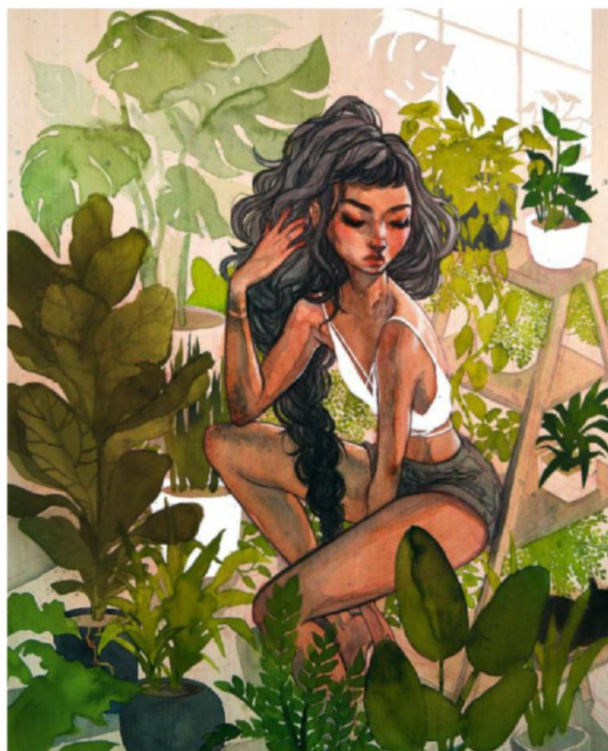
This 18x24-inch watercolour piece, entitled Greenhouse, was part of my solo exhibition.

I love surrounding myself with plants – they liven up any space! This heart leaf philodendron has been with me for three years and has completely taken over this shelf.

Here's my small digital workspace. It's still a new space so I haven't filled the walls with anything... yet! I recently upgraded to a Cintiq Pro 24, and when I'm not home I use an iPad for my digital work.

➤ work on my traditional paintings, usually with watercolours or acrylics, while my assistant packages orders for my shop.

I love decorating the walls of my studio: there's something so inspiring about having an aesthetically pleasing workspace. I surround myself with colours, tools, books, other artists' work and blank canvases to keep the creative juices flowing. It also works well as a beautiful backdrop for my YouTube channel, where I film my watercolour process, daily life, and help other artists start their business.

I'm usually a horribly disorganised person. My computer's desktop is always a mess of files and junk folders arranged by year. Yet when it comes to my art workspace, everything has a

This small shelf is dedicated to things that remind me of my black cat, Future.

"Using a studio away from home forces me to go out in order to get work done"

place. Having a large pegboard above me while I work helps tremendously with keeping my favourite tools within reach. I try to have a lot of containers for tools and supplies I use often, so that I never get stuck throwing everything into one drawer.

CREATIVE HERMIT
I've had several types of studios: a bedroom workspace, a backyard shed studio and this studio, which is about two miles from my home. It's so nice having a studio in your home, but I

always ended up becoming a hermit and not leaving the house for days at a time – sometimes weeks! Using a studio away from home forces me to go out in order to get work done, and it also forces me to socialise. I've met a bunch of other artists who also work in the building, and we visit each other during our painting breaks.

The only downside is that I can't bring my cat with me, and sadly he's no longer photobombing my YouTube videos by plopping down on my wet paint palettes.

Jacquelin is an illustrator and comic artist from San Jose, California, and looks after two cats called Future and Dumpling. Use @jacquelindeleon to find her on Twitter or Instagram, or see more of her work at www.jacquelindeleon.com.

This pegboard is by far the best studio decision I've made, both organisationally and aesthetically. Every tool has its place and is within easy reach while I'm working. It also gives me more desk space.

A mermaid painting done for the Mermay challenge this year, made using watercolours and coloured pencils.

A small selection of art books I've collected. I love looking through the books of my favourite films, especially How to Train Your Dragon. I also have a large collection of zines and art books from so many amazing artists.

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Letters

YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS

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Reader Dave thought that in recent issues we've struck the right balance between printing informative text and showing striking imagery.

Compliments on July 2019

I can't tell you how much I enjoyed the July 2019 edition. This is a well-balanced issue of images and text. I've been wary of the magazine as of late, due to the overuse of text. This issue and June 2019 have rekindled my enjoyment of your publication. Great work.
Dave Curbis, via email

Claire replies *Hello David, thank you for your kind comments. I think I'm probably too close to the magazine to know if one issue has more text than another, but I'll take your word for it that the June and July issues had fewer words! Here's to more imagery…*

Pleasant surprise

Your magazine was brought to my attention by artist Elias Chatzoudis who I follow through DeviantArt. He said he was going to be in one of your issues (174), providing insight into some of his digital colouring techniques.

I like to see various art mediums, techniques and/or styles, and what materials and/or references are used in the creative process, such as hair styles, clothing, jewellery and vehicles.

In closing, this is a pleasant surprise compared with what I've experienced with other magazine subscriptions in the past. I want to thank you – it shows

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you're very passionate about your position and concerned about your subscribers. It's rarely seen today. Claire, you have done an amazing job making my purchasing experience memorable, and again thank you! Great job.
Clint, via email

Claire replies *Clint, you have made my day! I love my job, so I'm very glad that it comes across in what I produce. By the way, I loved your list of what you like to see – this reminds me to hunt out some great artists to do a workshop on materials for us soon. Thanks for the idea.*

Take my money… please?

I'm new to ImagineFX. I first saw it on CreativeBloq. You have some wonderful articles and great resources, and I wanted to buy a digital copy of a past issue. But I was met with two hours of frustration and not being able to purchase. The Zino site is for the birds. If I want to make a one-time purchase I have to save my card details. Then if I don't want it left on their site I have to go back and delete it. Not only that but I tried twice to make a purchase and it wouldn't accept a Visa card.

I even talked to the live chat. All they did was give me links, and that was like chasing my tail. You folks may have decided to make it easier so you wouldn't have to handle the buying and selling of back issues, but depending on other companies like Zino doesn't sound like a good idea to me.

I was finally able to get it on Google, but not for Windows. Why is it available for iOS, but not Windows? I hope you can make it a better buying experience for Windows users in the future.
Steve Koch, via email

Claire replies *Steve, I'm sorry to hear about your problems with Zinio. I'm afraid that for digital editions we have to use third-party companies such as Zinio, and we have no power over their web experience. It may help you to know that we're also available via Apple Newsstand (iOS), Google News (Android), Amazon, and also Barnes & Noble's Nook. But, as you say, most of these options are for a tablet, rather than a desktop.*

Most of these digital edition companies offer a free trial, but they do stipulate that you enter your credit card details first. It's relatively standard practice for companies to do this when offering a trial. I'm sorry, but that's not something we can change.

If you want to buy print editions, our online shop link is to the left.

FRESH PAINT

New works that have grabbed our attention

Mariam's Ibrahim
@mariamibrahimart

Christy Tortland
@christytortland

Shawn Bailey
@shawn_bailey_art

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

——— ARTIST PORTFOLIO ———

KARL KOPINSKI

The British artist talks **Gary Evans** through a varied career,
which includes video game concepts and portraits of cyclists

Karl Kopinski has an ongoing series of paintings about professional cycling. These paintings don't show the roads on which teams race, routes leading up and down the rolling green hills of Tuscany, through the packed streets of Paris. They don't show dozens of speeding cyclists packed tightly together, the combative side of the sport, the danger. They don't even show bikes. Karl's paintings are essentially close-ups of sweaty blokes in lycra pulling faces.

Take his portrait of Marco Pantani: brow deeply creased, mouth hanging open, face twisted with physical strain. Cycling fans will know why Karl picked the Italian cyclist as a subject. In 1998 Pantani won the Tour de France and the Giro d'Italia, one of only a handful of cyclists to come top in cycling's two most prestigious races in the same year. He was an aggressive rider, shaved his head, and wore bandanas and earrings. Fans loved him and called him The Pirate. Karl's painting of Pantani seems to work like a good piece of photojournalism: illuminating both sportsman and sport, capturing a moment.

Karl does sometimes work from photographic reference, and a quick Google search brings up the exact image he used to paint Pantani's portrait. He's taken away the background – road, bike, spectators –

but he's added something, too. There's a haunting aspect about Pantani's eyes, something suggesting they're troubled by more than just physical strain. It's the kind of thousand-yard stare that reminds you of soldiers photographed after the battle, the stare that you see in all of Karl's cycling portraits.

YOUR OWN APPROACH
Born and brought up in Nottingham, Karl was "kind of a weird kid, a little introverted and pretty obsessive from an early age." His parents were into ▶▶

> 66 **Growing up, I was kind of a weird kid, a little introverted and pretty obsessive from an early age** 99
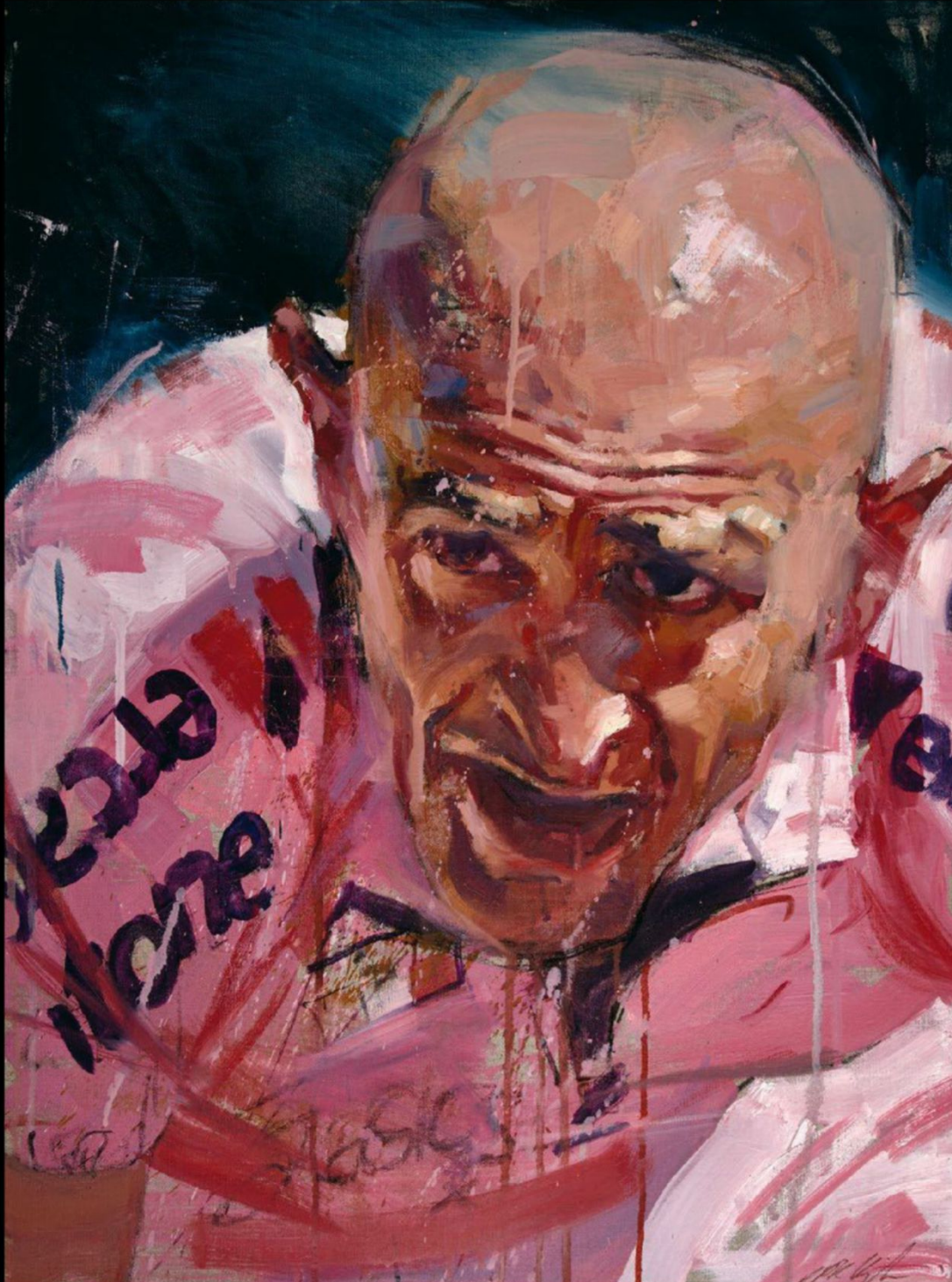
MARCO PANTANI
"I left a lot of the underdrawing showing
and worked on it quickly. I like the energy
and rawness." This print and others are
available to buy from Karl's website.

ULTRAMARINES CODEX COVER
"This oil painting was big. It's one of the most popular Games Workshop 40K armies. I'll probably never sell this painting. There's a little self-portrait on a dead marine."

© Games Workshop

© Rackham

art and music (Karl's sister is a musician). There wasn't a lot of spare money in the house, but he and his brother (who's also an artist) always had pens, paper and modelling clay to play with – if only because it was a cheap way of keeping them out of bother. Karl was ambidextrous from a young age. As he got a bit older, he started favouring his right hand for playing sport, but his left hand for drawing and painting.

Karl studied fine art at university in Sunderland, north-east England, but he didn't enjoy his time in the city. His attitude wasn't great, but the course didn't meet Karl's expectations, either. His teachers had little interest in teaching illustration or figurative painting techniques, or indeed any of the stuff that Karl was into. He only just scraped through, graduating in 1993 with a third, the lowest degree classification. The three-year course was so unproductive that Karl, looking back at his time at University of Sunderland, now describes himself as self-taught.

"After graduating, I had to go about teaching myself, which has been great in that you can really develop your own approach and style, but also

AT-43
"The sci-fi tabletop game AT-43 was a great series to work on because Rackham rarely allowed us to paint the characters in a situations other than battle."

difficult in that one tends to learn very inefficiently, making mistakes over and over again, which I still do now."

GAMES WORKSHOP

Karl eventually found work on a small comic called Warhammer Monthly, published by Games Workshop, a company based in Nottingham that was making tabletop gaming miniatures. It was a relatively small comic, but it featured good artists and writers. Karl contributed for a couple of years. In 1997, Games Workshop offered him a job in-house. He started out illustrating rule books with black and white images, then moved on to colour images for packaging. He learned a lot from two other in-house artists: Adrian Smith and Paul Dainton.

"Adrian Smith: I remember that being a real steep learning curve.

Teaching yourself means you can develop your own approach and style… but one tends to learn inefficiently

DRAGON'S GUARD
"I was inspired to do this personal piece after reading the Temeraire series of novels by Naomi Novik."
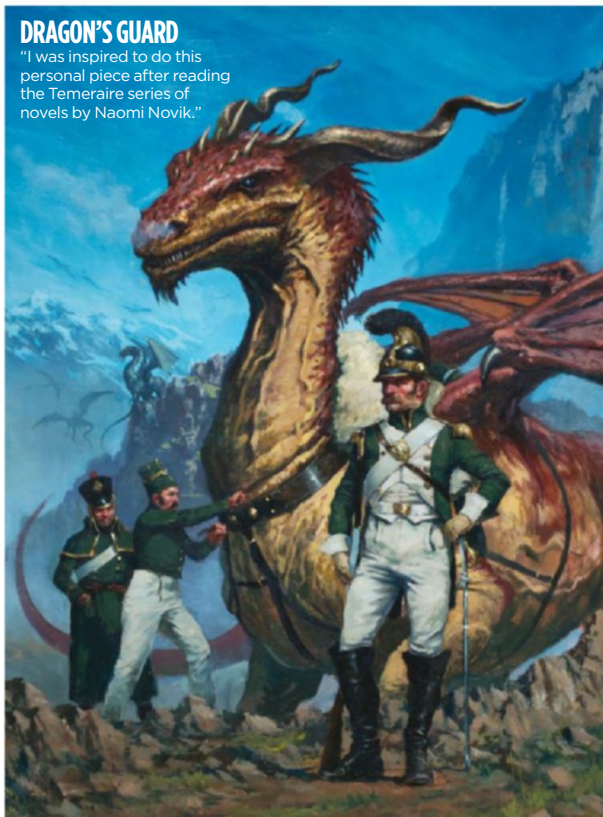
MAGIC: THE GATHERING
"This piece was never actually used for a card, only for packaging, but had proved to be one of my most popular Magic: The Gathering pieces ever."

EYE IN THE SKY

Vespas, Tuscany, steampunk: Karl explains how he made this epic poster for a convention, and the eclectic inspirations behind it

"In 2015 I was asked to do the poster for the Lucca Comics and Games festival, one of the biggest in the world with around 400,000 attendees. The organisers also had an exhibition of my work. We chose a steampunk theme. They asked me to feature one of the towers from the city in the painting. I was inspired by the light around the Tuscan hills and also wanted to include a nod to that icon of Italian design, the Vespa scooter, hence the flying biker girls.

I start most of these paintings with a series of thumbnail sketches, very rough, trying to focus on the key compositional elements and looking for something with a nice flow **(1)**. After the sketch was approved I move on to a colour rough, which is often

a photo of the drawing taken into Photoshop or Procreate. Here I'm trying to nail down a colour palette and values **(2)**.

Once we agree on the composition, I move on to a detailed sketch **(3)**, starting to look at the design of the key characters and refining the main elements. All of this is done with little or no reference. This is key at this point, because I want to retain as much energy and movement as possible. Working too closely from photographs at an early stage can often make the image look a little wooden and staged.

I tend to cover the image in a wash to get rid of all the white. I'll vary the tone depending on the painting. For this one I used complementary blues and purples

to get the light to pop. I tend to block in the background first and work to the foreground from there, trying to keep the shadows more thinly painted with a slightly more glazed technique to give them depth, and far more thick, almost impasto paint on the areas in light **(4)**.

Now it's a matter of getting in there with the paints. I usually use a similar palette for most paintings, arranged in this order: blue black, burnt sienna, yellow ochre, titanium white, cadmium yellow, alizarin crimson, cadmium red, ultramarine blue and violet. I'll sometimes change the primaries around a little, depending on the painting, but I try to stick to a limited range because it teaches me to mix and think about the values of the paint I'm applying **(5)**.

I spend a lot of time working the mid-tones and blocking in the large forms with as big a brush as I can possibly get away with, adding more detail towards the end **(6)**. I read an excellent piece of advice from the great Greg Manchess that said: 'As soon as you think the painting may be nearly finished, put it to one side and take a good look at it, because at this point you are in danger of overworking it.' This is something I've fallen foul of many times!"

> ❝ **I try to stick to a limited colour range because it teaches me to mix and think about the values of the paint I'm applying** ❞

40K BATTLE SCENE
"From my days at Games Workshop. I enjoyed doing these bigger pieces, overloading the details. They were an opportunity to go crazy with ideas and try and capture the whole religious fervour."

© Games Workshop

BIKER GIRL
"Working quickly without reference, I do at least one drawing like this most days, which I post to my Instagram page."

ELVISH ARCH
"I managed to do a decent painting of an important Magic card. (I normally do a good painting for an unimportant one, or a digital painting for a powerful card, meaning I have no original to sell to collectors.)"

➤➤ I had to paint as quickly as he paints and, man, he's a machine! So fast with an incredible sense of lighting and design using little or no reference. When you're put in that position, you really have to learn fast. Also, working with Paul Dainton was incredible: he's still one of my favourite artists. He has an amazing ability to paint epic scenes. Always coming up with new angles and approaches with a really strong understanding of the figure."

After seven years, Karl left Games Workshop to go freelance. Being an in-house artist meant making art while following the in-house style, which became restrictive: "I should have left after four years really. The first three or four years were good, but like a relationship that drags on too long… I was kept on quite a tight leash."

❝ I have a real love for many of the classical artists, but there's a huge amount of influence in there, too ❞

Freelance was a revelation. Right after leaving Games Workshop, Karl received a commissioned from art director Paolo Parente to work on a tabletop game called AT-43. Karl asked Paolo about the kind of work he was looking for. Paolo said: 'Do your thing. We want the Kopinski version!' But what is the Kopinski version?

"I think people can become a little preoccupied with creating a definitive style. For me, it's something far more organic that develops over many years. It's really a mix of all your influences and experiences. I guess my style is pretty European. I have a real love for many of the classical artists, but there's a huge amount of influence in there, too. Working at Games Workshop helped a lot: there was such a great team of artists, writers and sculptors, so many different influences."

SKETCHING AND CYCLING

Karl has a small studio at home in Nottingham. He works long hours, often still sitting with his sketchbook on his knee late into the evening, but most lunchtimes he goes out cycling for an hour or two. ➤➤

© Wizards of the Coast

THE BOSS
"I've known CMON's creative director David Preti since I first went freelance – he's a joy to work with."

© CMON Limited

SLAVE OF BOLAS
"Another of my Magic: The Gathering pieces, painted in oil on primed watercolour paper. My wife posed as the model for this one."

COGS COVER
"Another piece for Rackham's AT-43 game: I sold many of these originals when I moved house. I wish I'd kept a couple because they were from a significant point in my career – but, hey ho, bills to pay."

Interview

ASSASSINS CREED
"A real benchmark piece for me. I finally felt like I was getting a name for myself when Raphael Lacoste contacted me."

DRAGONLORD ATARKA
"Another oil painting for MTG. I'm not usually that good at dragons, but I was pretty happy with this one – I wanted the creature to feel huge and lumbering."

DUST POSTER
"A fun project while working with the awesome Paolo Parente. I really wanted to get that WWII vibe."

GETTING A KILLER ART ASSIGNMENT

Karl on why his time on Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag was professionally and personally important

"Working on Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag with the amazing Raphael Lacoste was a pretty incredible experience. I had a proper geek-out when I got that particular gig!

My job was really just throwing a few ideas in the mix. They already had a great team who'd produced some fantastic work. I think my eye for historical detail and aesthetic helped.

After producing a series of character sketches – investigating various costume ideas – I then produced the image that you see here in Photoshop. I think it was like a mood-inspiration piece, really. I'm not sure it was ever used for advertising or anything like that. The hardest part was probably that they needed a young, handsome character and, being a haggard middle-aged man myself, I kept making him look too old!

Turning freelance and having so much faith put in my work was huge. I'm not a naturally confident person, so realising that my vision, my ideas and my interpretation were what clients were looking for was great, and something I didn't feel while working at Games Workshop.

Raphael is the ultimate art director and an incredible artist in his own right. He also he gave me a lot of freedom. But when he does offer an opinion it inevitably improves the work. He's also great at the things I struggle with: mood setting and environments. He's got a great eye for that stuff. The Assassin's Creed job was just a real blast."

He's now in a position to pick and choose clients (a mixed bag that includes Hasbro, Ubisoft and Wizards of the Coast, film director and producer Peter Jackson, and fashion designer Sir Paul Smith). Typically, a commercial commission begins with a brief. Karl draws a selection of thumbnail sketches based on his instructions and the clients choose which one they want. For sketching, he likes Prismacolor black pencils, Pentel brush pens and graphite sticks.

Next, he draws a more detailed pencil sketch, occasionally adding colour. Between the thumbnails and the detailed sketch, Karl sometimes makes a very rough compositional drawing, blocking out the image with large shapes and working into them

"using fast gestural lines to get plenty of movement."

This movement, the piece's energy, can sometimes fade as the piece becomes more refined. This is something Karl that always keeps an eye on. He stopped working digitally four years ago (there were so many different tools and options that he became bogged down in technique and lost sight of the overall image) so it's important to plan the image thoroughly before painting it using either oils or watercolours.

"I find visualising my initial idea the hardest part because it's the real foundation. If you don't get these first steps right then you can struggle all the way through the whole painting. If I'm working on a big painting, I'll shoot a little reference, then start splashing the oil paints on!

"I'm lucky I can do a lot of the work without reference these days. The amount of sketching I do has really helped with this. I'll only get reference if I need it for specific materials or lighting, sometimes for backgrounds – I'm not very good at environments.

"I like working like this because I tend to have three or four different projects on the go, all quite varied in

approach. So if I find myself frustrated I can move on to some sketching or more loose painting."

REGAINING CONTROL

Karl's freelance career was going well, but commercial work comes with expectations, deadlines and pressure. He wanted something over which he had total control.

He started his ongoing series of professional cycling paintings in 2012. It was a passion project, something enjoyable to do on the side, but – as

> 66 I tend to have three or four different projects on the go, all quite varied in approach 99

is often the case with these things – it ended up being successful. In 2014, Sir Paul Smith, himself a big cycling fan, spotted Karl's work and exhibited it in one of his London shops. Sir Paul later published these paintings in his scrapbook about cycling. Karl would go on to paint his portrait.

"I encourage every artist to try and have something like this to work on without pressure," says Karl. "It enables

SIR PAUL SMITH
"A personal piece I gave to Paul and has since featured in a few of his exhibition books. I like the fact that I used his signature pink colour in the background."
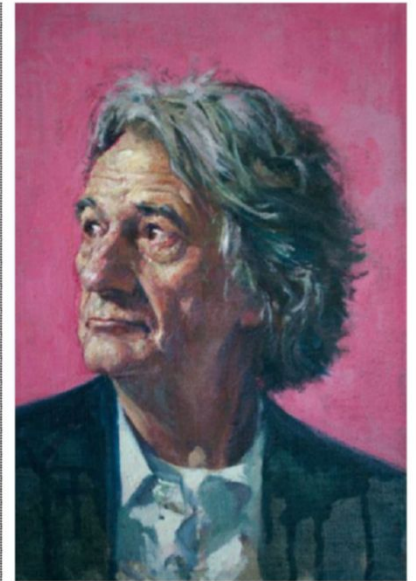
you to really explore themes and techniques which can filter through the rest of your work."

THE APPEAL OF CYCLING

It's easy to see why Karl chose cycling as a subject to paint. It's a favourite pastime of his, a way to both relax and stay fit, but professional cycling is full of drama and danger and scandal and tragedy. It's an opera as much as it is a sport.

Cycling fans will know Marco Pantani was a talented sports person, but that he was also a tragic figure. He was repeatedly accused of taking banned drugs to help him win. In 1999, he was kicked out of the Giro d'Italia for failing a drug test. He fell into a deep depression. A few years later he stopped seeing family and friends, barricaded himself inside his hotel room and died of a drug overdose.

But what is Karl really getting at in these cycling paintings: a series that eschews the roads, the races, the bikes, portraits connected by their subjects haunted and haunting eyes? Is he saying something about how cyclists – like soldiers, like all of us – can do bad things but still be good people, can be both heroes and villains? Is he comparing the loneliness of the professional cyclist to loneliness of the professional artist? Or are these paintings just really good close-ups of sweaty blokes in lycra pulling faces?

Karl answers, in a roundabout way: "My favourite art looks, to me, like the artist has refined and developed such a high level of skill that they have the confidence to understate everything: it's far more engaging when the viewer is doing some of the work."

Sketchbook

Vinod Rams

Demons, cyborgs and overweight birds feature in the sketchbook of this veteran vis-dev artist, who's also a big D&D fan!

Artist PROFILE

Vinod Rams
LOCATION: US

Vinod has been creating characters, creatures and worlds for tabletop and video games for over 20 years. He was one of the main character designers on the indie video game Gigantic, and is now is working as a freelance visual development artist for various clients in the entertainment industry. He likes drawing wrinkly old people in his spare time.
www.vinodrams.com

SOMETHING FISHY

"Random characters from my sketchbooks often become jumping-off points for my professional work, even if it's just a fun shape exploration."

PEN PRACTICE

"This guy is sad, because he was only drawn to try out my new Lamy fountain pen. Poor guy!"

ABBADOX AND MR. BUMBLES

"It was fun to contrast the sharp and pointy demon with the soft, round penguin in this sketch."

❝ Commission for a Dungeons & Dragons character: he's a half-orc cartographer ❞

BOZU
"More Mozu-related fan art from the video game Gigantic. Here's her bumpkin father, Bozu. It's fun to take a fantasy race you created and draw characters of different ages and body types to explore the design."

DAVOR
"Commission for a D&D character: he's a half-orc cartographer. Who says there aren't any original ideas any more!?"

DAVOR ROUGHS
"Some roughs for a friend's D&D character. Here I'm just exploring some posing, props and face types."

Sketchbook

TANK DRIVER
"Here's a budget Tank Girl. She's not as cool as the original, but she'll get the job done."

KNOSSOS
"Another drawing of a Gigantic character of mine. Knossos the minotaur is always ready for a fight... or a party."

ROBO BROTHERS
"I had a trio of dumb henchmen that became "Frankenstein-ed" in my campaign. Designing a D&D adventure is a great exercise in art direction. And you'll get immediate feedback!"
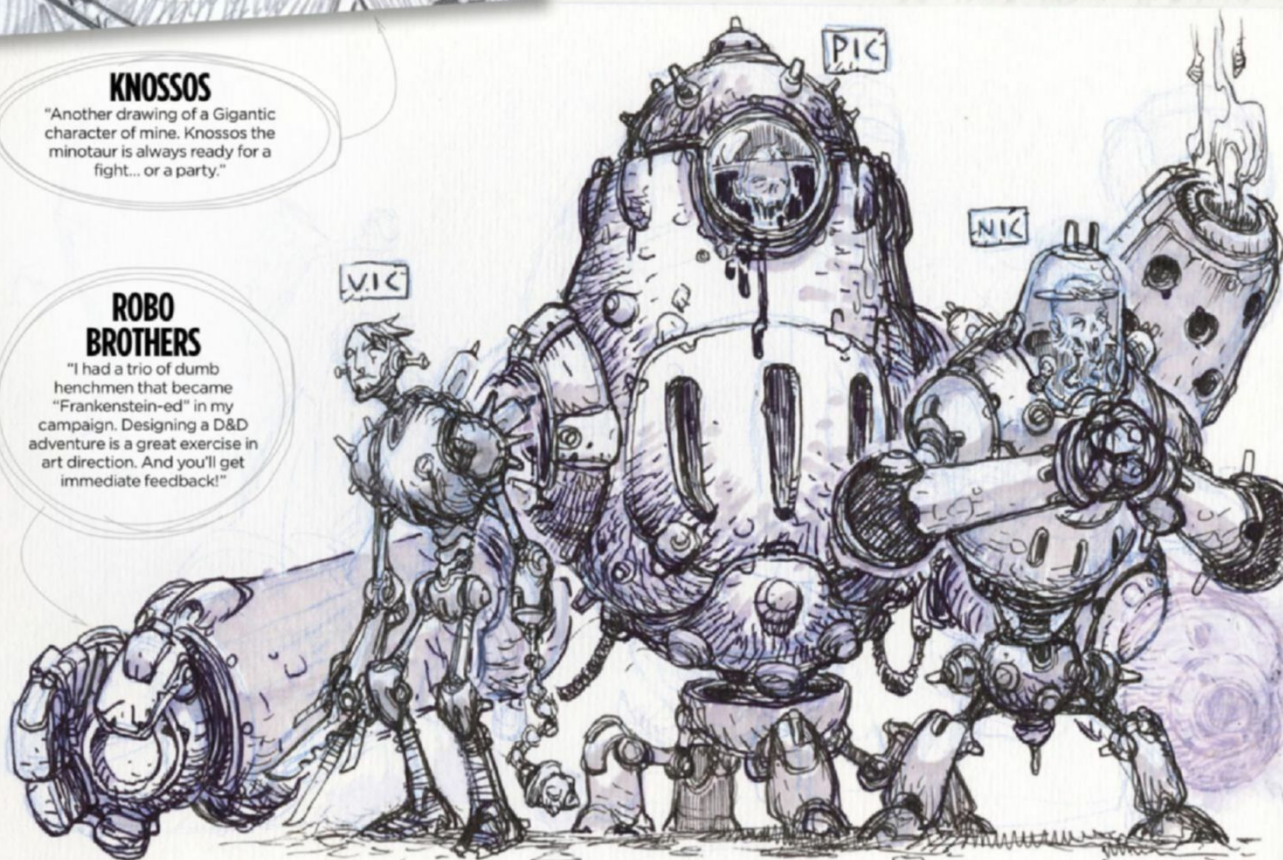
" Fat birds and angry monsters. You can't go wrong with that combo "

FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER
"I love arcane Frankenstein tech. Generators, glass tubes, bolts – it's all great!"

GOGGLE MONKEY
"This guy is my unofficial mascot. I really need to develop him more."

GIGAS AND THE DESTROYER
"Fat birds and angry monsters... can't go wrong with that combo!"

Sketchbook

YOUR MOM

"This old lady turned out to have a very Ghibli-esque feeling to her. Like Yubaba from Spirited Away... but somehow uglier."

BOLAGI, SEER OF DESTINIES

"I like the design of this guy – he definitely has a story to tell. I just have to get around to tell it!"

ROBO MINIONS

"Some Frankenstein-ed tech baddies for my D&D campaign. They all use similar elements so they feel like one group of enemies."
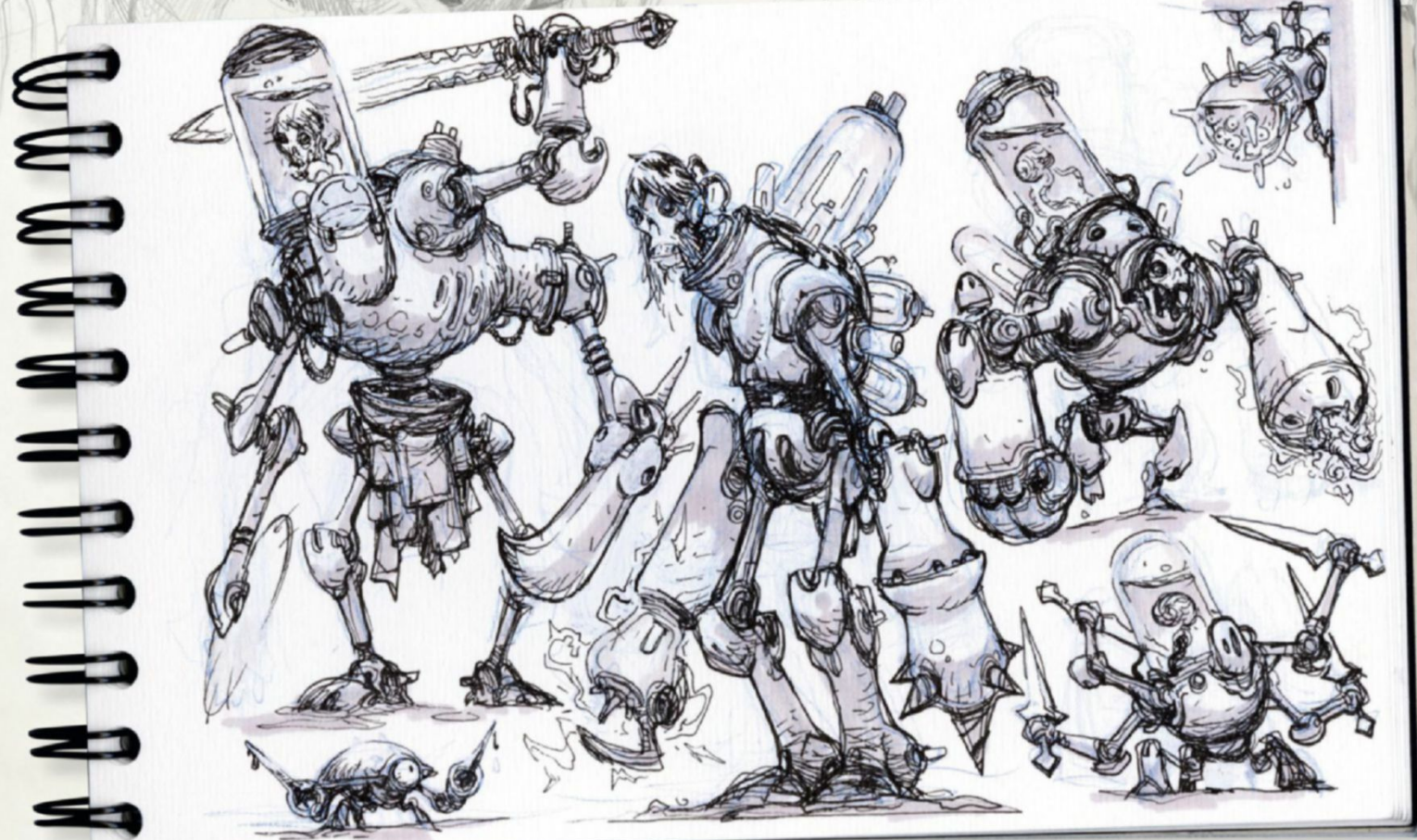
SOPLI THE CLOUDFLIER

"This old guy has a strong Frezzato vibe to him. Check out the author and artist's Keepers of the Maser series if you don't know what I'm talking about."

> ❝ This old guy has a strong Frezzato vibe to him… ❞

JOHNNY LICORICE

"I tried getting this guy's eyes as tiny as possible. He's a weird guy – best not to talk to him."

GROOFUS MALWEATHER

"He can read your future by observing the very wind! But he'll still charge you. It's a business after all."

Interview

PAPRIKA
"I often start with a very loose concept, sometimes a word, or a blurry snapshot in my mind of something that intrigues me."

ELIZA IVANOVA

The Bulgarian illustrator tells **Gary Evans** how her dark, haunting fine art feeds into her day job as a 3D animator working at Pixar, and vice versa

INITIATION
"A boy enters the next stage of his life, and this initiation ceremony is a reminder of mortality and the fleeting nature of time."

Look at Eliza Ivanova's art – the melting faces, the drowned bodies, the personifications of death – and you don't think: that's a Pixar artist at work. It's all but impossible to see an image like Initiation (pictured left) and connect it to the artist who worked on family film favourite Cars 2. It appears to be two different types of art, and it appears to come from two different places.

Eliza grew up in Sofia, Bulgaria's capital. Her parents said she could draw before she could speak – and particularly enjoyed scribbling in their passports. Aged eight, she started art classes. By the age of 12 she had enrolled in art classes at the atelier of Bulgarian artist and playwright Garo Muradian. This was the beginning of her "real education." Muradian taught her almost everything she knows, but he also instilled a lasting appreciation of aesthetics.

By now, figure drawing was an "obsession." Eliza's father would buy her academic art books from Russia. She had no idea what they said. The books hadn't been translated into Bulgarian. Eliza was interested in the pictures: this was the standard she aspired to. The books, the classes… it was all preparation for a traditional fine art education the National Academy of Arts in Sofia. At least, it was supposed to be.

At high school, Eliza became interested in film. That led her to the discipline she saw as a mix of art ➤➤

Artist PROFILE

Eliza Ivanova
LOCATION: US
FAVOURITE ARTISTS: Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Jenny Saville, Egon Schiele and Mikhail Vrubel
MEDIA: Graphite and paper; Photoshop
WEB: www.elizaivanova.com

HUNGOVER
Eliza's sketches
are anatomically
precise, but invite the
viewer to do some
of the work when it
comes to meaning.

BOOK SKETCH
Eliza uses symbols from nature to say something about the character's internal world.

INKTOBER SKETCH
Eliza has a huge following on Instagram (@eleeza), regularly posting WIP sketches and process videos.

and film: "Animation was always an interest of mine because I couldn't wrap my head around how a human hand could create such complex movement with drawings. It was the draftsmanship rather than the performance that drew me in initially."

THE COST OF STUDYING ART

Eliza looked at colleges in the US, the UK, France and Canada. Her first choice was CalArts, the California Institute of the Arts. Many of her

agreed to the move. Aged 17, Eliza left home to study animation in Los Angeles. She pushed herself hard. She knew that, after graduation, foreign students had one year to find a job. Failing that, she would have to return to Bulgaria.

She remembers one low point during her time at art school. It was the day before the deadline for her end-of-year project, when the animated film she'd spent months working on wouldn't render, no matter how much

SCENES FROM THE CITY
Eliza takes her inspiration from the world around her, the "big busy city with its fast pace and diversity."

> 66 **I couldn't wrap my head around how a human hand could create such complex movement with drawings** 99

favourite animators went there. However, US art schools are expensive. They're even more expensive if you're a foreign student. Eliza knew it was asking a lot of her parents to support her financially. And it wasn't just about the money, either. Some of her old teachers saw animation as a frivolous subject compared to fine art. Eliza had a point to prove.

Six universities accepted Eliza, and CalArts was one of them. Her parents

she prayed to the Computer Gods. Eliza broke down in tears.

She had a couple of favourite instructors at CalArts: E Michael Mitchell and Cornelius Cole III. They shared an outlook that Eliza found reassuring during tough times. Animation, they believed, was a tool to make fine art in motion.

Eliza did a placement at Pixar Animation Studios while at college. The idea was to go back as an intern

THE SAME, BUT DIFFERENT

Eliza reveals how a concept can evolve once she puts pencil to paper

DESERT WINTER
Desert Winter is part of a series of prints currently for sale at Eliza's website.

"For Desert Winter, I was going for a quiet moment of contemplation and isolation. As an introvert myself, I often find social interactions energy-draining, and any moment of solitude is how I recharge. So I attempted to illustrate that.

I usually go straight for the final line work from the first pass, because I think more clearly in silhouettes than volumes. It doesn't matter to me whether it communicates exactly what I had in mind or it invokes some other emotion. As long as I've done my part of translating thought to paper, I'm happy with the result.

After the lines are down, I do a pass with the blending stick to map out the largest shading areas. The blending stick blurs the initial lines a bit, so I do a second pass and add more details. This layering process is basically how I construct every piece. Finally, I scan the sketch and digitally colour it, while trying to keep all the original textures visible. You get a lot of mileage from a nicely rendered image."

SKETCH
Eliza begins with a single word – "contemplation" or "isolation" – and develops it into image layered with meaning.

Interview

after graduating. She returned to college for her final year, but was concerned Pixar would forget about her now the placement was over. So throughout her final year, Eliza regularly sent Pixar work to remind the studio what she was capable of.

INTERNING AT PIXAR

Eliza graduated in 2010 with a BFA in traditional character animation. Straight out of college, she started her internship at Pixar. A decade later and she's still there. As a 3D animator, she's helped to develop a number of the studio's leading films, including Cars 2 (2011), Brave (2012) and Monsters University (2013).

Her favourite movie to work on was Inside Out, one of summer 2015's blockbusters. It tells the tale of a young girl trying to adjust to new surroundings after recently moving halfway across the country to San Francisco (where Eliza now lives). The film is set inside the girl's head, so we see her emotions personified by five very different characters.
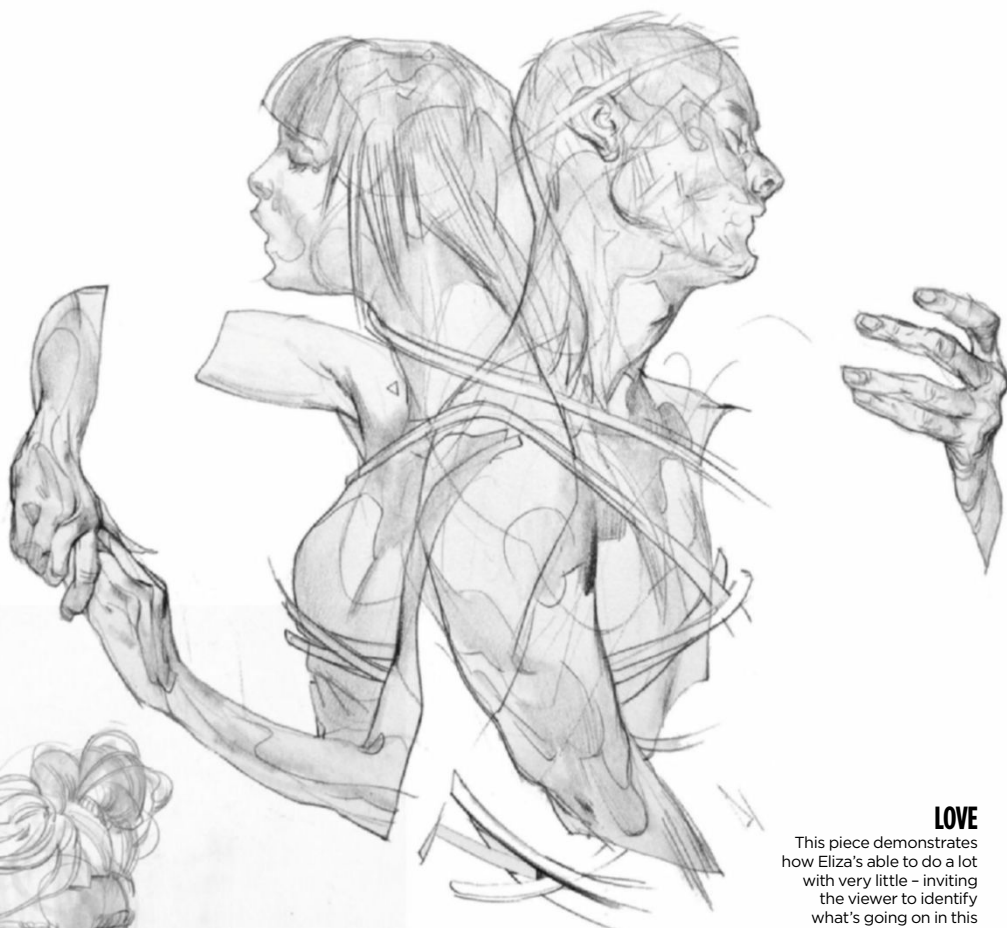
"I was accustomed to doing realistic performances, so this was a wonderful opportunity to take out the drawing pad and thumbnail extensively for each scene I animated, to push shapes and stylise movement. I did 2D passes on almost all my shots before translating them into CG."

Her background in fine art proved to be invaluable when it came to

LOVE
This piece demonstrates how Eliza's able to do a lot with very little – inviting the viewer to identify what's going on in this couple's relationship.

BUNS
These pieces start out as quick sketches to get Eliza's creativity going, but end up becoming her favourite images.

working in the animation industry, particularly anatomy: how things fitted together, how things moved. But what Eliza learnt while working at Pixar – the same thing she found while studying at CalArts – was that animation also helped her become a better fine artist.

For many years, Eliza felt that she wasn't putting enough time into her personal work. Then she had her first child: "I faced the hard truth that free time was a scarce commodity. I had to make that free time somehow. Now,

("I think it's a 30s thing"). Discipline helped with efficiency. Technique became increasingly easier. This meant she could focus more on the idea itself and less on the mechanics of drawing it, which in turn helped make her work so instantly recognisable.

"With practice came the luxury of being able to experiment with my visual 'language.' After drawing for so many years, I had developed a shorthand for many of the shapes of the face and body in a figure, as well as how I shade. That personal

> ❝ I faced the hard truth that free time was a scarce commodity. I had to make that free time somehow ❞

when I feel even remotely inspired, it's about getting the art supplies as quickly as I can, or not letting too much time pass since I last made something of value to me."

Eliza is up at 6am most mornings. After a full day at Pixar, she comes home and spends time with her family. Her daughter goes to bed at 8.30pm. That means Eliza can work on her own stuff until around midnight and still get enough sleep to do it all again the next day.

This sort of discipline was hard-earned. She honed it over many years

preference of what to stylise, add, omit or push is what I believe people recognise in my work."

CROSSING BORDERS

Eliza likes art that "crosses the borders of the known." This could be achieved through a new idea, a unique concept or by depicting familiar things in unfamiliar ways. She believes good art innovates. This innovation could be small, even trivial, but it must show us something we haven't seen before.

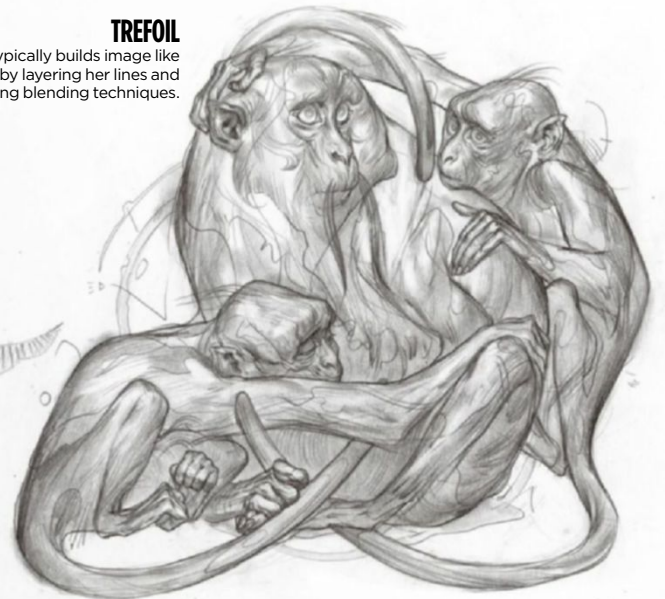Because Eliza's art aims to communicate in this way, she doesn't

NEON FROG
"I have a warm place in my heart for anything aquatic, which you can see in my body of work."

TREFOIL
Eliza typically builds image like this by layering her lines and using blending techniques.

get too hung up on the medium. She sees no difference between fine art and digital art. It's either successful or unsuccessful. It delivers the message or falls flat on its face.

Eliza starts a new piece with a loose concept. This could come from a kind of blurry snapshot she has in her head. It could be a single word. It's something that intrigues her, and she gets to work drawing it. At least, that's how it goes when she's feeling inspired – which is only about half the time. The rest of the time, when's she uninspired ("because, you know, life"), the first half an hour at her desk can be painful. This is when her discipline kicks in. She has to jump-start her creativity.

She finds a reference – either online or in her own library – and draws it. It could be an object, a figure, an ➤➤

REAPER
Eliza's darker work may seem to jar with her job at Pixar, but they feed into one another.

INKTOBER SKETCH
Eliza regularly takes part in the annual art event Inktober, where artists do one ink drawing a day throughout October.

Interview

"I WAS MY BIGGEST BULLY"

Eliza explains why free time is just an illusion and how she learned to stop being her own worst critic...

"My personal victory as an artist was the time that I realised I was my biggest bully. I got over telling myself how much I sucked and that I shouldn't even try to make it in the business. That little nagging voice never goes away, but getting it to 'shut up' when zoning out and focusing on the most important part of the creative process – which is actually creating work – goes a long way.

The other thing I had to tell teach myself was free time is an illusion, and it's motivation that's going to get me out of the art-block swamp. After a while, it became easier to sit down and draw, as I had that ball rolling already and had the routine down to a tee.

I take baby steps into experimenting visually and with new media. I go with my gut feeling as to what seems interesting, and then follow that path to wherever it leads. Sometimes that's a dead end, but more often than not you become inspired and create interesting work."

PAPERCUT
This piece – like much of Eliza's work – leaves the viewer wondering what happened before and after the image we're seeing.

MELTY
Another example of Eliza taking an abstract feeling and attempting to represent it visually.
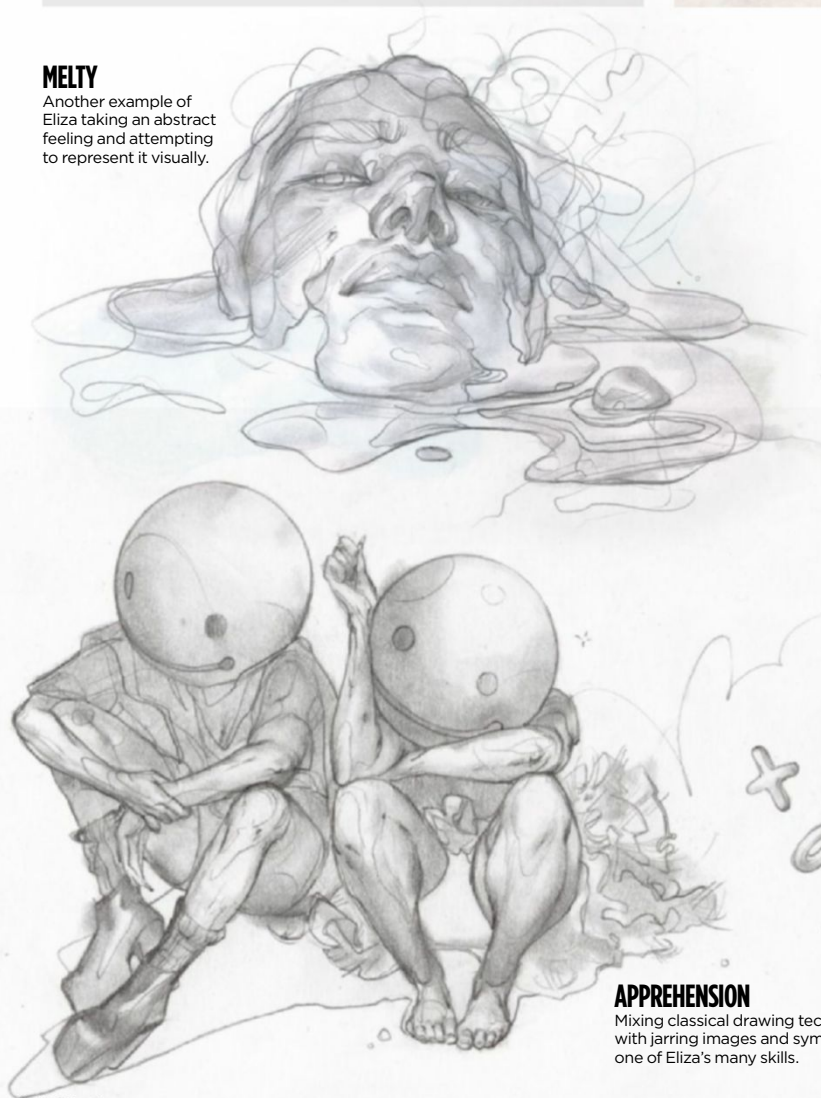
APPREHENSION
Mixing classical drawing techniques with jarring images and symbols is one of Eliza's many skills.

SEPTUM
Eliza's subjects often appear emotionless, but the artist's expressive lines gives the viewer clues to their inner thoughts.

RAW MATERIAL
Many of the images featured here appear in Eliza's debut sketchbook, Raw Material, which covers the artist's work between 2012 and 2017.

> ❝ I've seen skilfully made art that's just not interesting to me, and less-polished work that's conceptually brilliant ❞

➤ animal. There's no pressure to create a polished piece or even finish it. "That's how I shake the rust off and get the creative juices going. Some of my favourite pieces came when I was in a supposed artist block. Go figure."

Eliza usually goes straight in with what will be the final line work. Once the lines are down, she goes over the image with a blending stick to mark out shading. The initial lines might blur, so goes over them again and adds more detail. She scans the sketch and colours it digitally. Her aim is to maintain all of the original textures.

ENJOY MAKING ART

Look at Eliza's personal work and you don't immediately think: that's an artist having a lot of fun. The fundamentals are crucial. Discipline is very important. But the other thing that's essential to good work is enjoyment.

For a while, Eliza lost sight of that. From a young age, she was making art at a very high level. She pushed herself hard at college to make sure she'd get work at the end of it. She pushed herself hard at work to make sure she'd be a success in animation. In recent years, she's put more emphasis on taking pleasure from the work she does. There's no objective, no foolproof way of measuring how good your art really is. But it's easy to know whether or not you enjoyed making it. And the two things – quality and pleasure – are inextricably linked.
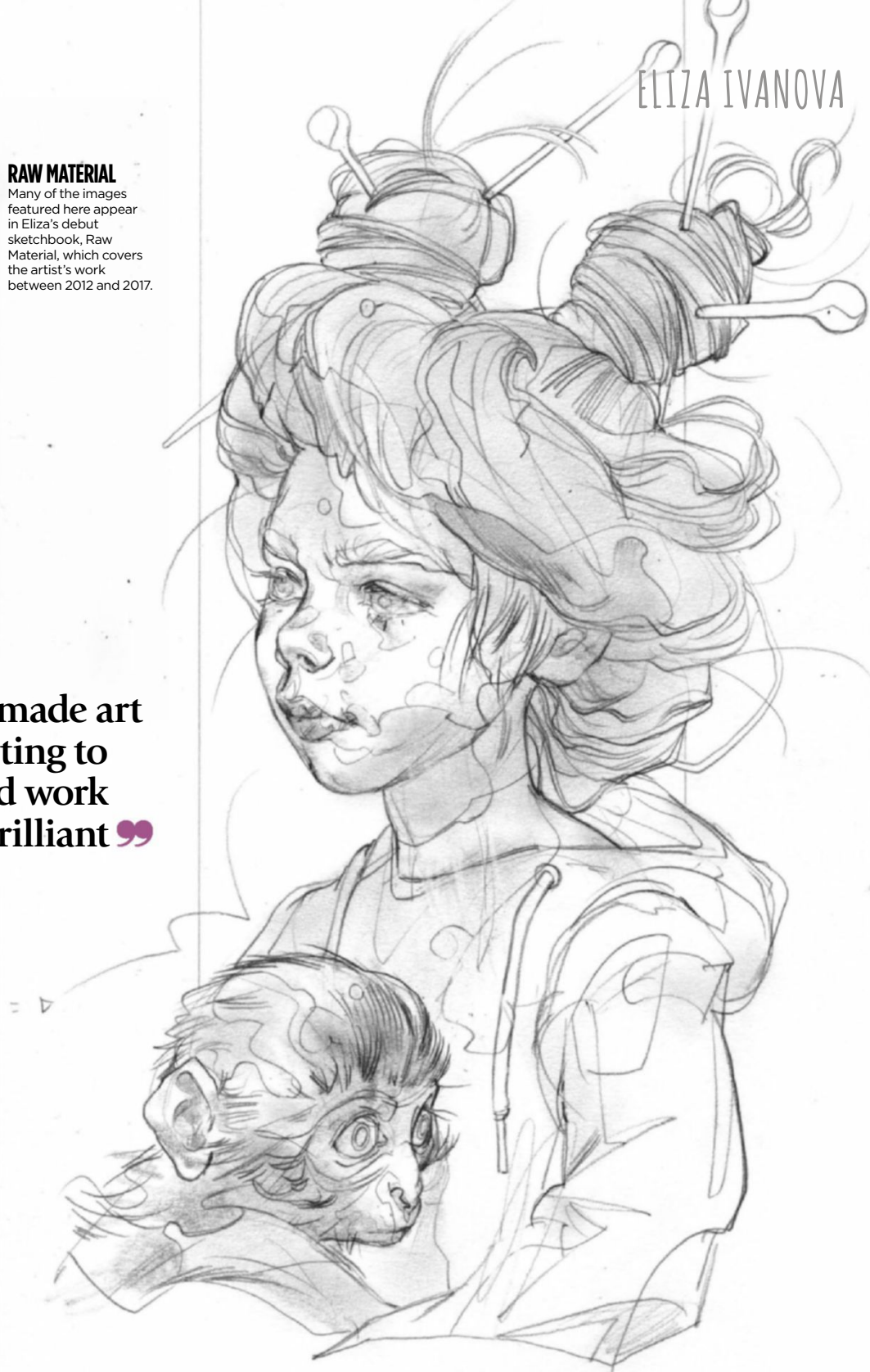
"I wish we had some way to quantitatively measure skill and originality. But we don't, and we purely rely on our visual intelligence and taste, and sometimes relevance to what's going on around us," Eliza says. "I've seen skilfully made art that's just not interesting to me, and less-polished work that's conceptually brilliant. It's a fine line, but I guess that's what makes it exciting. If it were as easy as a formula, then doing something impactful wouldn't be as rewarding.

"Mastering the foundations of drawing has always been the key to breaking the mould. I like my skill-set to be an extension of myself – to the point where I don't think about the physical creation of an artwork, but about the emotion I'm trying to convey. And the most subtle part is care: if I don't care about my work, why would anyone else? When I see a great piece of art, I can just tell the artist had a great time doing it. It just shows." ●

SUNDAE BUNS
"The messiest of buns. As you can tell, I have an affinity for this hairstyle, mainly because I can't achieve this look for the life of me."

VIDEO WORKSHOP

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX
Workshops

Advice from the world's best artists

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This issue:

Photoshop
PAINT CHARISMATIC CHARACTER ART

Character designer **Aleksey Baydakov** reveals his colourful rendering process as he depicts a unique circus partnership

Artist
PROFILE

Aleksey Baydakov
LOCATION: Russia

Freelance illustrator Aleksey specialises in developing original, humorous characters for animation and advertising projects.
https://ifxm.ag/alekseyb

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The ImagineFX team saw my sketch of a well-matched circus duo and asked me to develop the art for their cover. I really like these cartoon characters and was happy to render them in colour. I love it when form and details of my characters convey their mood and charisma.

I do all my work in Photoshop. In this workshop, I'll explain my usual process of working on the rendering of characters in colour. I'll show key techniques and principles that guide me, and reveal how I use photo textures. I don't employ a large number of brushes, but I try to sculpt forms through my brushstrokes, just as in traditional painting. The strokes are visible if you study the art closely, but the render looks smooth at a distance. It took me some time to perfect this technique, but now I use

it to speed up my painting process. And I like the effect it produces.

It's crucial to observe the phasing, and go from simple forms to complex details. It's also important to establish all the details during the sketch stage, otherwise you may run into trouble later on. Of course, I'm inconsistent and make mistakes, but that's just part of the fun! Let's see how I create these performers, who are clearly at the top of their game…
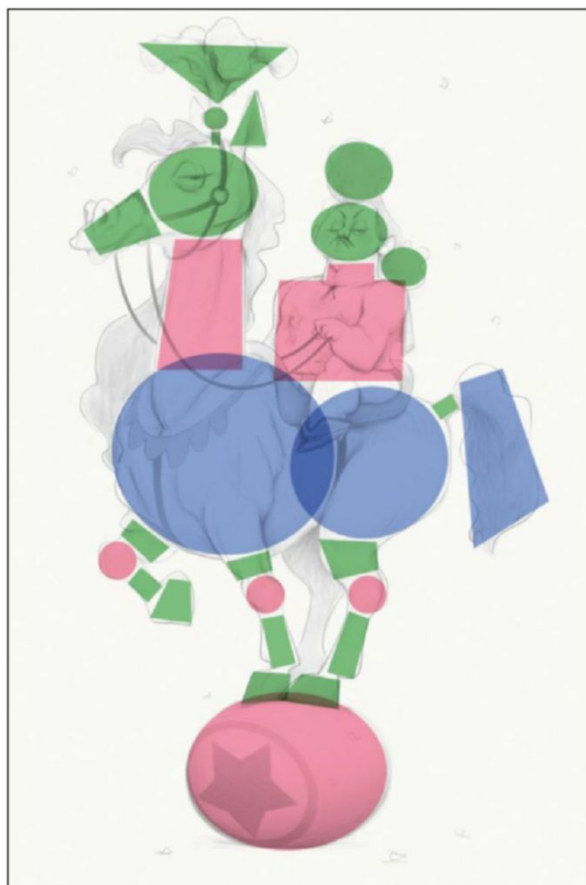

1 Adjusting and improving the original sketch

Because I'm working from a finished sketch and it's been some time since I drew it, this is an opportunity to take a fresh look at it and make some small adjustments. I clarify the lines, then turn the image into a silhouette to assess the expressiveness of the forms and counter shapes. ➡➡

Workshops

2 Starting with simple shapes

When creating an original character I start by placing simple forms next to each other at different sizes, such as a circle, square or triangle. Taking this approach enables me to quickly build up a basic design without becoming distracted by small details. Once these key shapes are in place you can zoom into individual elements and introduce those all-important details that will help add to the storytelling in the scene.

3 The choice of tone

Tone is very important, and here I create three variations of the tone sketch. This will affect the choice of colour later in the painting process, because each colour has its own tone (the yellow colour can't be created from a dark tone, for example). I also use the tone to help me set the visual rhythm of the piece.
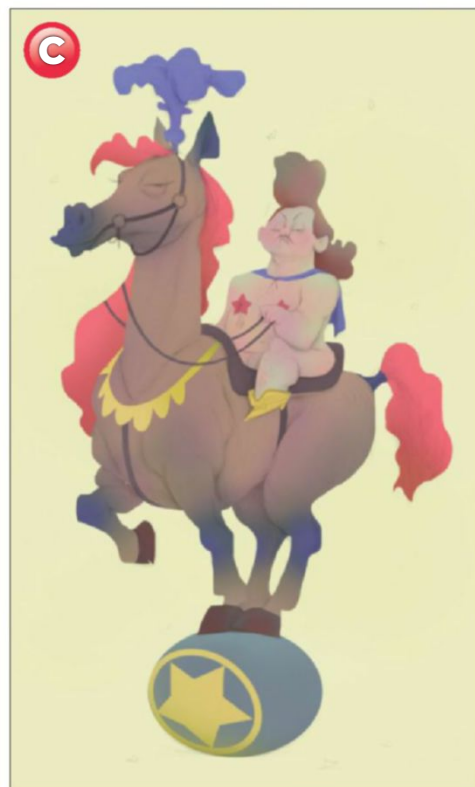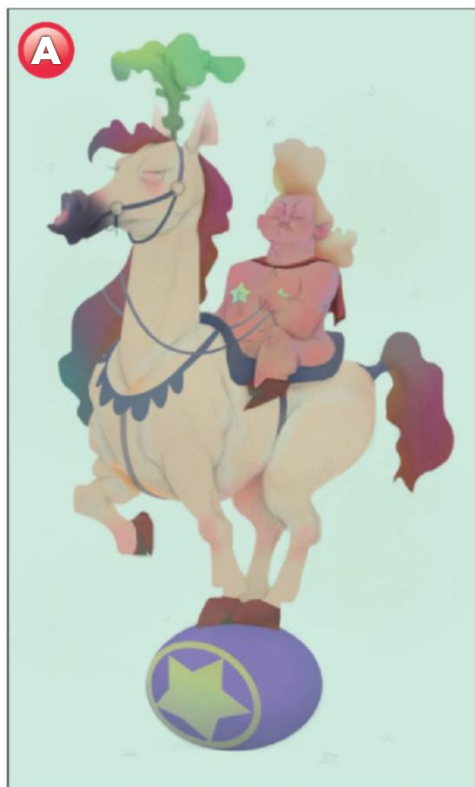
4 Presenting three colour sketches to the ImagineFX team

Next, I need to create three colour sketches based on my earlier tone versions, bearing in mind their approximate colour range. I begin by creating the silhouette of the character. Then I select a soft Air brush and paint in the primary colours – remember, there's no detailing during this stage. I create smooth transitions between all my colours. The ImagineFX team chooses option C, so I start to render the scene in this range.
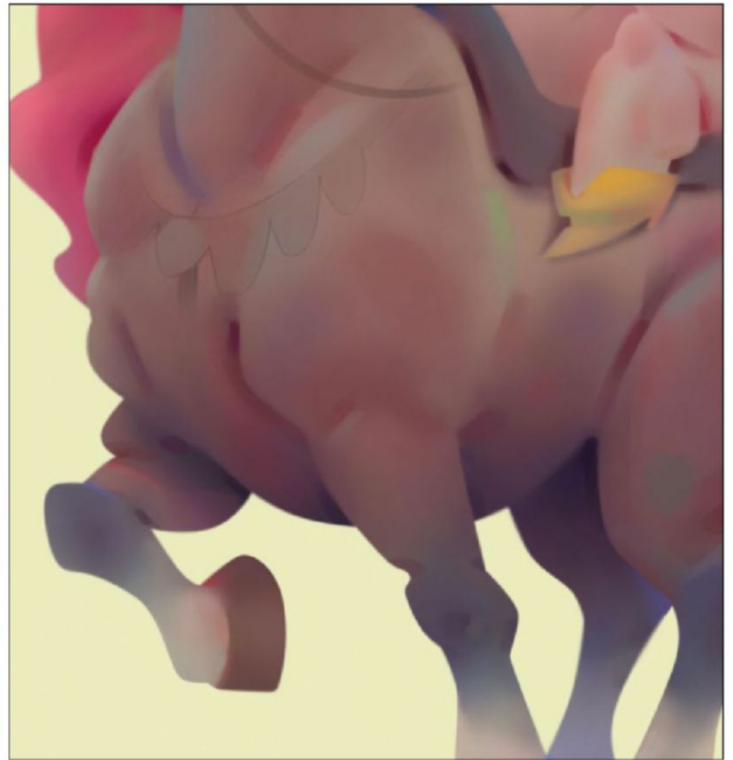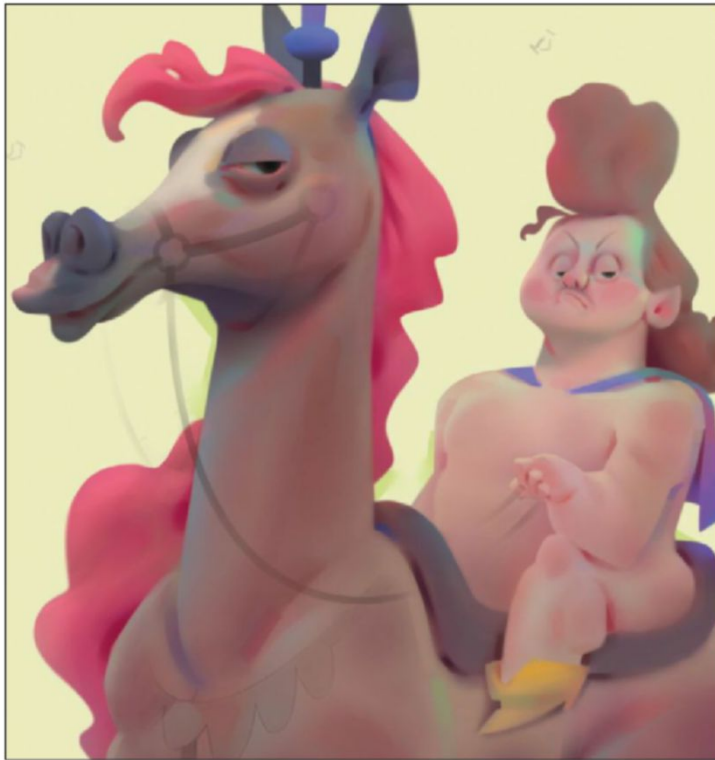
5 Bringing in common colours

My uppermost layer is the linear sketch. Underneath the bottom layer is my colour sketch. I create a new layer and begin to strengthen the tone of the character as a whole, using a large Soft brush. I do this over the whole image. It's important to draw as loosely as possible; I don't pay attention to details. At the same time I try to vary my colour sketch by applying additional colours.

6 Using the Lasso tool

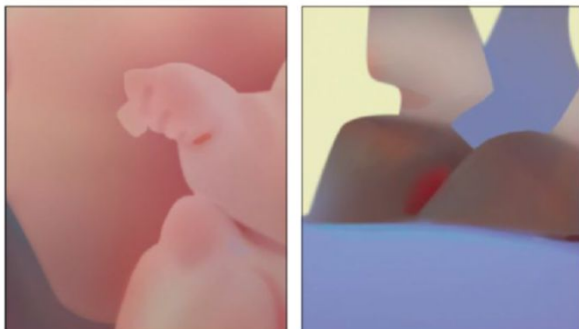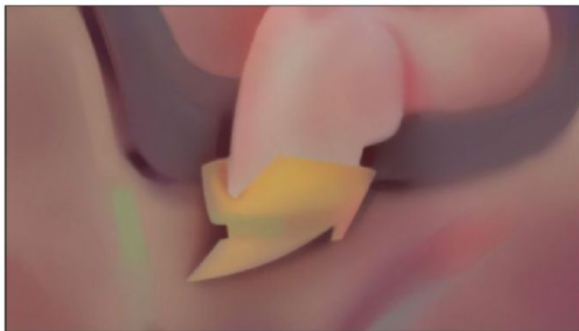My painting process makes good use of the Lasso tool. In this case, I need to separate the horse's leg from the body, I select the desired element with a lasso, click Cmd+H (this hides the selection – those marching ants – which I've found to be a distraction) and draw in a shadow using the Air brush. The Inverse command (Cmd+Shift+I) also comes in handy here.

7 Refining planes and edges

Next, I begin to work on the major details. I enhance the shadows and continue to strengthen the colour. I use two Hard brushes – an oval brush and a rectangular one – with the Opacity ranging from 70 to 100 per cent. With the help of these tools, I establish the plane and edges of the character. ➨
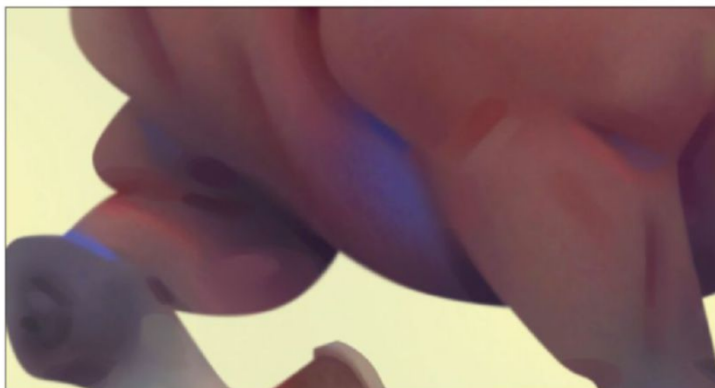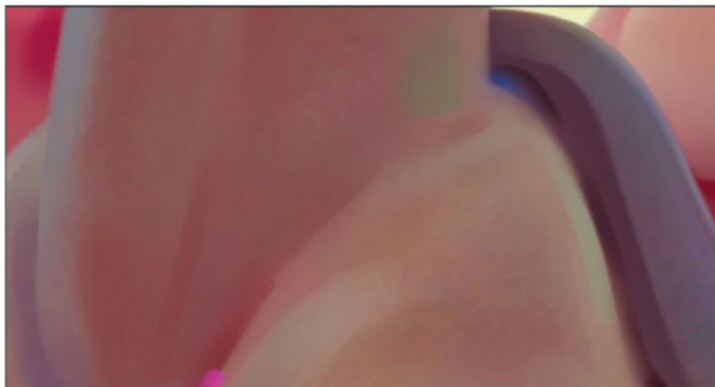
8 Working with layers

I try to use the minimum amount of layers, because it enables me to concentrate on the drawing process. Another advantage is that it's easier to merge all the details of the drawing. The combining of visible brush strokes is very close to classical painting techniques, in my opinion.
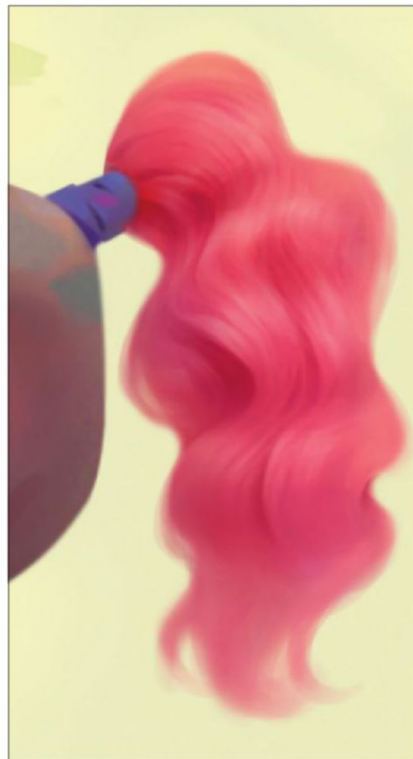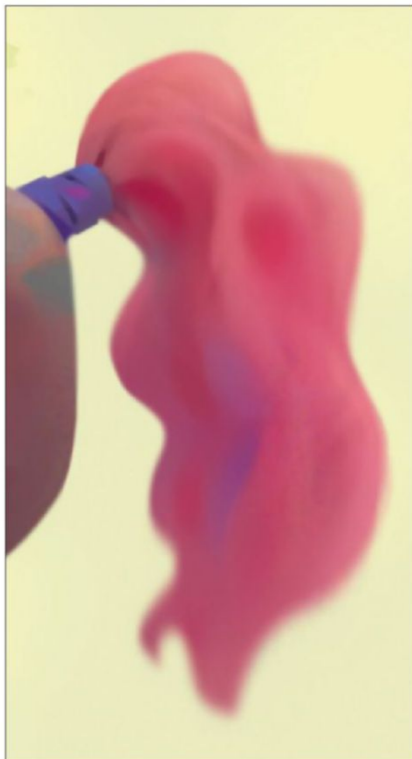
9 Making use of photo textures

To speed up the painting process I make use of photo textures, applying them to the horse's mane and rider's hair. Before applying the texture, the shape and volume of the element must be already defined. Then I change the photo using the Warp tool to match the element, and use it on the form in Soft Light mode.

10 Photo texture or painting?

They'll be times when you have to depict unfamiliar elements or materials. Ostrich feathers are certainly new to me! At first I try to use a texture, but I don't like the result. It doesn't match with the overall picture. I decide to take inspiration from classical painters, and study how they solve similar complex elements (fir branches is a good match) and I draw the feathers using the same principle.
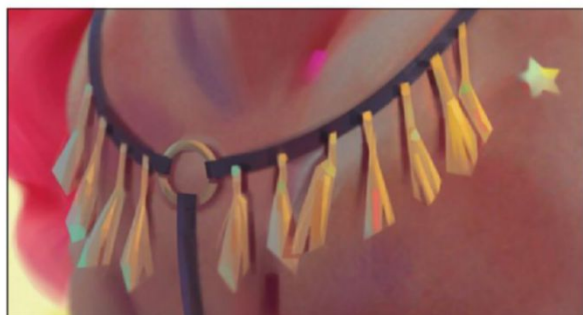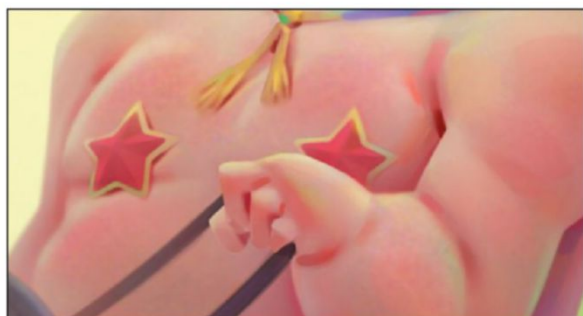
11 Addressing the smaller details

I now turn my attention to the minor details. I try not to get hung up on one thing, and instead move evenly across the image, gradually clarifying details as I go. Sometimes I can depict them with a single brush stroke. This approach makes it possible to preserve the original concept of the circus character and his mount. During this step I use a Hard brush and Smudge tool.
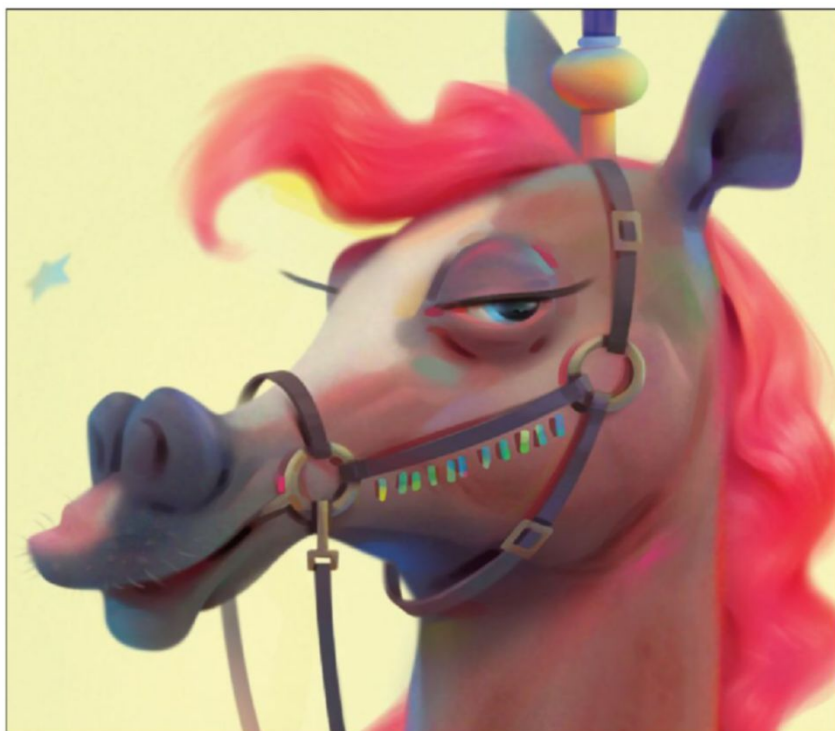
12 Mixing up my colour choices

I try to vary my colours as much as possible, often by following the hot-to-cold principal to add their opposites. I like to use greys alongside other colours, which helps to make my colours seem brighter and richer. I also like to experiment and use unexpected colours – this seems to suit my humorous character designs.
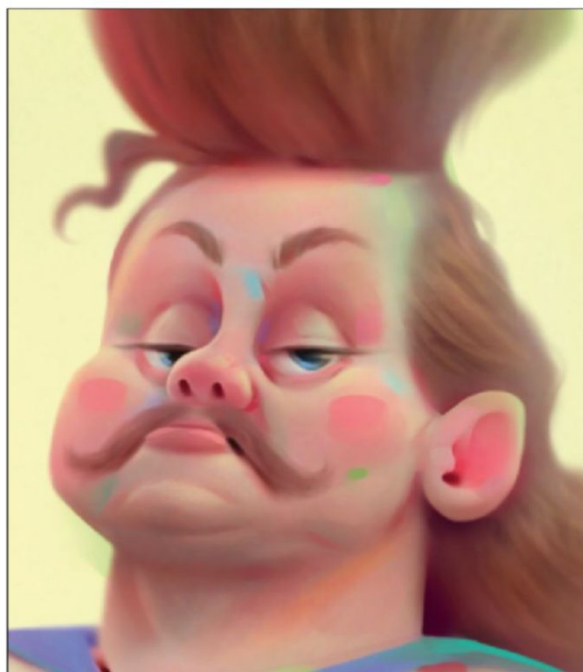
13 Refining the face

The rider's face is the focal point of the composition and so it's important to get this right. I didn't finalise all the facial details during the initial sketch, so I spend a bit of time doing this now. Even when creating exaggerated character art, it's important to bear in mind the basics of anatomy. This will help you to deal with the volumes and make the drawing look convincing… relatively speaking!
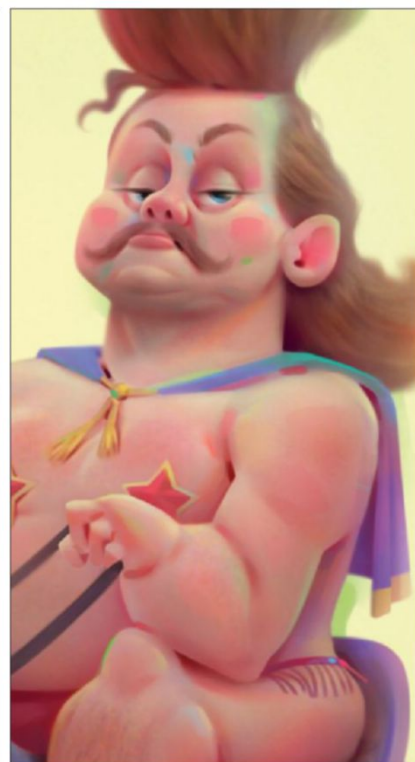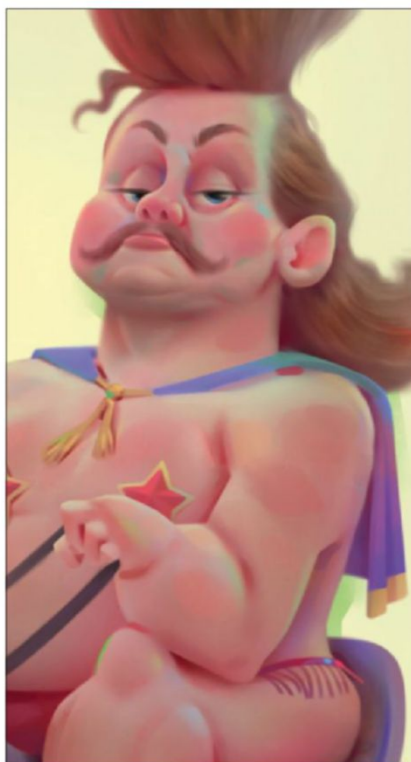
14 Carry out post-processing

Finally, I bring more contrast into the image using the Curves tool by simply moving the sliders to the desired result. I also add sharpness using the Sharpness and Noise tool. I use this tool only on the face and on the important elements of the character, which helps me to strengthen the image's focal points.

Painter & Photoshop
GET INSPIRED BY REFERENCE

Peter Polach shows how he sculpts and lights a diorama to help fuel his creepy, but illuminating digital art illustrations

Artist
PROFILE

Peter Polach
LOCATION: Slovakia

Peter, also known as Apterus, is a freelance illustrator and concept artist who enjoys depicting creepy things in bright colours.
https://ifxm.ag/apterus

GET YOUR RESOURCES
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Painting over photos is generally frowned upon, because it's often associated with infringing on someone else's hard work. Yet when it's done ethically it becomes an effective mixed media strategy.

For this workshop I want to try something new. Reaching my limit of imagining a complex 3D scene with tricky lighting combined with nostalgic feelings for my days of sculpting have prompted me to find my stash of oil-based clay and build my scene, which has proven to be both a useful and fun break from the digital world.

I decide to keep my first clay scene simple, with just one figure and a basic environment: a ruined wall, industrial pipes and general rubble.

Doing this prior to painting saves me a lot of time that I would otherwise spend fixing a picture that just seems odd for reasons unknown, as is so often the case. Better still, the irregular shapes of clay combined with natural light create situations that wouldn't occur in a digital model of a similar scene.

This approach has promise and could solve several problems I've been having with my compositions, as well as increase the depth of a scene and reinforce the feeling of reality that I'm seeking. I'm hopeful for the future as I continue with more ambitious projects.

Aside from the sculpting aspect, the rest of my creative process follows my usual painting steps.
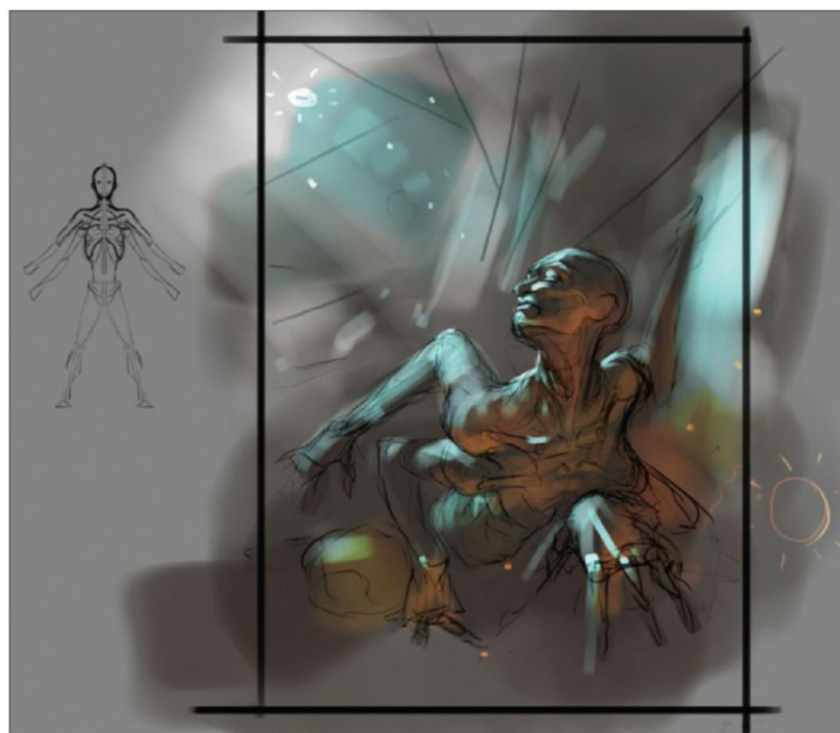
1 A hazy glimpse
I start with a simple sketch where I decide on the basics, such as the creature's physiology, pose, light sources, composition and the overall mood of the illustration. Keeping my choices simple and vague enough ensures it'll be relatively straightforward to translate my ideas into a diorama. I continue by selecting references that I'll need, such as photos of urban ruins and factory environments.

2 Possibly pointless, but fun
I build a simple diorama based on my sketch using oil clay and objects found around the house, in this case some plumbing parts and metal tubes. This is the first time I've used a diorama as a basis for my painting. At this point I have no idea if it's going to be a success and worth the effort, so I don't go into too much detail. ➡➡

3 Tis' just a sketch

Using candles and my phone's torch I illuminate the scene and take a photograph. The composition needs to be adjusted; a few things need to be moved around. I take the photo into Photoshop and use the Lasso tool. I don't worry about being precise. I darken the background using the program's Tonal Control tools and continue with a few brush strokes to indicate how I want to proceed.
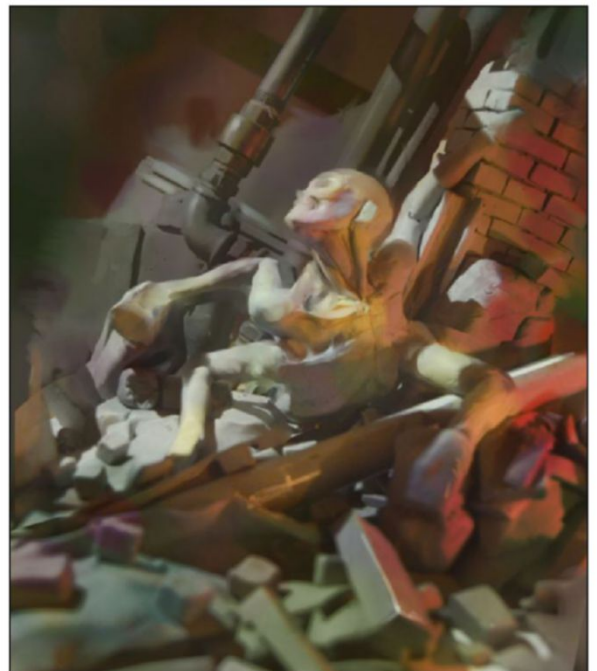
4 Preparations for painting

My rough sketch is blocked out and I'm confident my masses are in the right places and the shadows are working, because the source material is on the table next to me! I use a simple brush with Hue Jitter set to 100 per cent on Overlay mode and add random smudges of colour to turn the background image into a palette.
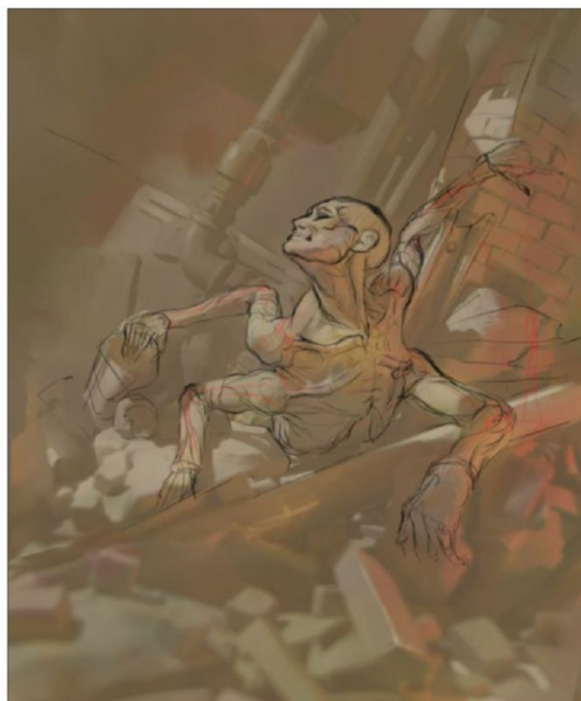
5 The scene comes to life

I squint at the picture and decide it's time to move on to the details. The guy's anatomy is important to finalise, so I gather all the remaining reference, dim the image and draw the bones and muscles over the photograph of the sculpture. There's no need to refine the lines, because I'll merge them with the background and paint over them.
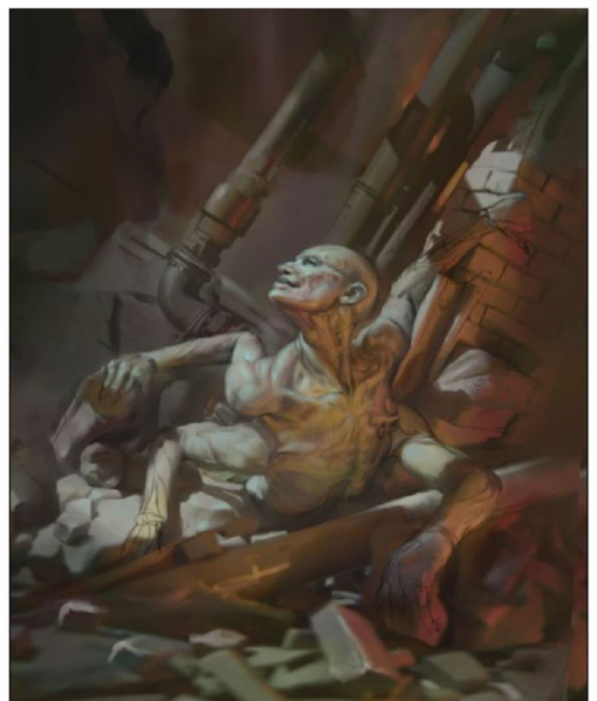
6 Business as usual

I match the rough figure to the more precise drawing, merge it all to one layer and continue with rendering, for which I use a Photoshop soft Chalk brush that adds colour and mixes it with what's on the canvas underneath. This part (interrupted by a few adjustments sessions) takes the most time and it is the least eventful.

7 Adding colours

After the key parts of the illustration begin to emerge in a more finished state I gain an understanding of how I want it to look. Even though the image has colours, up to this point I consider it black and white and my focus is on values and shapes. I switch to Painter and add a colour gradient overlay and a local colour overlay.
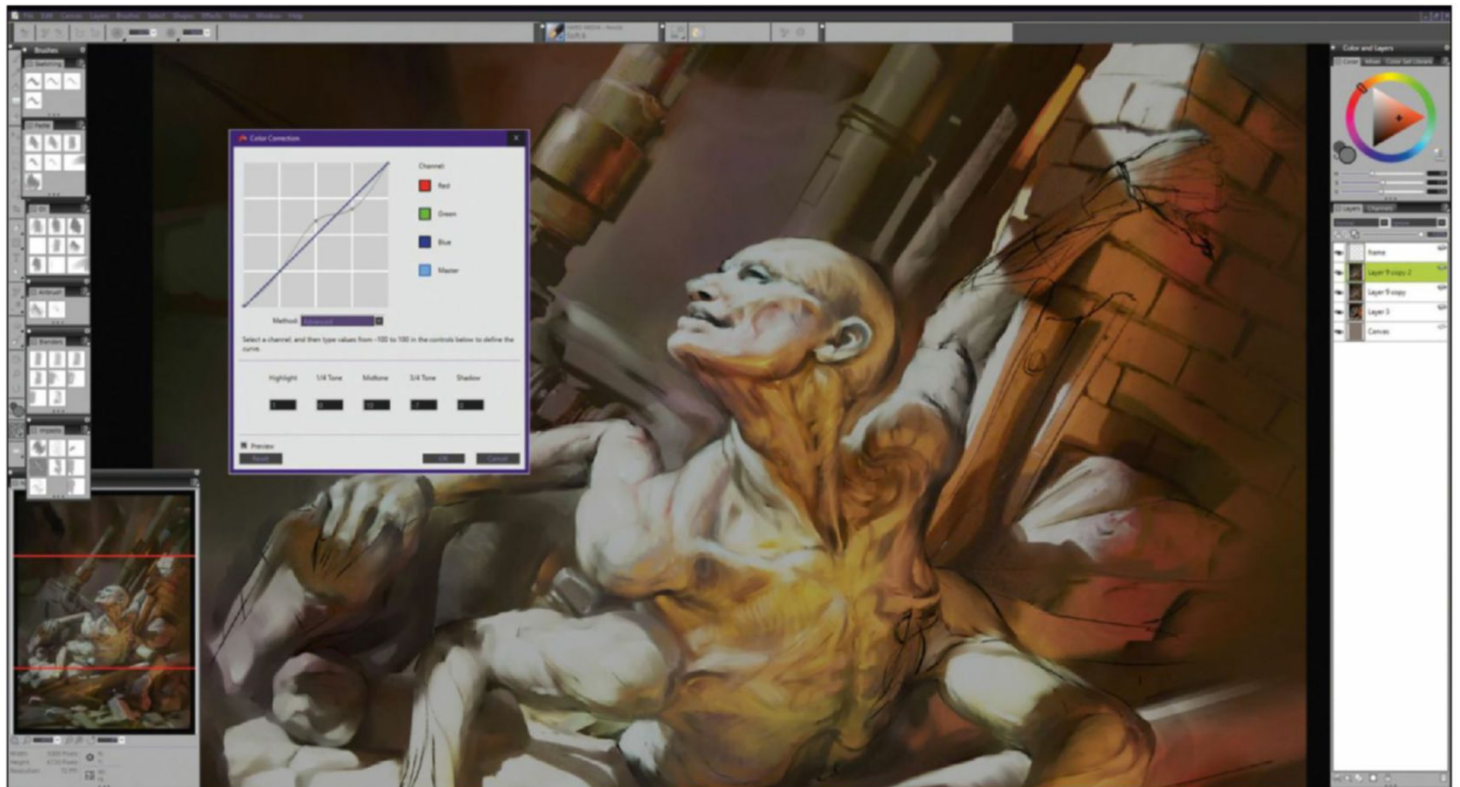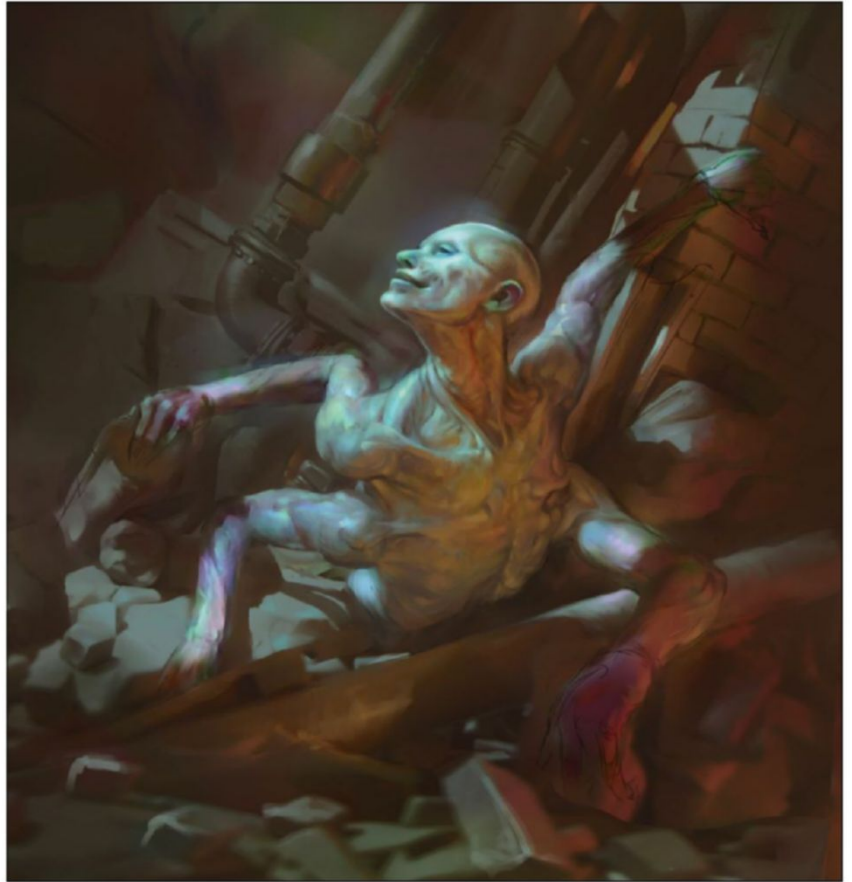
8 Explore my colour options

Often at this stage a value correction is needed, because even though I have a plan, it almost always changes when I explore more options. For this purpose I use a Curves adjustment layer in Photoshop or Correct Colours effect in Painter. I bring the highlights down to mid-tones and add new highlights, before experimenting with more colour overlays. ➨

9 The not-so fun part

When I'm satisfied with the colours I carry out more rendering, paying attention to the background and blending the character into it. During this phase I notice some small mistakes and try to fix them. Then I force myself to deal with the character's hands, which I've been steadfastly ignoring until now.
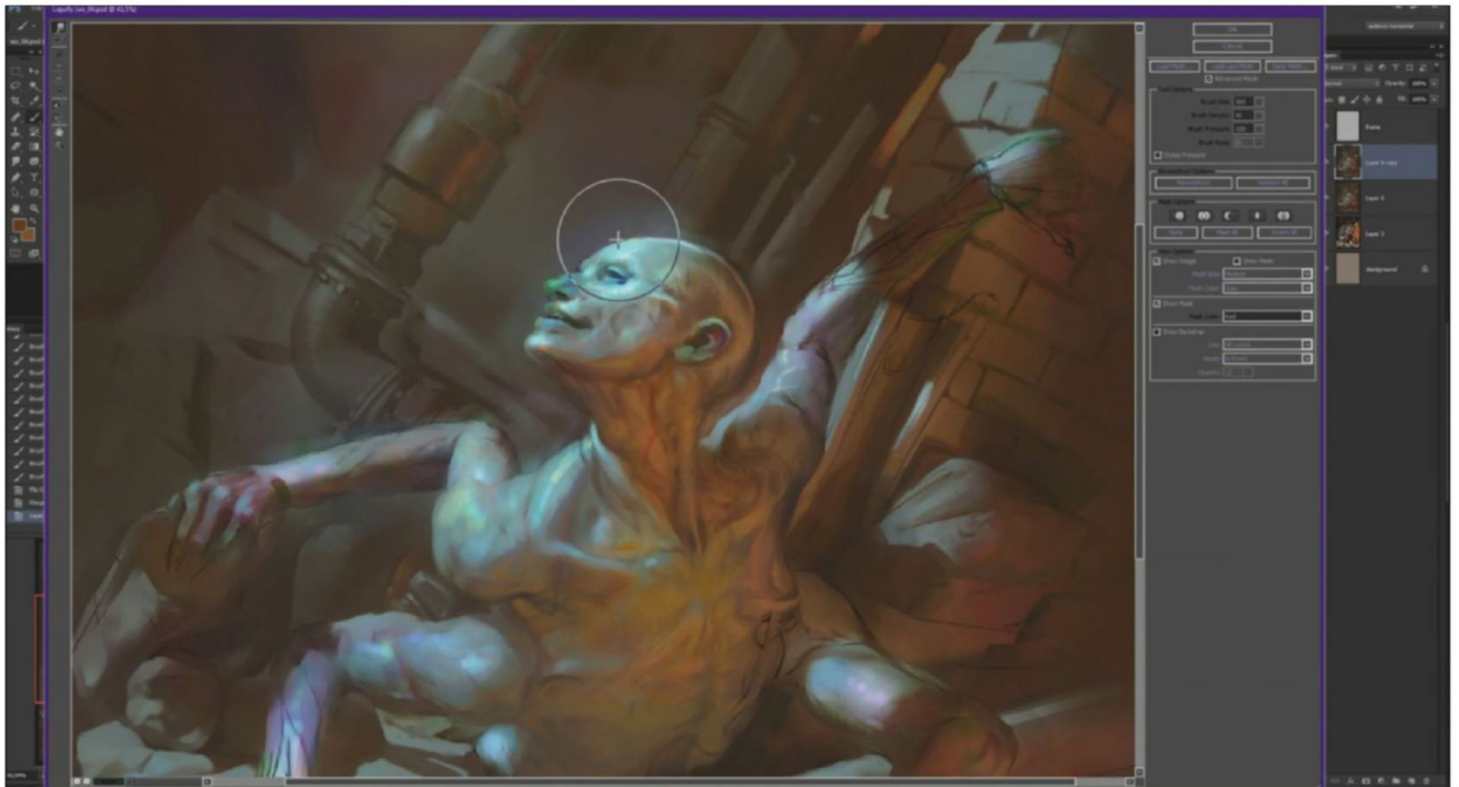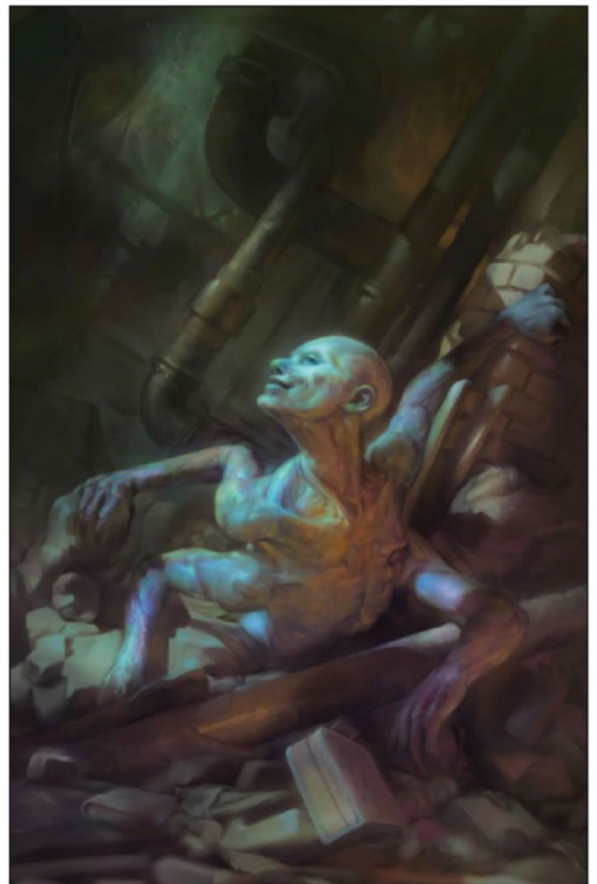
10 It's never quite right, but that's okay

Fixing mistakes is a big part of my work and that's why Photoshop's Liquify tool comes in handy. I keep my painting in just one layer (of which I make a back-up copy each time I make a significant change) because using the Liquify tool makes it easy to make minor corrections. When it becomes apparent that the mistake is more severe I, of course, use the program's selection tools to move things around accordingly.
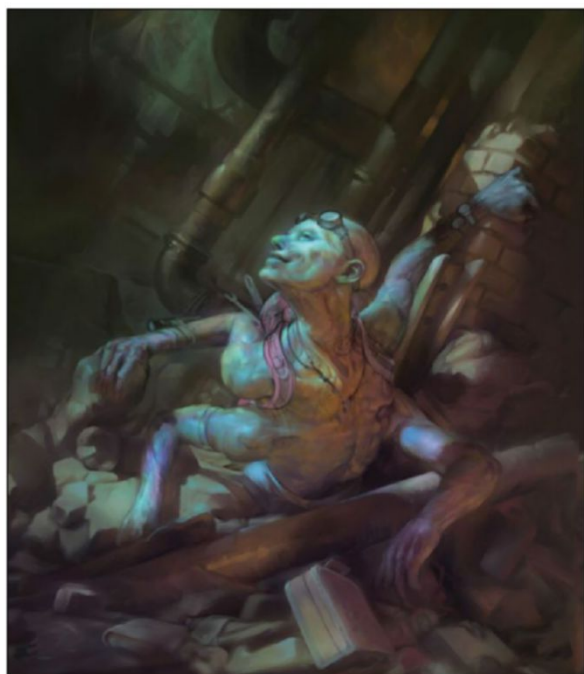
11 Addressing the little things

When the character's body and all the solid structures in its surroundings are pretty much finished, I add objects and materials that are affected by the shape of such elements. These include the figure's backpack, the fabric wrapped around one of his arms, a few trinkets and the vines that are draped over the rubble.
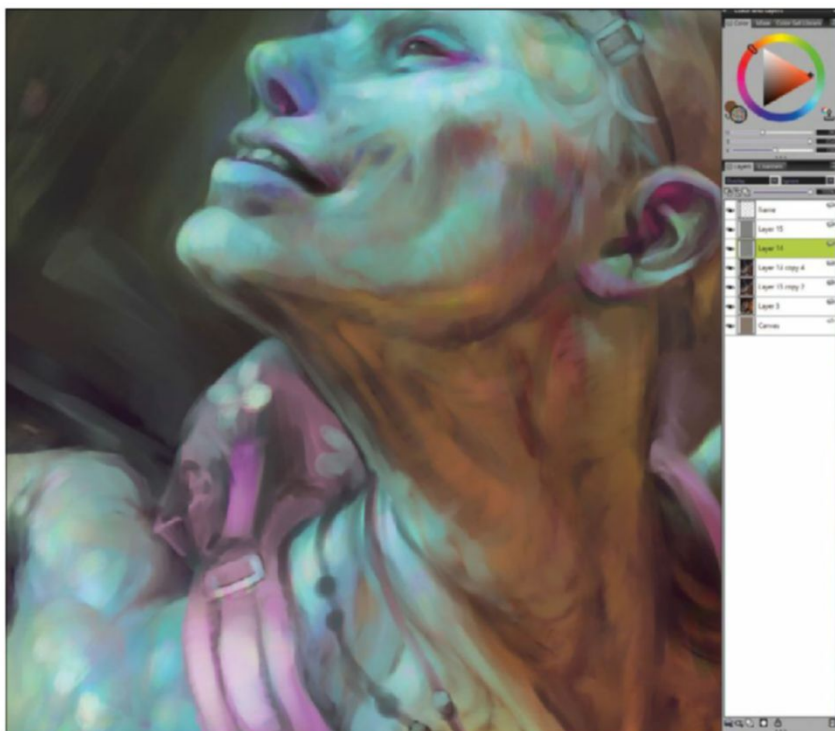
12 An unnatural colour sheen

I have a brush that paints with random colours, and with it I'm able to create an opalescent shine effect that I often add to my characters' skin. This is achieved by painting with the brush on a new layer set to Overlay. I may need to adjust the brush's Smudge setting, and set it to 50 per cent grey first.

13 Final touches

When the painting is finished I add a layer or two containing with a custom natural media texture. The textures average at 50 per cent brightness and are desaturated almost entirely, which in Overlay mode adds all the texture details while preserving the original colours and values of the artwork.
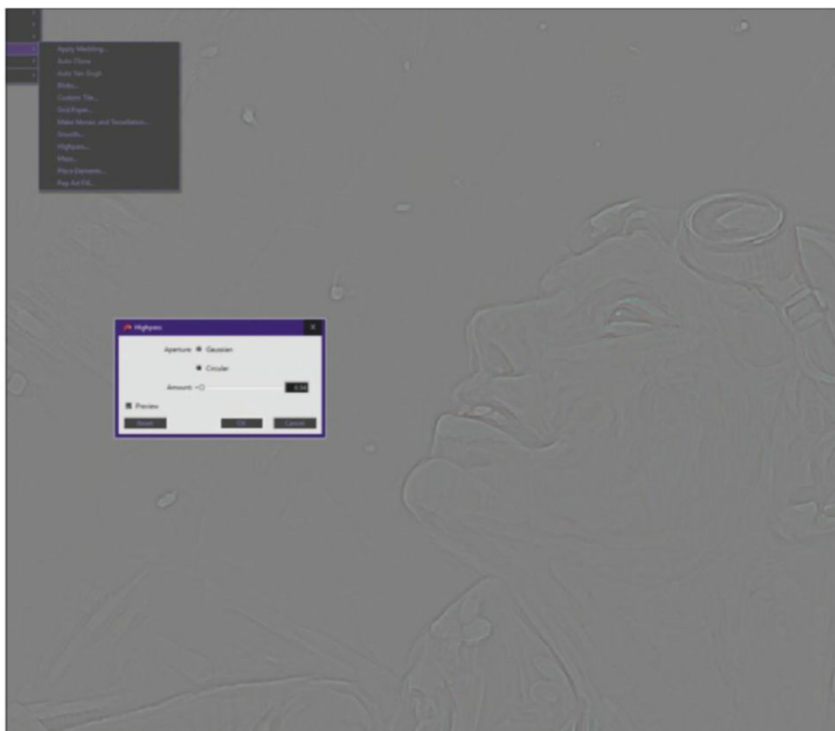
14 Looking sharp

After adding a few bits of floating dust in the air that help enhance the depth of the scene, I copy the main painting layer. Then I apply a Highpass effect and change the blend mode to my favourite: Overlay. This does the same thing as the standard Sharpen effect, but I prefer to do this manually in case the added effect requires more adjustments.

WHAT IS
AVAXHOME?

Next month in...
NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX

Kim Jung Gi exclusive cover and workshop!

Who else can better head-up our drawing skills
issue than the master himself... Kim Jung Gi!

Legendary artist
Kim Jung Gi
reveals his
drawing process
to ImagineFX!

All this… and more!

Digital sketching skills
Get more out of Autodesk Sketchbook with our how-to guide.

ArtRage 6 workshop
Steve Goad take us on a tour of the new features in the latest update.

Your guide to using Krita
We kick-start our Krita Core Skills series with artist Sara Tepes.

Pro artist interviews!
We chat with Tim Von Rueden and Nivanh Chanthara!

15 CONCEPT TIPS FOR CLIENT WORK

Serge Birault draws on a wealth of industry knowledge and insights as he reveals his advice for generating character concepts for clients

Artist PROFILE

Serge Birault
LOCATION: Canada

Serge is based in Montreal and works as an art director for the likes of Eidos, Ubisoft and Warner Bros.
https://ifxm.ag/sergeb

Character design is a complicated subject because your job is going to have unique requirements. You could be working in different fields such as animation, video games or even advertising, while tackling a mascot, a recurrent hero or a one-off villain. Whatever the product, the project, the budget, the allotted time and the team setup, you'll have to produce something brand new.

Yet the main goal is still the same: to create a unforgettable character. People can like your design, sometimes they'll hate it, but it has to be memorable. There's not magic wand as such – you'll have to develop an approach for creating a unique character and to deal with all the constraints of the production. Here's my list of a few tricks you can use to produce winning character designs.

1 WHAT'S THE DESIGN'S PURPOSE?

You don't create characters in the same way as you would for illustrations, 2D or 3D animations, or video games. The constraints aren't the same and you'll need to adapt your ideas depending on the final product. Sometimes your client, because of their NDA, gives you the least amount of details possible. Yet you'll need all the art direction you can get, so if your brief is lacking, speak up. And just like a personal project, think about the goal of the design.

2 PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Think about the practicalities of your design. Can the studio afford to employ modellers who will turn your concept into reality? Perhaps your client doesn't have the budget to animate an octopus with 800 tentacles? The 3D modellers will probably need billions of polygons to make this creatures, but if it's for a mobile game then this is probably overkill. Even if your client doesn't reveal its resource limitations, it's important to consider this factor during your work and speak up if you don't think something is achievable.

3 ASK FOR A BRIEF

To produce your best results, you need to know a little bit about the project: its overall mood and atmosphere, or whether it's for children or adults, say? Is it low-key or relentlessly upbeat? Colourful, or black and white? Essentially, you need some art direction. This might sound like a given, but believe me, it's not! Most of the projects you'll work on will be in their exploratory phase, which means your client doesn't know what they want. If nobody can give you at least few guidelines about the project, walk away. Remember: your character has to work in someone else's universe.

> ❝ Essentially, you need some art direction. This might sound like a given, but believe me, it's not! ❞

4 ARCHETYPES AND OPPOSITES

When you know a little bit more about the character, such as their personality, job and background, certain visual stereotypes might spring to mind: all the bad guys wear black, all the women wear sexy outfits, the hero has cheekbones to die for. But sometimes it's fun to play with a cliché and take the opposite view: the attractive woman is the real villain, the horrible-looking monster is actually generous and kind, for example. It'll depend on the story you have to tell, but most of the time it's worth trying to find a new way to play around with the initial impression your character will make on the viewer.

5 STRONG SILHOUETTE

Think about Batman or Mickey Mouse: their silhouettes are instantly recognisable, as are those of most famous characters. It's a difficult trick to pull off because there are already so many standout characters in popular media. Think about how you can adjust proportions, clothes, hairstyles, props and so on. When you've finished, turn your character into a silhouette and check your work. For some designers, this is just the first step of their creative process.

6 UNIQUENESS

For most – but not all – commissions, you'll be asked to create a unique character. You'll have to find a way to make your character unforgettable. It's even more important than the quality of your design. Most iconic designs are very simple. You don't need to put details everywhere. Instead, find a key element that will make your design stand out. An eye-patch, a crazy hair style, a flamboyant cape… whatever you want. It's sometimes just a small detail, but it's always something unusual. ➡➡

6 INJECT SOME PERSONALITY

I find it impossible to create a character without thinking about their personality – it would be like drawing a blank face. Sometimes a project won't hire writers and nobody will give you a biography. And even if a few background details are given, they may not be enough to help you with your task. So try to fill in the blanks and imagine your character's life, how they think and their attitude to the world. This is probably the most important concept to grasp when designing a character.

> **66 Fill in the blanks and imagine your character's life, the way they think and their attitude to the world 99**

7 SIMPLE SHAPES

Shapes are one of the most important part of character design. Once again, keep things simple. If everything's too noisy, it's going to be difficult to visually read and understand. Consider characters who you actually remember. I'm sure if you think about Optimus Prime, his original design springs to mind, and not the one from the films. Why? Because the shapes are simple and you can remember them.

8 MAINTAINING CONTRAST

Characters with contrast are important, especially in video games. For readability purposes your character has to be contrasted enough in every situation. With games that utilise realistic illumination, the lighting can change significantly from one scene to the other. If the character's design is overly dark, it becomes impossible to see them in a dimly lit room, for example. You have to think about this for video game design because it can ruin the gaming experience. The same can apply for films or animation.

9 PAINTING A NEW VERSION OF WONDER WOMAN
Serge Birault reimagines Princess Diana of Themyscira as a moody teenager

A Sketching your idea
My drawing skills are pretty basic and I think more like a painter. For me, sketching is only useful for establishing the overall idea of what I want to do. I already have a vision of what I want my version of Wonder Woman to look like: her haircut, some of the clothes, the general shapes, and of course, the pose of the character.

B Colours and masses
During this stage I think about the general masses, the contrast and the colours. Painting digitally means you can easily change the colours and move elements. You're free to try different approaches. Don't forget to flip your work from time to time, to check the anatomy's correct and there are no glaring errors.

C Final colour pass
I used to always spend time cleaning up my artwork from top to bottom, but this will depend on the assignment and isn't always necessary. During this step I still work on the proportions and shapes, adding small details and fixing little mistakes. I'll also try different tonal variations and produce a colour grading pass.

10 LIMIT YOUR COLOURS

I think Street Fighter has some of the best video game character designs. Someone online created simplified versions of each character out of LEGO. They were recognisable just from their colours. With this in mind, try redesigning the costumes of classic Marvel or DC comic characters, who wear the same basic spandex suit with different colours. It's a surprisingly difficult exercise, so take your time. Two or three colours might be enough. Once again, a simple approach is usually the best.

11 CREATING A POSE THAT SELLS THE DESIGN

We don't usually employ complex poses during production design. The classic T-pose is usually enough in most cases for 2D or 3D animation, and even video games. Bear in mind that you won't be the only person working on this character. Make everything clear for other professionals in the pipeline by including reference materials, indicators of scale… essentially, anything that 3D artists or animators will find useful. On the other hand, you sometimes have to sell your concept to people who know nothing about character design. In this case, you'll also need to put your character in a pose that clearly shows off their personality or attitude.

12 MOVING FROM 2D TO 3D

Depending on the nature of the commission, your design may not be the final version. For a 3D product, another artist will be finalising your character's look. You need to make everything clear for them, because they'll be spending weeks or even months working on the 3D model.

As well as producing a strong 2D character with a range of supporting materials, why not learn the basics of a 3D program such as ZBrush. This will enable you to produce some 3D shapes that will assist the modeller. I know some talented 2D character designer are also 3D modellers. This crossover of skills is a growing industry trend.

13 KNOW YOUR CLIENT

This is the tricky bit. When you know your job, it's easy to produce good character design. But bear in mind that you're working for other people. They have their own taste and, well, sometimes this can be bad. It's your job to guide them towards something good, or at least acceptable. If they don't listen to you, you have to choose between money and integrity. You don't have to feel bad about delivering awful design if your client asked for it, you're not responsible for the incompetence of those people. Just ask to not be credited on the project…

14 NOT AN ILLUSTRATION

Character design is more about visualising ideas than demonstrating your drawing or painting skills. Some of the best character designers could come off as pretty mediocre artists. But it doesn't matter because they're constantly creative in others ways and that's much more important. And remember that creating cool designs while following a strict brief is harder than it looks. It's easy to show off artistically with plenty of lines and unlimited colours. But it takes a mastery of the subject to achieve something great through simplicity.

> **Creating cool designs while following a strict brief is harder than it looks**

15 DO YOU LIKE IT ?

Actually, you should ask yourself, "Did I do the best I could with what I had?" It's the only question that matters at the end. Like everything else, it's more about compromises than anything else. Considering that you had to deal with producers, art direction, deadlines, budgets and so on, did you do your best? We're rarely totally satisfied with what we do in our career. So don't be too hard on yourself unless it's a personal project, when you have to be!

CREATE CINEMATIC KEYFRAME ART

Concept artist **Ivan Khomenko** reveals his production process for developing a cinematic keyframe using both 2D and 3D techniques

Workshops

Artist PROFILE

Ivan Khomenko
LOCATION: US

Ivan is a Los Angeles-based concept artist who has several years of experience working in the film industry.
https://ifxm.ag/ivan-k

What do you think of when you hear the term "cinematic keyframe"? A lush landscape lit by a beautiful sunset, or an action scene with explosions in the background? Sure, those can be cinematic. But to me, the challenge of making a cinematic keyframe in a small room with a handful of characters and a couple of lights is more appealing.

To accomplish such a task, I'm going to use basic principles of blocking, lighting and texturing in 3D to create a solid base. Then, with photo references and different photo-bashing techniques, I'll be fleshing out the characters in the scene.

I draw a lot of inspiration from films and to me, Sidney Lumet's 12 Angry Men is a perfect example of compelling camera work and actor staging in a limited space. Lumet manages to achieve a depth that enables multiple stories, both in the foreground and background, to play out within a single frame.

To achieve this effect, I'll depict an interrogation close to the camera and the aftermath of the scene's previous events in the background. Note that this workshop will be less of a painting exercise and more of a photo and 3D dependent piece, and will show my usual work process.
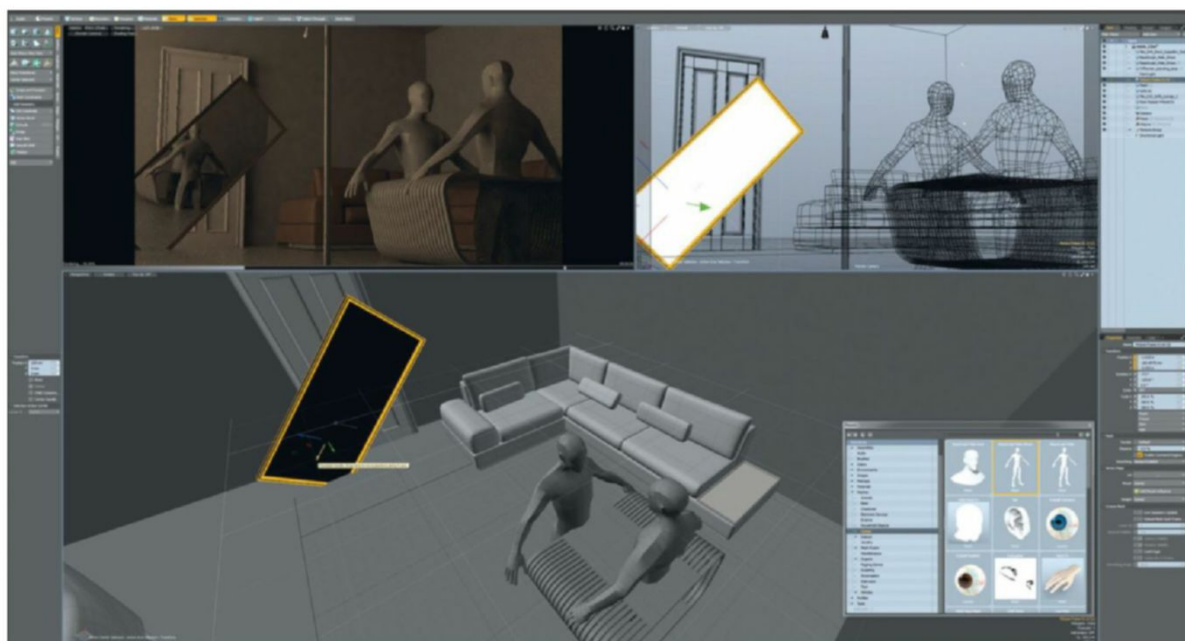
1 Blocking out the 3D base in Modo
I start with a cube and delete one polygon on the side to imitate window light coming from the left. By using meshes from Modo's content library, I'm able to start blocking out the furniture and characters in the scene. I also want to play around with reflections, so I decide to add a mirror to the opposite wall.
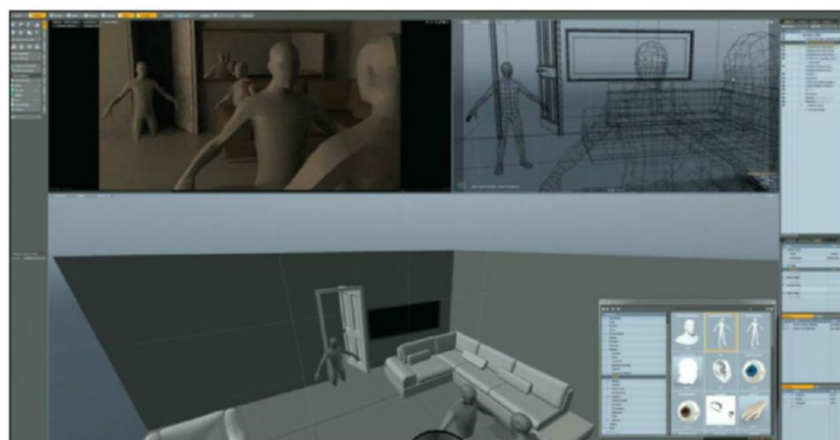
2 Finding your frame
A key step is to choose your camera angle, which is always tricky in 3D because you have too many options! Here I decide to change the camera focal length from 50mm to 35mm. This gives me a wider view so I can include close-ups of two character in the foreground, and the characters near the door. This ensures I'll be able to show emotions up close and most of the room at the same time.

3 Posing characters in DAZ Studio
Once I'm happy with my choice of camera angle and character positions, I switch to DAZ Studio and pose all four characters. DAZ models are very easy to pose, and the Genesis Male and Genesis Female models that come with the software are pretty much perfect for temporary stand-ins. I also download a free 3D model of a gun that I'm going to use later on in the process.
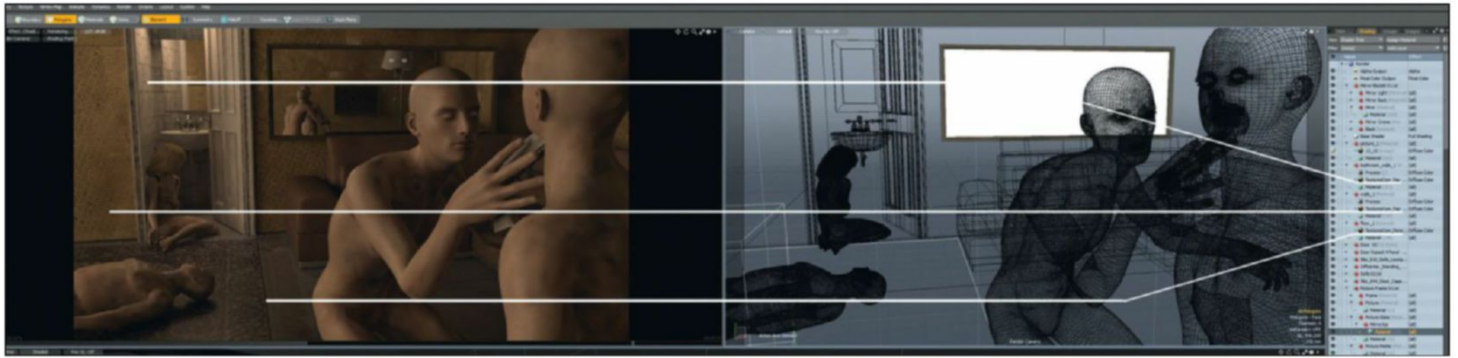
© Textures.com

4 Texturing in Modo

I use a couple of free textures from **www.textures.com**. I apply room walls and bathroom tiles textures using Projection Type>Box, and carpet texture using Projection Type>Planar on Projection Axis>Y. This ensures that I have just one single texture of the carpet, which I can move around and place where necessary. I also apply a Bump Effect using the same texture to both the carpet and bathroom walls.
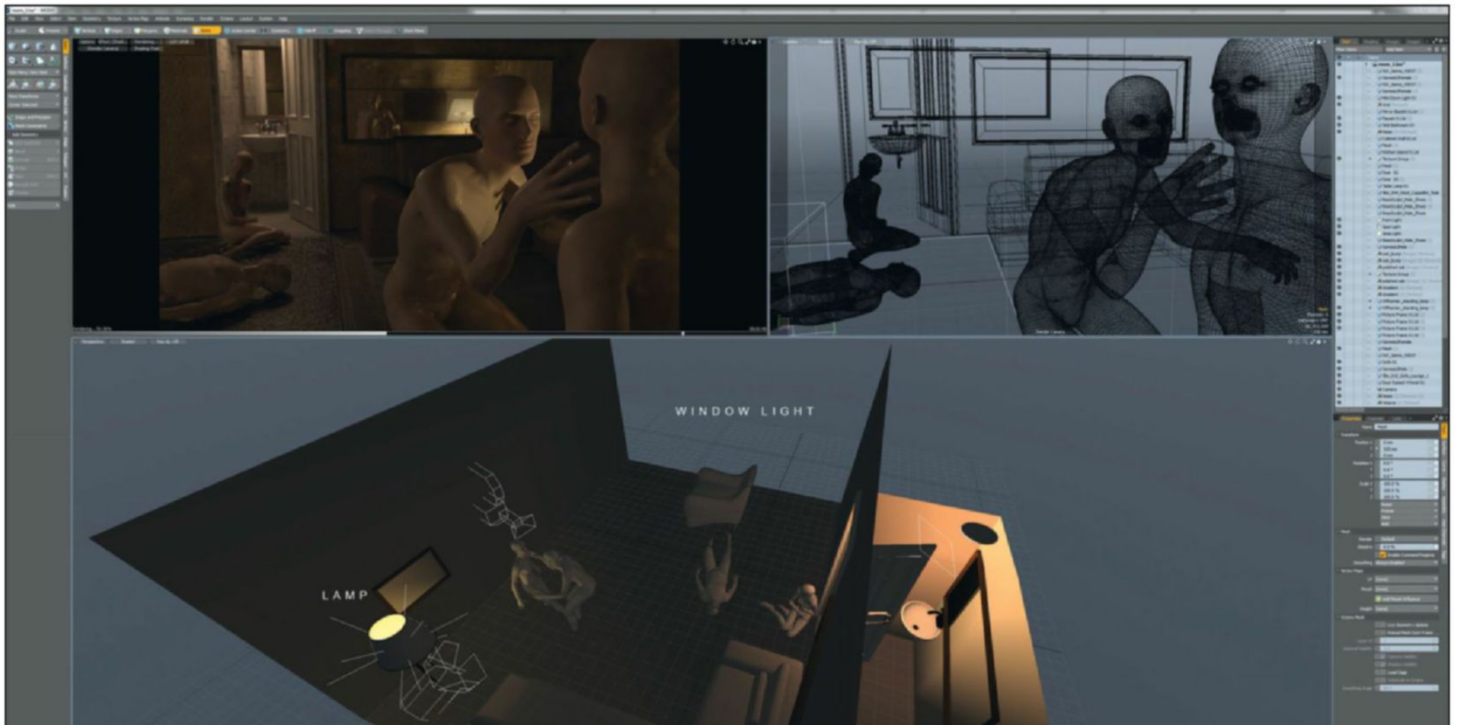
5 Exploring lighting options

One of the main advantages of 3D is the ability to play around with the lighting, and so I turn different lights on and off in the scene. Before this stage I had a window on the left acting as my main light source, with a lamp in the right-hand corner that was turned off. Now I reduce the window light by 80 per cent (I leave 20 per cent to act as fill lighting) and turn on the lamp. ➤➤
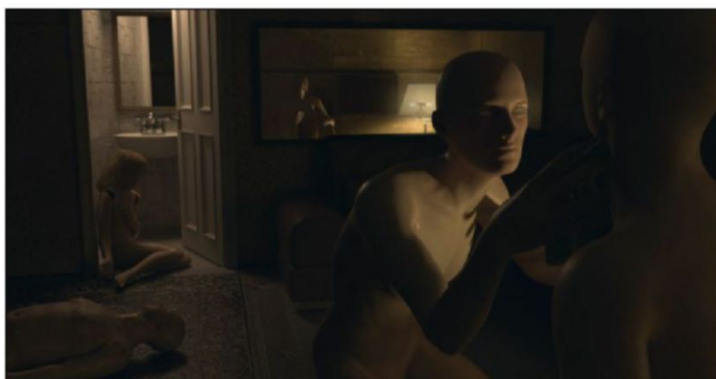
6 Developing the mood of the scene

Here are examples of two very different lighting scenarios that I produce. I like them both, but because I'm going for a gritty look I choose the one on the left. Furthermore, the lighting coming up from the bottom makes the character with the gun looks more menacing.
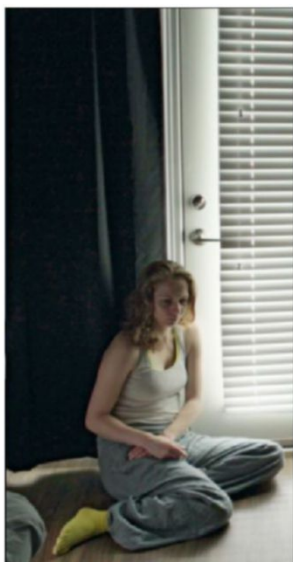
7 Using photo references

I can't stress enough how important it is to have proper photo references. If you work in film and visual effect then in most cases you'll be asked to develop a photorealistic final image. Usually, I use photos that I've either taken myself or found online. In this case I take photos of my roommates under a similar lighting setup.

8 Make adjustments in Photoshop

I often use Photoshop's Quick Selection Tool to select areas that I need, then adjust colours with Color Balance and Hue/Saturation, and exposure with Levels (I never use Curves) Occasionally, before using these precision tools I'll use Match Color to quickly generate colour and exposure adjustments.
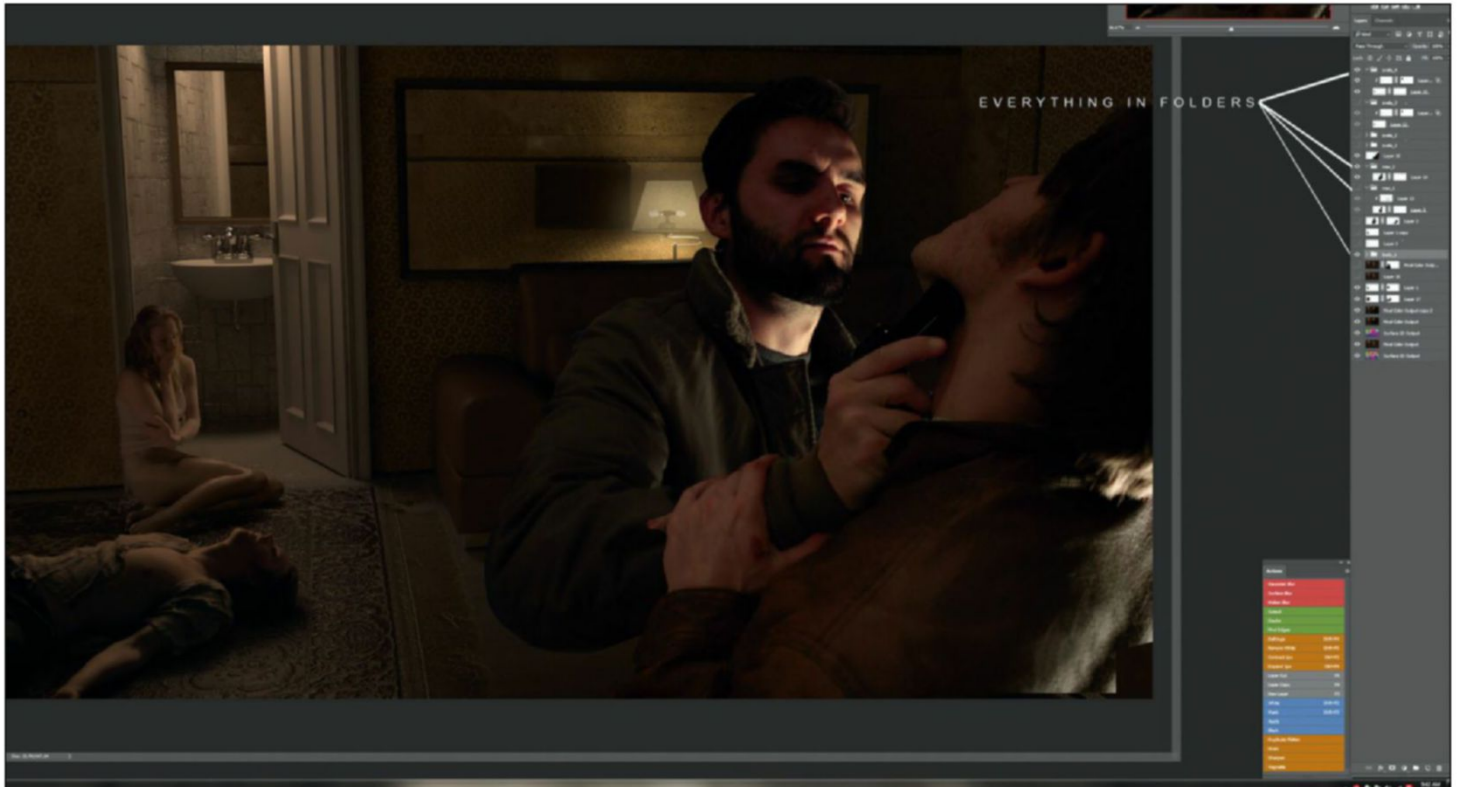
9 Making use of my earlier photo references

Using Photoshop's Layer Masks, Warp and Transform tools I swap my 3D models with the photographs that I took, mainly thinking about the light direction and exposure. During these later stages it's important to stay organised, so I keep each adjustment on a separate layer and arrange different versions of each character in their own folder. It's not the most exiting part of the process, but it always pays off at the end.
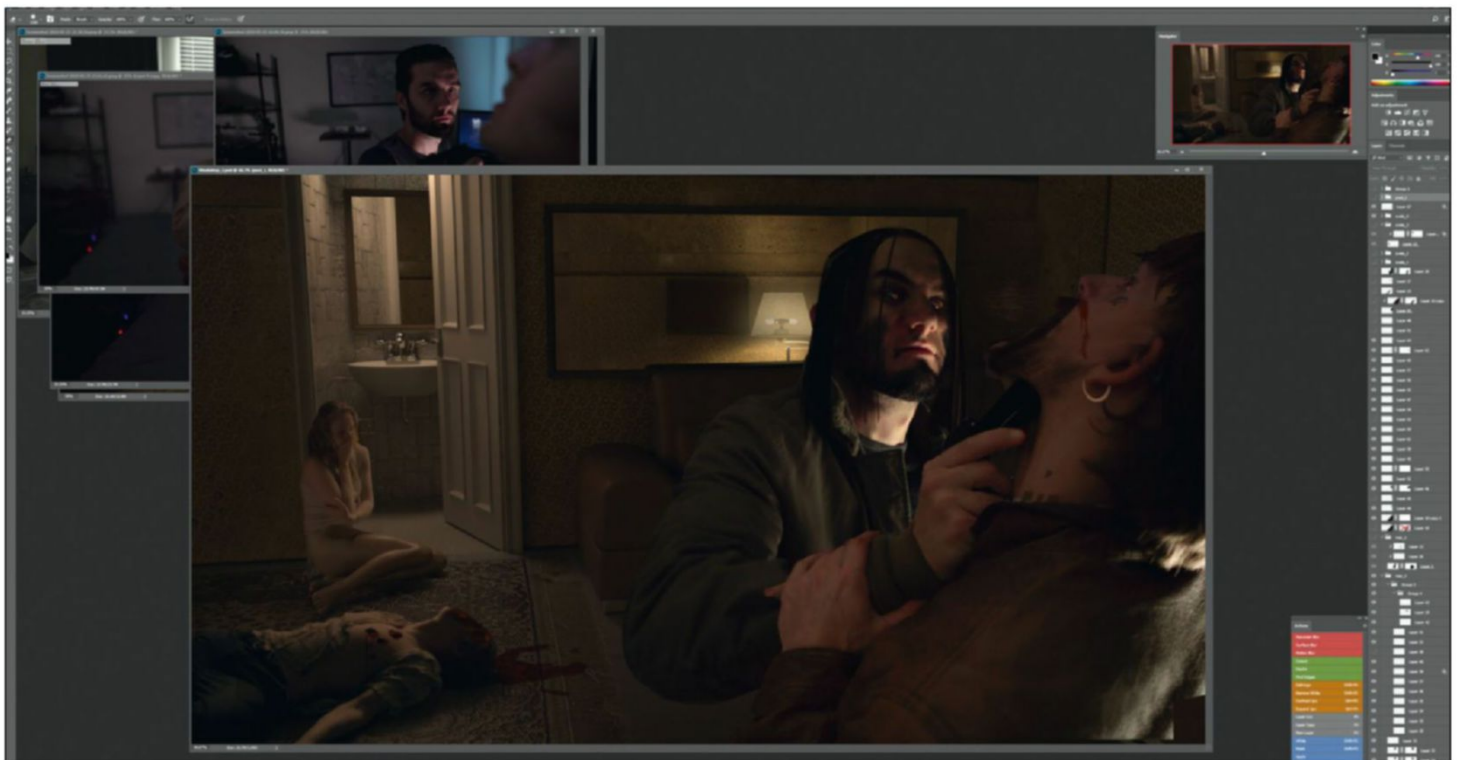
10 Overpainting on elements through out the composition

As soon as I'm satisfied with the basic elements in the scene, I start to paint on top of them. Here I'm trying out different looks for the main character, changing the face of the other guy and adding details to the body on the floor. Most of the time I paint using a combination of the Brush and Mixer Brush tools, and three of my custom brushes that will be included with this workshop. ➡➡

11 Going back to the 3D foundation

Another advantage of having a 3D base is that you always can go back and add elements to the scene. Here I render out the gun that I had before so that it matches the position of the hand, as well as a coffee maker/murder weapon on the floor. But I'm still trying to figure out what I want to the main character to look like.

© actionvfx.com

12 Painting textures

I paint some bullet holes on the sofa and door, and use a few textures for bullet holes on the mirror. I also paint smudges on the mirror in the bathroom using the Mixer Brush and Airbrush tools. At this point, I can bring the image to a photorealistic final look with different photo textures, but in my production pipeline experience what I have now would be enough in most cases.

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: HARD BRUSH

My main brush that I use to paint and erase layers and layer masks.

SOFT BRUSH

I use this brush to add atmospheric depth and haze to the image.

SMUDGE BRUSH

Ideal for smudging textures and removing unnecessary textures.

TEXTURE BRUSH

This brush can be used to paint noisy textures.

13 Final touches and tidying up

Now I make some alterations to the main character's face, clean some edges and in general just try to remove any remaining photo artefacts. I also add a few accessories and a coloured strip to his jacket. I've only used four brushes through this workshop and I'm usually very economical with brush strokes, only applying them where they're needed.

14 Applying post effects

Finally, I carry out Hue/Saturation and Color Balance adjustments and apply a subtle haze effect. Sometimes in my art I'll also make use of the Find Edges filter (Filters>Stylize>Find Edges) before inverting that layer, turning it to Multiply and reducing the Opacity to 30 per cent. This gives all my edges subtle outlines, and makes the composition look a little bit cleaner. ◕

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Issue 175
July 2019
Learn the art skills you need to break into the animation industry with pro advice on character art, lighting keys, portfolio work and visual development. Elsewhere, we talk to Florian Satzinger, and artist and animator Aaron Blaise.

Issue 174
June 2019
There's a host of top-level comic art talent this issue. We talk to Jorge Jimenéz and Christian Ward, Tony S Daniel creates our cover art, Jen Bartel paints Captain Marvel and Tess Fowler presents her essential inking tips!

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Photoshop
DESIGN ENGAGING GAME CHARACTERS

Mary Glaid & **Nicolas Leger** reveal how they develop the characters for the video game Unruly Heroes, a take on the Monkey King legend
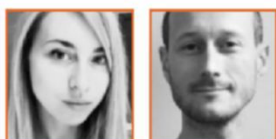
Artist PROFILE

Mary Glaid & Nicolas Leger
LOCATION: France

Mary is an illustrator and digital artist, and Nicolas is an animation director. Both artists are working at Magic Design Studios, Montpellier, on the south coast of France.
https://ifxm.ag/mary-g
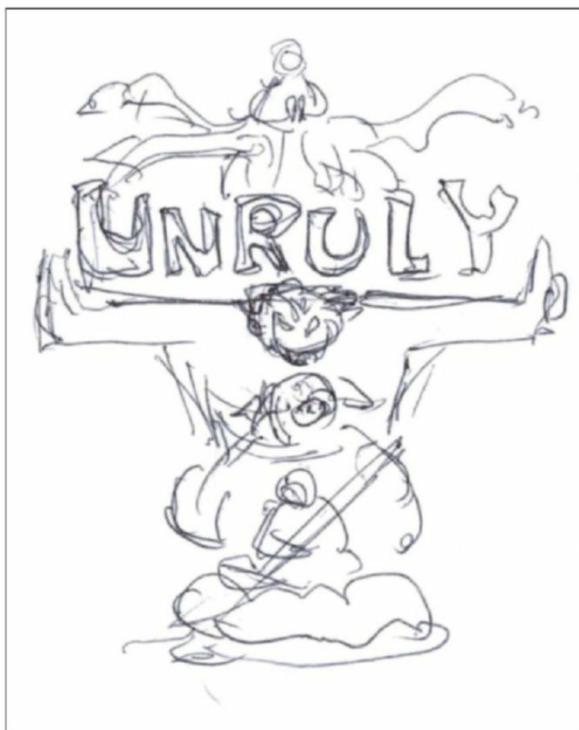**https://ifxm.ag/nicolas-l**

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 8 now!

In this workshop we explain how we assemble the four lead characters from the video game Unruly Heroes into a single composition, while showing off their unique personalities.

We've worked together in the past, with each of us bringing our own art skills to the table. In Nicolas' case it's design and composition, while colour, textures and light are Mary's specialities. Taking this collaborative approach throws up plenty of happy accidents, and we're organised enough to factor in some creative experimentation during the painting process, too.

RESOURCES

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSH: MARYBRUSH

Mary's bespoke brush combines a light texture effect with soft edges. This creates a look of traditional media.

1 Visualising the initial idea
Our creative director Yang Lu scribbles a quick thumbnail sketch to visualise his idea. It's a simple, symmetrical image that highlights the title of the game and illustrates the main characters. The aim is to ensure the viewer both focuses on the game's title and understands the ranking of the protagonists.

2 Lay down the line art
We have to stay true to the game's character 3D models, but also give them expressions that will create an interesting illustration. Greyscale lighting will guide Mary's colouring later on. It takes a bit of time to finalise the stacked arrangement of the characters, to ensure that their personality comes through while conveying a clear hierarchy. The Monkey is in a meditative position at the base, the Pig is a comic character, the Ogre is a pillar of strength, and the Monk is the spiritual guide.

3 Exploring character poses and expressions

We compare characters with different stances and facial expressions, to ensure our choice of poses will work in the vertical composition. We like the look of the Pig holding the object, but settle on him with folded arms to maintain the symmetrical look of the stacked characters.

4 Generating the first colour pass

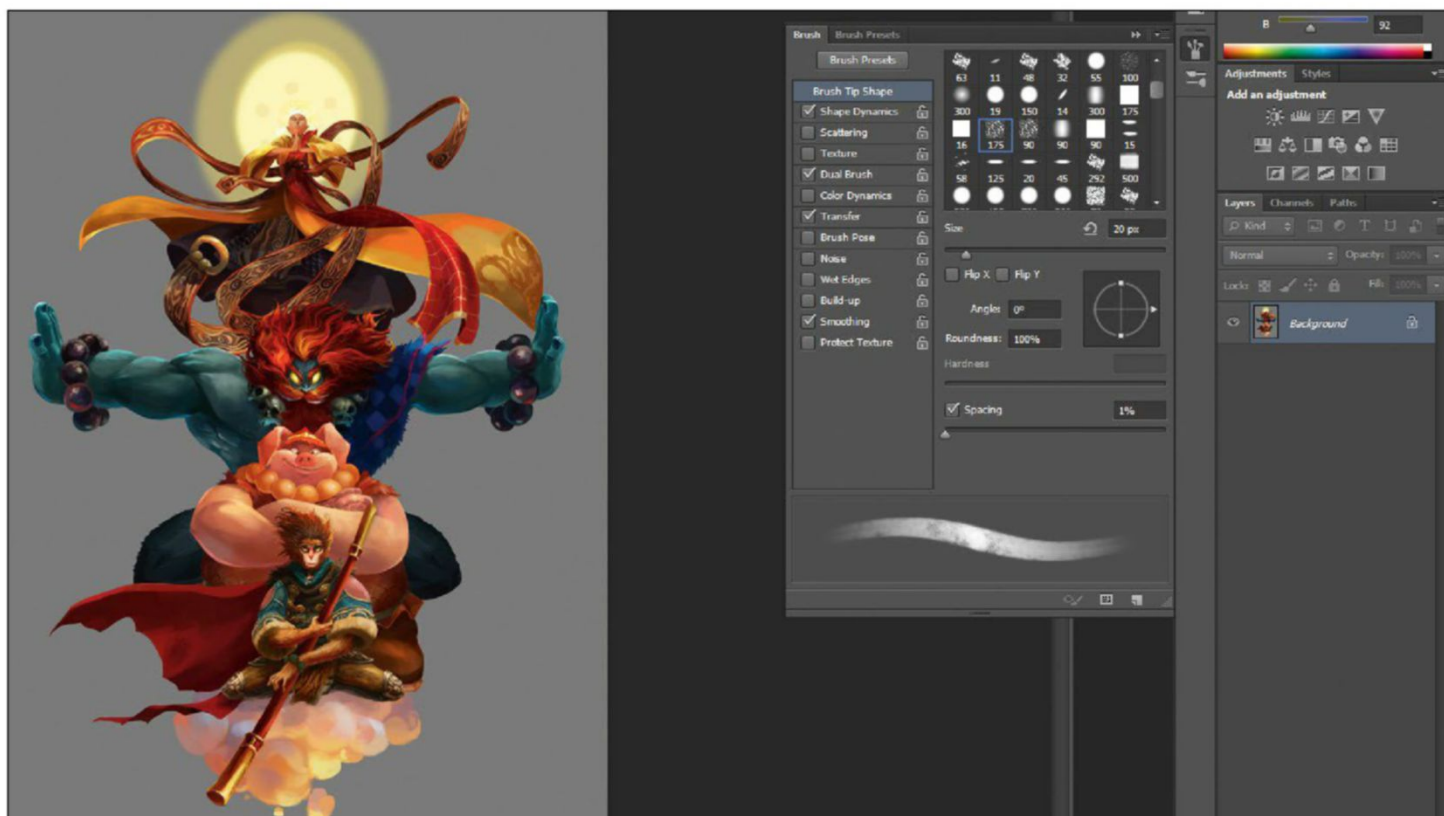Mary applies colours and volume to the four characters. She does this separately at first, without taking account of any reflected lighting or colours in the shared environment. Now is an opportunity to correct some anatomy proportion errors and other mistakes that weren't obvious in the initial sketch. Once we're happy with how the figures are looking, Mary starts on the details: cloth pattern, hair, accessories and so on.
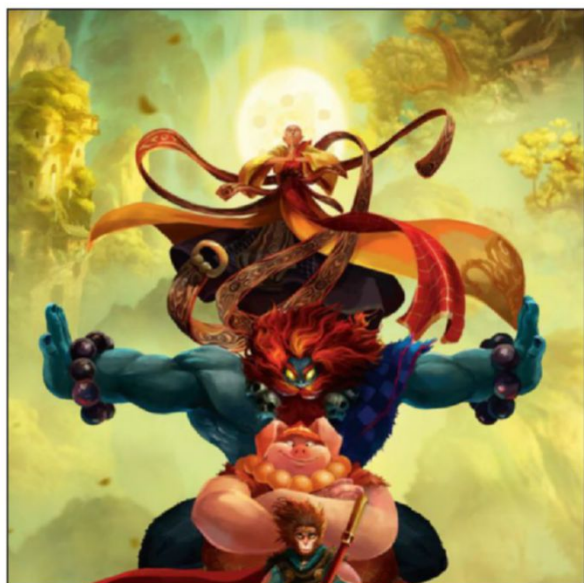
5 Introducing the environment
Unruly Heroes is a journey into colourful and fantastical worlds, and so Mary places the characters in a warm and natural environment, which matches the tone of the game. She arranges a variety of trees and mountain assets that have already been created for the game, and uses multiple fog layers to anchor them in the scene. The atmospheric perspective immediately brings out the characters and gives depth to the illustration.

6 The importance of Photoshop filters
Applying Photoshop effects may seem like taking the easy way out, but when used sparingly they're a great way to enhance elements of an illustration. In this case, radial blur immediately boosts the depth of the scene and it enables us to better integrate the characters into their environment.

7 Ensuring the characters belong in the composition
Over the next few steps Mary brings harmony and coherence to the characters and background. She also needs to reinforce their silhouette. The cloud that the Monkey's sitting on needs to look more textured, so that it matches the detail levels of the environment.
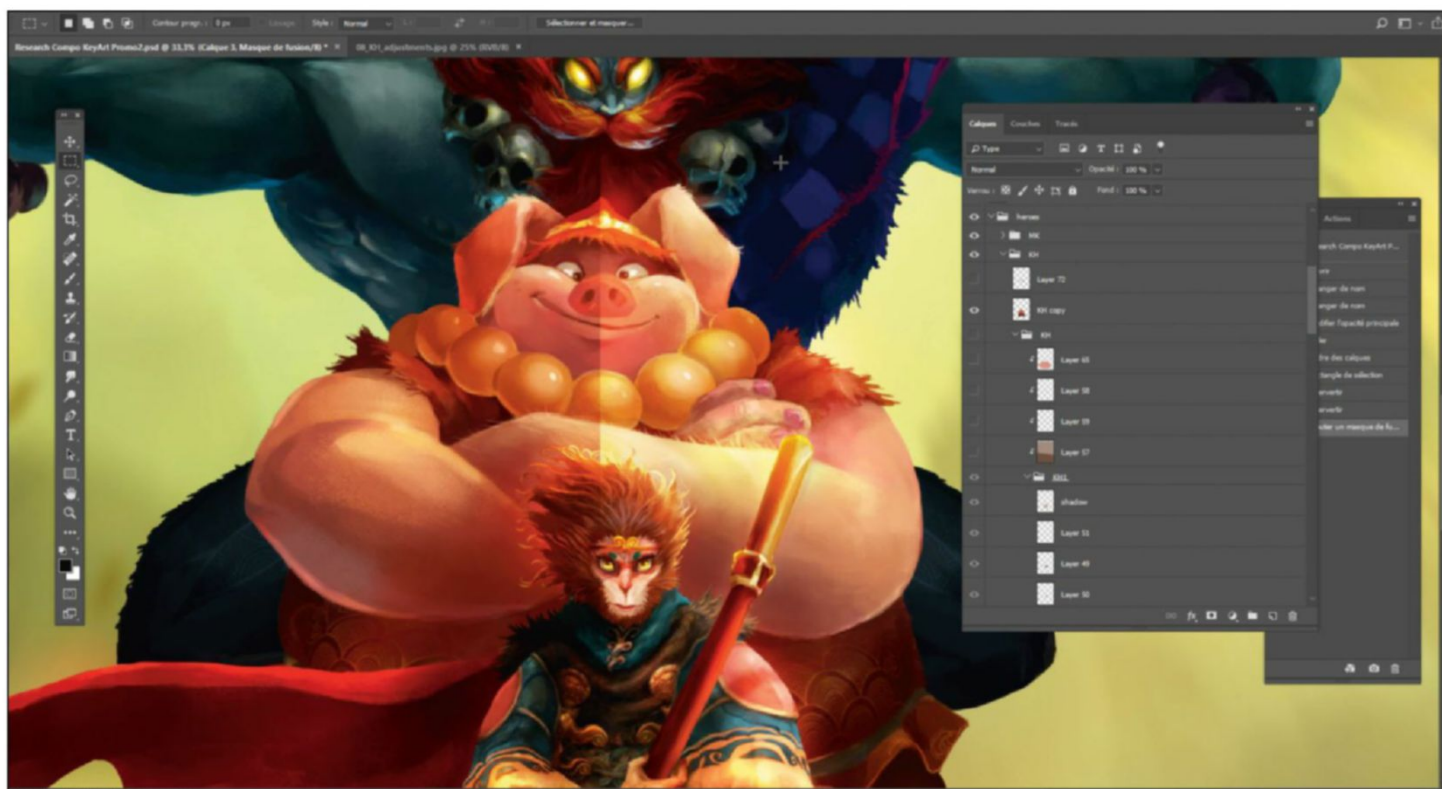
8 Use lighting to enhance the personalities of the Pig

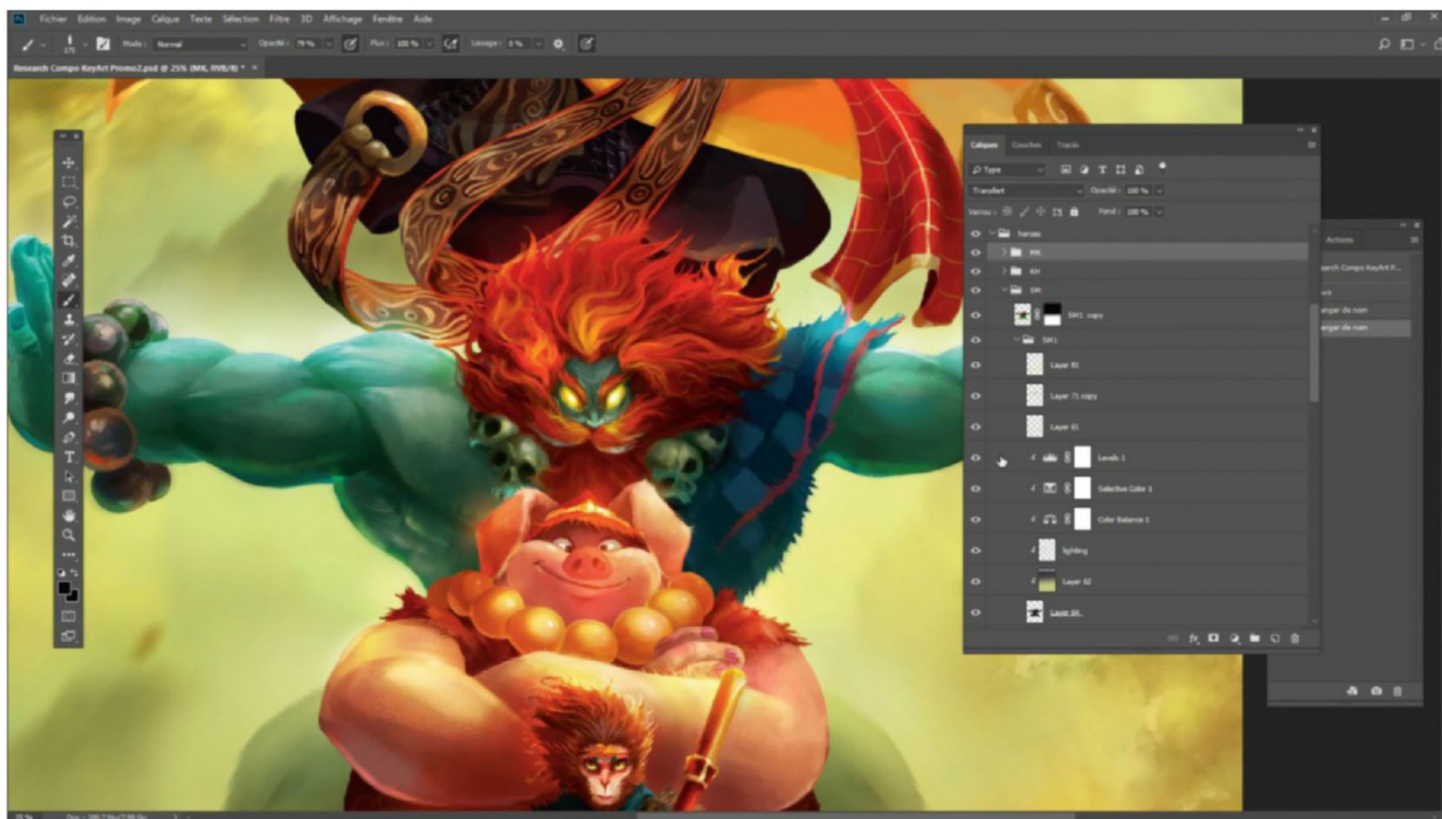The depiction of the Pig needs to convey his headstrong attitude. Mary's solution is to apply a bright light on to his huge arms. This creates a focal point on the character, informing the viewer of the Pig's stubbornness, as well as his physical strength.

9 Refining the appearance of the Ogre

The Ogre is the scene's central element, but he's an overpowering presence at the moment. We need to tone down his appearance and integrate him better into the background. Fog layers help to hide his legs, while Mary uses adjustment layers to lighten and colour correct his body.

10 Illustrating the Monk's magic and movement

The Monk already has a design that conveys lightness through his wind-swept clothes. In addition, the low-angle view gives the viewer the impression that he possesses an inner strength. We push the character's mystical abilities by using blur effects to simulate movement across his body and within the floating energy spheres. This results in a softening of his silhouette, so we make sure to keep the Monk's head in focus.

11 Achieving foreground consistency

We extend the Monkey's cloud across the whole foreground, to give our characters a more consistent base. Mary boosts the characters' mystical and spiritual aspect through the use of lighting effects, which stops the figures from looking like they're simply floating in the scene.

12 Making the final touches to the illustration

Mary uses adjustment layers to darken the edges, and lighten and warm up the centre. This subtly improves the light in the scene. Then, after merging the image, she finally adds a global radial blur to give a sensation of movement, ensuring that the viewer focuses on the characters and the game's logo (which is hidden here). She duplicates the radial blur layer and masks around the centre of the artwork, so that it doesn't interfere with the characters' facial expressions.

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX
Reviews

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

5 PRODUCTS ON TEST

SOFTWARE

96 ZBrush 2019
Pixologic brings workflow improvements and an innovative render feature targeting 2D artists to its venerable 3D tool.

TRAINING

99 Unconventional Oil Techniques
Veteran artist and illustrator James Gurney demonstrates his oil painting technique for realistic-looking textures.

BOOKS

100 The Making of Alien
Just like the facehugger from the film, this book will wrap you in its grasp with exclusive imagery and on-set insights.

101 Sketch with Asia
Asia Ladowski's book is a beautiful blend of manga-inspired art, tips and tutorials.
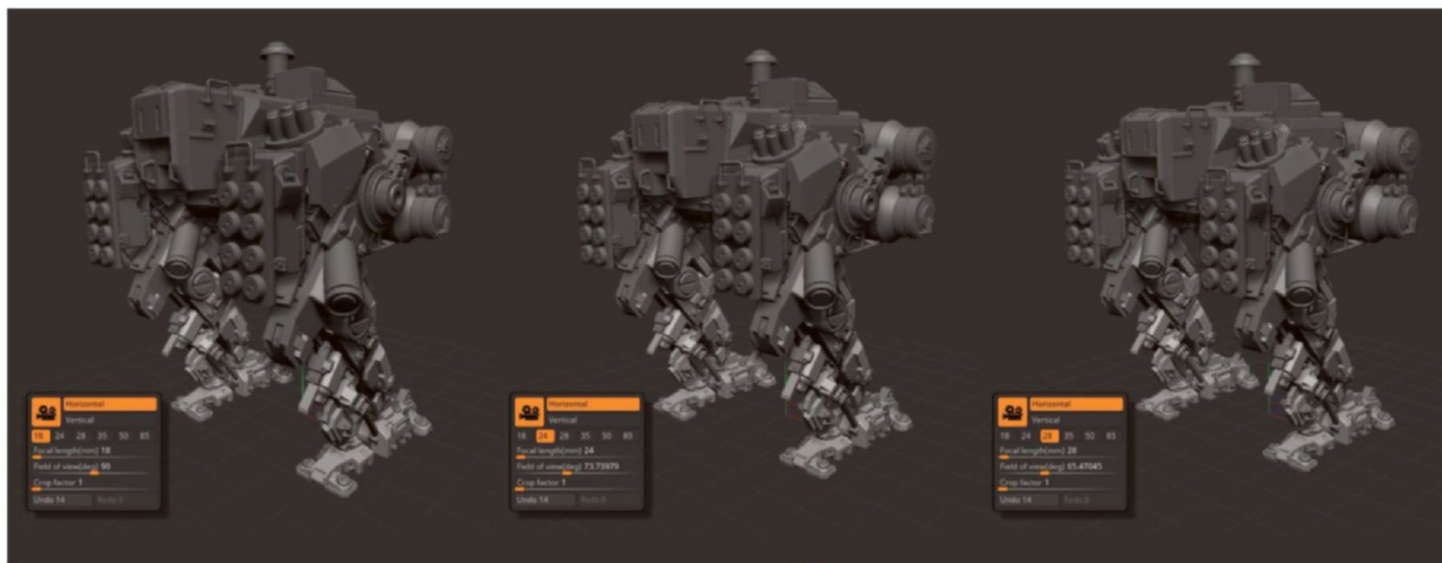
101 The Art of Toy Story 4
This art-of book lets the concepts from the latest Pixar juggernaut do all the talking.

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

This release brings a new camera system that will be more familiar to 3D artists.

ZBrush 2019

MAC & PC

NEW LOOK Pixologic introduces workflow improvements and an innovative render tool targeting 2D artists to its venerable 3D software

Price £710 (one-time fee), £32 per month or £143 every six months **Company** Pixologic **Web** www.pixologic.com

Renting software often brings a mix of complaints and praise. ZBrush is the latest company to add its name to the ever-growing list of subscription-based software models. The program now has monthly and six-monthly options, alongside its one-time perpetual licence offering.

ZBrush's price has grown steadily in recent years, but if you bear in mind that all upgrades have been free of charge since the early 2000s, then there's not a lot to moan about. For one, having a monthly option is always great news for small studios and freelancers who may need a small number of licences for a short period of time or a specific contract.

Aside from the pricing restructure, what else is new? Accessed from the Render panel, NPR or non-photorealistic rendering gives you new options for changing the look of your final renders. The range of styles is mind-boggling: there's now a huge range of sliders and settings to choose from and then combine. You can turn sculpts into a comic style with heavy outlines, overlay textures and paper styles; create hand-drawn effects similar to Photoshop filters or actions; and even add halftone effects. Not a huge bonus for traditional 3D artists perhaps, but it's a great addition for illustrators and mixed-media artists who want to stand out from the crowd.

IMPROVED RETOPOLOGY TOOL

ZRemesher has been through two iterations already and both have been well received. It's essentially an auto retopology tool and it makes quick work of making high-res models usable by giving you clean topology and edge loops. This latest version works better for hard-surface models: it can detect sharp surface angles and even maintain creased edges, as well as giving you polygroups.

One gripe with the subtool system has always been that you can't group and manage your subtools effectively. This becomes a problem when you get into hundreds of subtools per character. Good naming conventions helped, but a true folder system was needed and that's now been added.

More of an improvement to subtools than a new feature, this version brings folders and a range of folder settings.
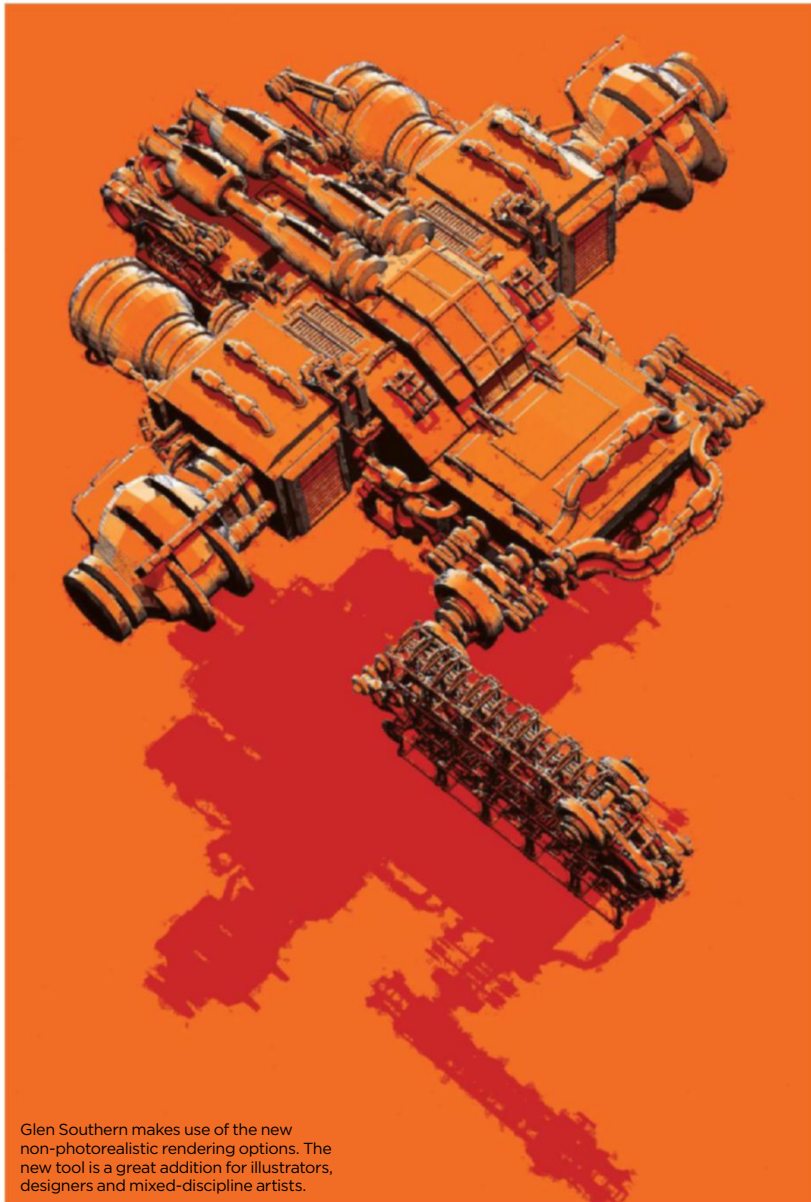
Glen Southern makes use of the new non-photorealistic rendering options. The new tool is a great addition for illustrators, designers and mixed-discipline artists.
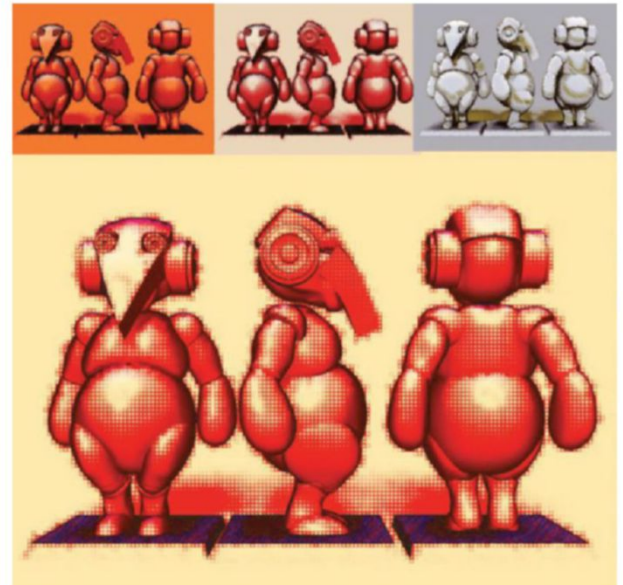

You can dramatically change the look of your designs after you've rendered them, as Glen Southern demonstrates with this robot artwork.

66 **The NPR tool enables you to turn sculpts into a comic style with outlines, overlay textures and paper styles** 99

Subtools can now be placed into folders and there's even a folder setting button that enables you to access a range of folder actions, such as delete, transpose, merge and Boolean. The ability to move, scale and rotate the whole folder is a real bonus. Having used it for a few days, it's a massive help in organising your creations, and it seems a shame that we only have one folder level and we can't nest them (yet).

Snapshot 3D enhances the functions found on the Spotlight wheel. Spotlight was introduced to enable an artist to take any image (texture) and project it on to the surface of a model using Polypaint. It came in the form of a wheel that, when activated, made it possible to place the image or portion of the image over your model and then paint through, adding the texture to the surface below.

Snapshot 3D works in the same way, as part of the Spotlight wheel. What's different is that the textures, rather than applying anything to the model below, enable you to convert the image to a 3D model as a subtool. For example, if you take a greyscale image of a white cube on a black background and apply it through Spotlight, it'll create a cube of that shape and size.

Using complex greyscale images and the live Boolean function in the SubTool panel means you can quickly generate complex shapes. It's a novel way to add 3D geometry from 2D patterns and shapes.

IMPROVED CAMERA OPTION

The ZBrush camera has often baffled new users. It's there as we look through it when we work, but it's always been seen as a weakness. ZBrush 2019 adds the Universal Camera, which now gives us some of the basic functions we would see in other 3D cameras. There's a focal length control, crop factor, and even import and export functions. You can match the focal length of imported photographs and you can save some of the settings to reuse in other scenes. Of course, this now plays well with programs such as KeyShot.

Pixologic also added some new plugins, including Intersection Masker that enables you to use a mesh to mask, and ZColor which enhances digital painting tasks.

ZBrush is still clearly the market-leader in digital sculpting packages, and this 2019 update brings some diverse new features and tools. Pixologic doesn't always respond to industry needs, but has a habit of coming up with unique ways to solve problems. There's lots in this release for illustrators, designers and mixed-discipline artists, along with some well-needed additions for 3D artists.

DETAILS

Features
■ Snapshot 3D for creating geometry
■ Non-photorealistic rendering
■ New ZPlugins including ZColor and Intersection Masker
■ Enhanced Folder system
■ Universal Camera with new import/export options and greater functionality
■ Manage colour via the new ZColor plugin

System Requirements
PC: 64-bit Windows Vista or newer, Core 2 Duo or AMD equivalent CPU, 4GB RAM, 8GB hard disk space
Mac: OS X 10.8 or newer, Core 2 Duo or AMD equivalent CPU, 4GB RAM, 8GB hard disk space

Rating
★★★★☆

The techniques James shows in the video will give you more command over the feel of different surfaces in your own work.

James Gurney's paintings are famed for their realistic textures and lighting – here he reveals some of the secrets that make it possible.

There's plenty of insight into James's broader working methods, including his use of colour studies to test different poses.
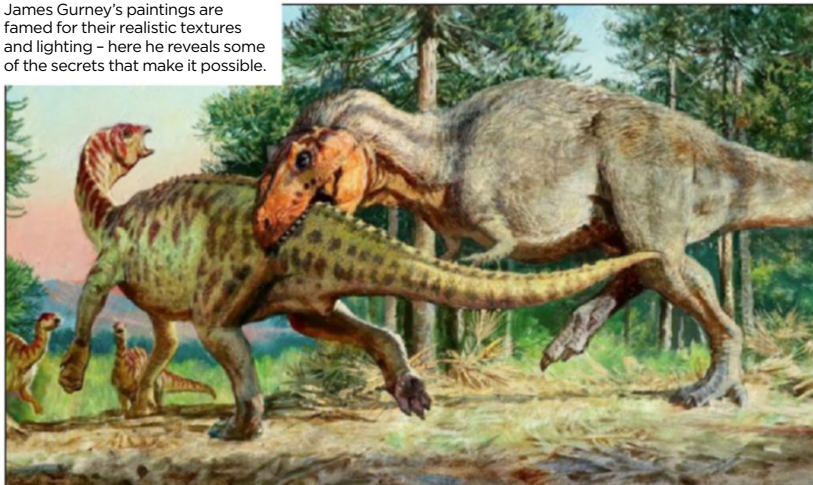
Unconventional Oil Techniques

OIL SHOW YOU HOW Veteran artist and illustrator James Gurney demonstrates how easy it is to paint realistic-looking textures when you put brush to canvas

Publisher James Gurney **Price** £19 (DVD); £14 (download) **Web** www.jamesgurney.com

James Gurney's specialism as an artist is making you believe that the scene he's depicted is real – whether he's opening a window on prehistory with his dinosaur paintings or presenting pure fantasy, as in his **Dinotopia series. In books like Imaginative Realism and several of his videos, he's shared many of his techniques for using light, colour and texture to bring his visions to life.**

You could see Unconventional Oil Techniques as a companion to that material. Here, James delves into the nitty-gritty of the painting process, showing how he works with oil paints and the canvas to create particular effects, from the roughness of rocks to the delicacy of old forest foliage. He does this through a combination of his documentary-style filming approach, where you see him on location capturing research and in the studio

painting; and direct-to-camera exercises showing specific techniques. These range from well-established approaches like glazing and scumbling, to more surprising tricks.

One example is what James calls pre-texturing, where he applies modelling paste to the artwork surface, uses various tools to create bumps and ridges out of it, then paints on top. This way, he gets textures that would be difficult to achieve with oil paint alone, and uses less actual paint, which means the oils he applies dry faster – a real boon for any busy artist.

As you'd expect from James, all the camera work is first-rate, showing you exactly what's going on, and his narration is precise and relaxed. You also get an insight into his broader working methods, including preliminary sketches and studies, and working with maquettes to acquire lighting information.

DETAILS

Topics covered
- Glazing
- Scumbling
- Oiling up
- Pre-texturing
- Side-dragging
- Palette-knife blending

Length
94 minutes

Rating
★★★★★

ARTIST PROFILE
JAMES GURNEY

James specialises in painting realistic images of scenes that can't be photographed, from dinosaurs to ancient civilisations. He's also a keen plein air painter and sketcher. James learnt to draw by reading books about Norman Rockwell and Howard Pyle. He received a degree in anthropology at the University of California, but chose a career in art. The artist has written the instruction books Imaginative Realism and Color and Light.

www.gurneyjourney.blogspot.com

Sci-fi illustrator Chris Foss contributed to the film's pre-production process.

All Alien imagery TM & © 20th Century Fox Film Corp.

HR Giger developed the look of the alien eggs, the derelict ship as well as the creature.

The Making of Alien

GIGER COUNTER Just like the facehugger from the film, this book will wrap you in its grasp with exclusive imagery and on-set insights

ImagineFX ARTIST'S CHOICE

To mark Alien's 40th anniversary, best-selling author JW Rinzler has charted the development of the film, starting with writer Dan O'Bannon's simple idea right through to it becoming a ground-breaking piece of cinema history.

Actually, 'charted' doesn't do Rinzler's work justice. The writer had to delve into the entire filmmaking process, which started in 1968 and lasted around 12 years. The result is a book that's overflowing in rare insights. There's details on the hiring of visionary artist HR Giger and the many problems experienced when trying to translate the form of his alien designs into practical effects, as well as the filming of the notorious chestburster scene and how early screenings of the film reportedly had people running out of cinemas screaming. And that's just scratching the surface.

Unsurprisingly, there's artwork galore, including never-seen-before storyboards, concepts and film stills. Among the exclusive imagery are script excerpts and copies of original letters from the 20th Century Fox archives, which not only back up Rinzler's storytelling perfectly, but often provide a welcome change of pace from the reading experience.

Rinzler also manages to make the book modern and relevant, by

Actor Veronica Cartwright recalls once fainting when wearing her cumbersome space suit.

> ## There's art galore, including never-seen-before storyboards, illustrations and film stills

including new interviews from director Ridley Scott and other key members of the original film crew. This gives the reader a fresh perspective on the film and its sequels.

Before you settle down to enjoy The Making of Alien, which is hugely impressive on both a visual and editorial level, it's worth noting that this book is not for the faint hearted: some of the images are very graphic. It's also extremely heavy on copy, all of which is in small print and can become hard going when reading in long stints. That said, the chapters are ordered chronologically so this weighty publication is easy to dip in and out of.

Indeed, The Making of Alien has an almost encyclopaedic feel to it, providing everything one could possibly ever want to know about how Alien came to be. It provides a fascinating – albeit expensive – understanding of one of the most iconic films of the 20th century. If you're a fan of Scott's work and Alien in particular, then film retrospectives don't get much better than this.

RATING ★★★★★

Director Ridley Scott, inspired by the work of Moëbius, produced a series of storyboards ('Ridleygrams') to help convey his vision to 20th Century Fox.

Sketch with Asia

HELPING HAND Asia Ladowski's first book is a beautiful blend of manga-inspired paintings, tips and tutorials

Author Asia Ladowska **Publisher** 3dtotal **Price** £24 **Web** www.3dtotal.com **Available** Now

Recent years have seen manga artist Asia Ladowski become an online sensation, building up a huge following on social media with her #sketchwithasia challenge on Instagram (where she now has well over 900,000 followers).

Blending her experience in hyper-realism with manga, the artist's distinctive artistic style is loved by a growing army of artists around the

Asia reveals how she took just 20 minutes to give this character piece the right level of shading and detailing.

globe. Not bad when you consider how many times she was told in her early creative days that 'manga would never get her into art school'.

In this 168-page book, Asia reveals all on her bumpy road to artistic success, before providing a detailed look at her creative process and offering a wealth of advice to aspiring manga artists. From faces and expressions, to hair, hands and more, you'll discover how she adopts both

digital and traditional art techniques to achieve her signature style. And there's plenty of inspiration to be had with a collection of Asia's finished art, including bespoke pieces for this book.

Sketch with Asia is both engaging and easy to read. The book's a must-have for manga – and Asia – fans, and for any artist wanting tips on how to share their work in the modern world.

RATING ★★★★★

The Art of Toy Story 4

VISUAL FEAST This art-of book lets the concepts from the latest Pixar juggernaut do all the talking... more's the pity

Foreward Annie Potts **Introduction** Josh Cooley **Publisher** Chronicle Books **Price** £29 **Web** www.chroniclebooks.com **Available** Now

Sheriff Woody and friends are back on the big screen, in the fourth instalment of Pixar's Toy Story series. The Art of Toy Story 4 reveals some of the concept art that helped to bring the film to life.

Almost every one of its 160 pages feature never-seen-before concepts from the archives. The full-page paintings by Pixar art director John Lee are captivating, showing off

An example of John Lee's deceptively simple concept art that appears throughout The Art of Toy Story 4.

character studies, storyboards and more. If it's visual inspiration you're after, then this book has it in spades.

However, the lack of almost any context makes it difficult to fully appreciate the craft on show. For the most part, images are simply accompanied by artist attribution – we counted barely a dozen captions that revealed the thinking behind a particular artwork. A lack of proper chapters further muddies the waters

of the reader experience. It's telling that no author is credited as a guiding hand behind the book's publication.
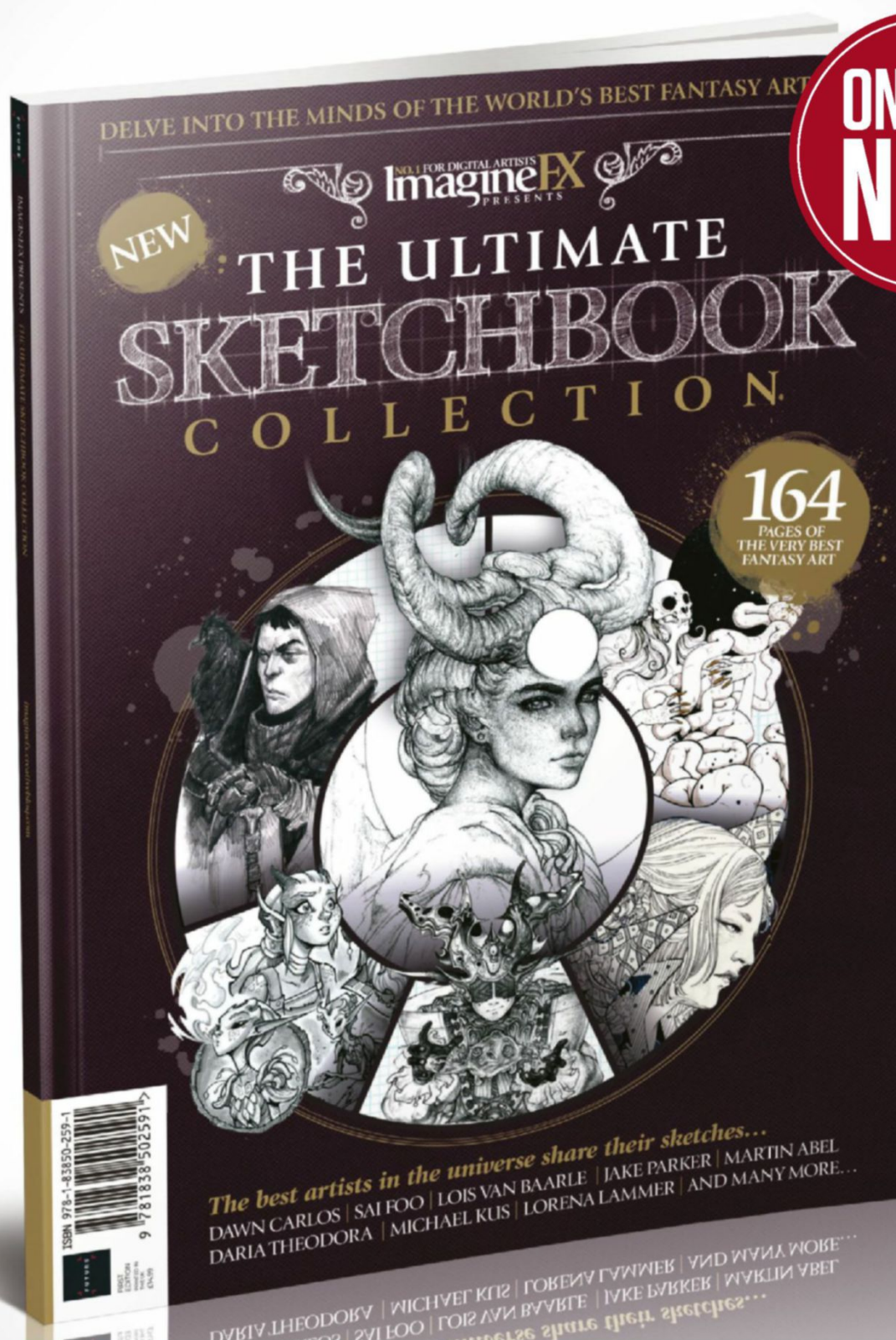
We can't help but think it would have been better to delay the book's publication date until after the film's cinema run. In trying so hard to avoid spoilers for the reader, the book ends up giving away too little. We were left simply wanting more.

RATING ★★★☆☆

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX
Traditional Artist
Inspiration and advice from the best pro artists
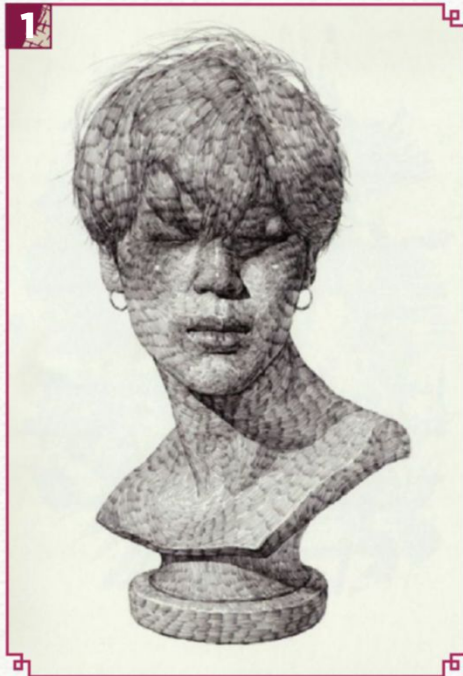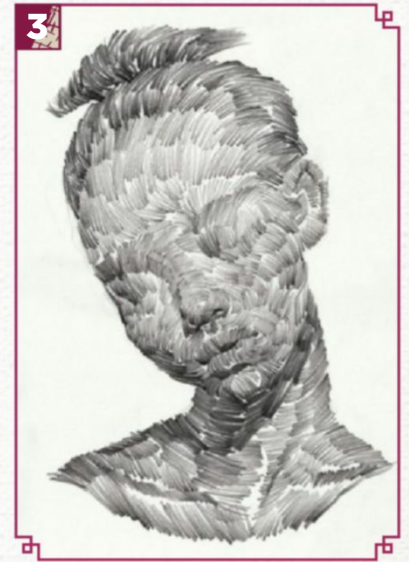

108

104

114

This issue:

FXPosé

SHOWCASING THE FINEST TRADITIONAL ARTISTS

Lee.K

LOCATION: South Korea **MEDIA:** Pencils, charcoal **WEB:** www.instagram.com/leekillust

Lee.K is an artist based in Seoul. His work focuses on humans and their emotions, the illustrator using swirls of charcoal and pencil detailing to build up his portraits.

1 UNTITLED 710
"I use a variety of media in different ways to maximise their expressive properties."

2 UNTITLED 709
"My art tries to portray human emotions writ large. I particularly enjoying showing the darker side of life, as I see it."

3 UNTITLED 702
"I want to depict human feelings that are beyond the scope of photographs."

4 UNTITLED 908
"I love using low-chroma materials such as pencil and charcoal, because I think black and white pictures help me to portray the dark side of humanity more effectively."
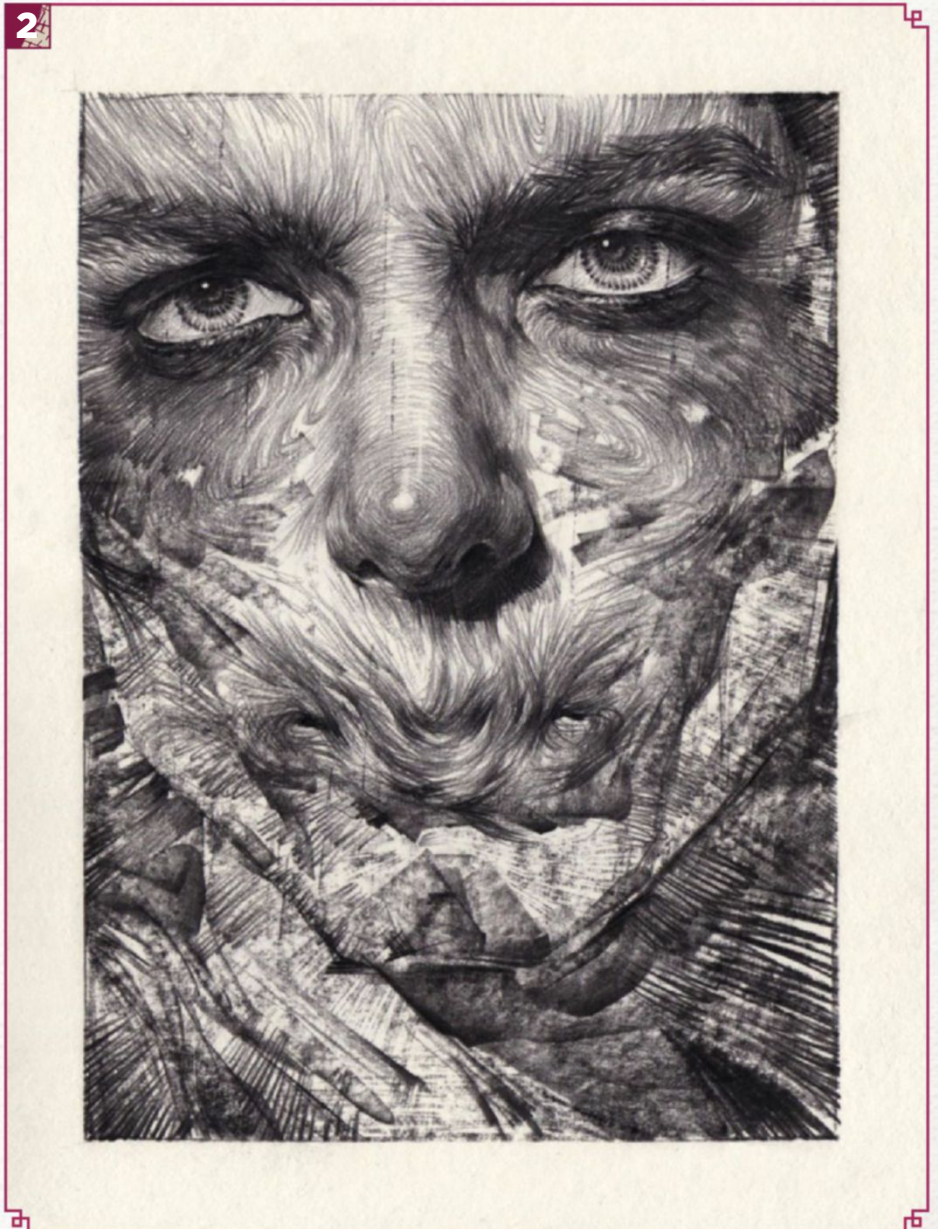
Stéphane Lauzon

LOCATION: Canada **MEDIA:** Watercolour, pencil **WEB:** www.stephanelauzonillustration.com

Stéphane works mostly in watercolour, although he sometimes uses pencils to add detail, or paint for highlights. The artist's work explores themes of mythology, nature and science.

1 DAME AUTOMNE (LADY AUTUMN)

"One of four portraits I did, based on the seasons. There's a duality about autumn, with the bright colours of the leaves and the 'death' of nature just before Lady Winter arrives."

2 TERRE (EARTH)

"I painted portraits representing the characteristics of each element. For Earth, it was all about calm and wisdom; ancient and solid as a rock."
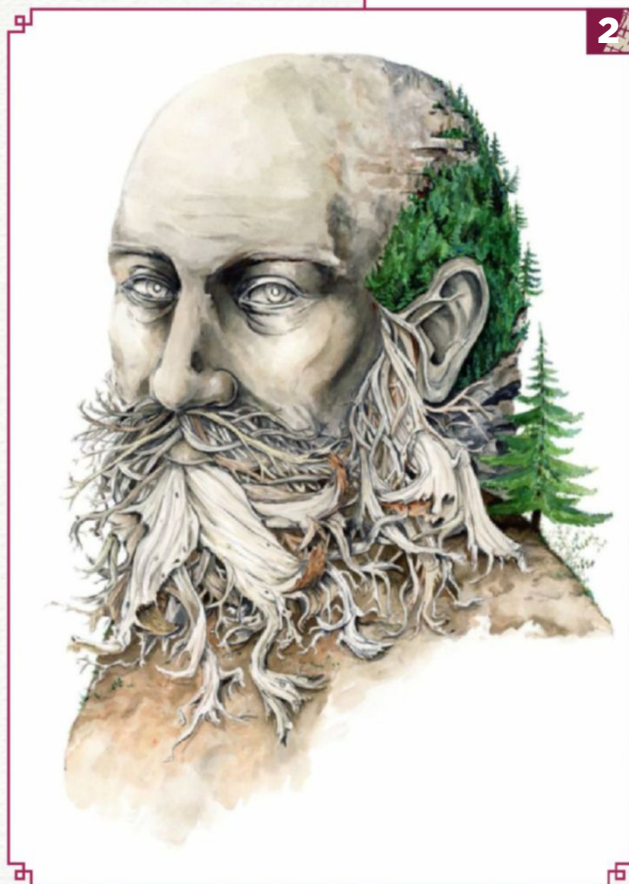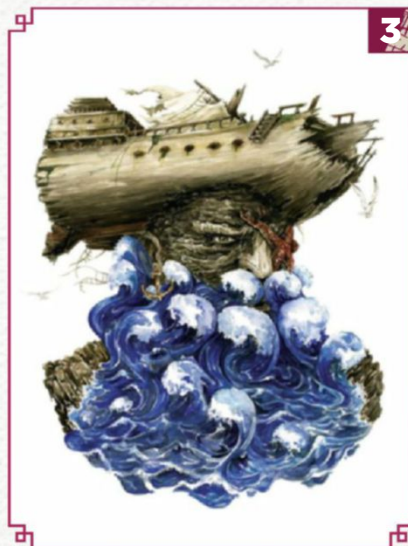
3 REDOUTABLE (FEARSOME)

"I combined pirates, a shipwreck and powerful waves to illustrate the deadly face of Water."

4 RETOUR À LA TERRE (BACK TO EARTH)

"'Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed.' This lady is putting everything back into the soil, ready for her twin sister Renaissance."
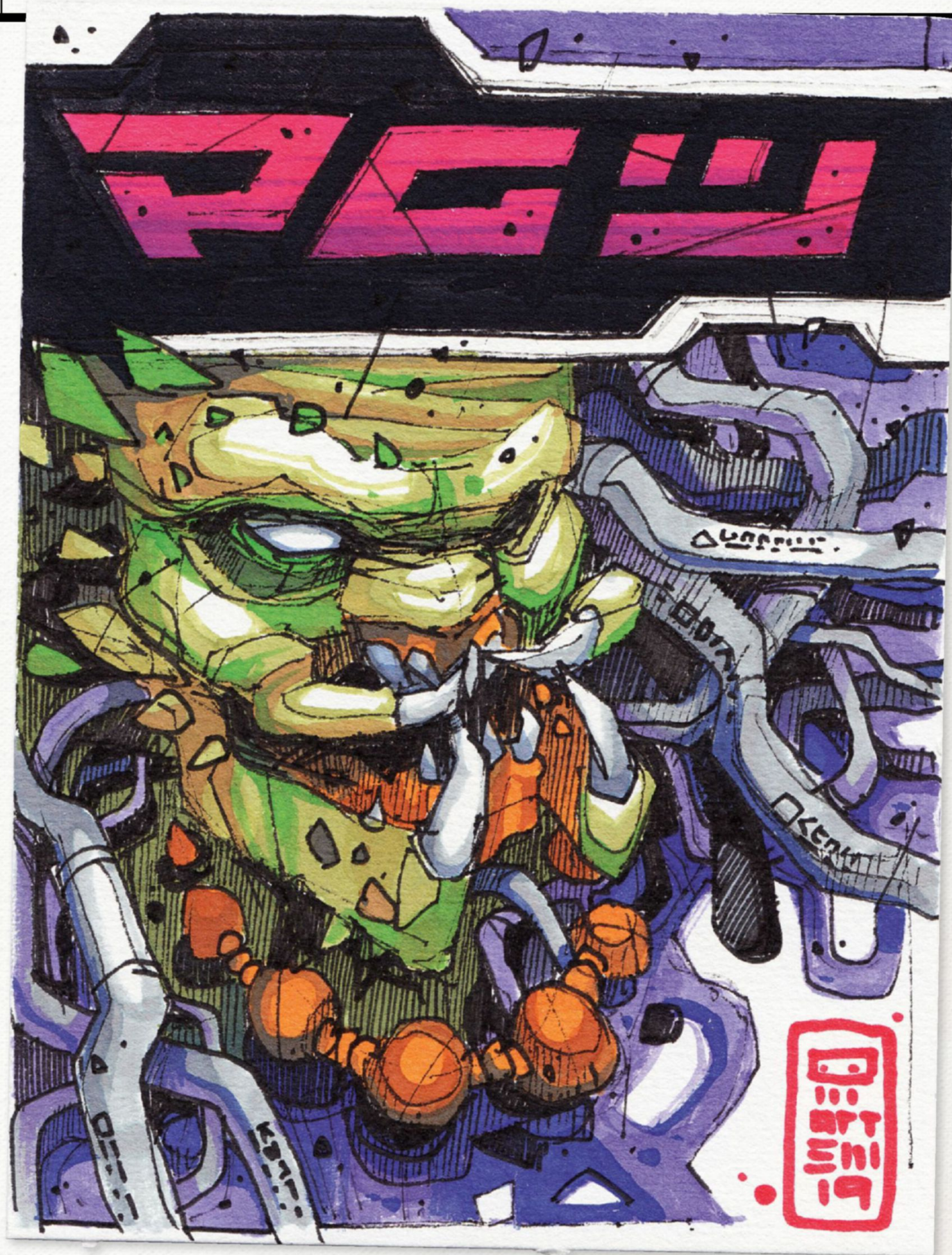
Pens

QUICK BRUSH PEN TECHNIQUES

Discover how ARTEM SOLOP goes back to basics and creates colourful artwork using fineliners, brush pens and some typography know-how

Your style is your voice, but are tools your language? There are exciting times of new technologies and unlimited access to information, but making a choice is harder than ever. You can explore digital art effects, try to master every traditional medium and watch hours of tutorials. Yet after all this, it's possible to lose inspiration and feel unable to create anything.

As a kid I used to create art with simple tools. A pen was more than enough in most cases. Naive? Yes, but I was just enjoying the process.

Then there was art school, followed by university, with their classic approaches to art teachings. Next, it was my first job, which involved Photoshop, web design, motion graphics, layer styles and effects. It was exciting, but there was still no time to just, you know, draw.

MATERIALS

FINELINERS
- Kuretake Zig 0.8mm

BRUSH PENS
- Selection of Arteza Real Brush Pens

PAPER
- 300g/m2 watercolour paper

I've always strived to develop my personal style, an artistic voice that speaks via tools and media. It should be heard through a simple sketch, a painted canvas, vector graphics or a tablet screen. When I thought I had found it, I got completely lost at the same time. My vector graphics looked crisp and professional, but my hand drawing was stiff. I bought countless markers, gel pens and paints, but couldn't accomplish any art.

GOING BACK TO BASICS

Then I reviewed my approach and started to draw with nothing but a pen. Just sketches with no intention to end up as finished artworks. I also tried to do the same digitally: one single layer and default brush. Surprisingly, it worked! There was a common theme between new works and drawings that looked completed despite being quickly drawn (I rarely

spend more than 30 minutes on my traditional art).

But curiosity drives me to experiment. That's why I use new media all the time. I keep it simple and use tools that meet my needs; I rarely explore what else these tools can accomplish. I don't use water with brush pens, I've never opened a blender marker, and I don't apply an eraser to lead pencil. But I'm happy with that – my artistic voice comes through my personal style.

Here you'll see how I create my typical style artwork with brush pens – media that I'm currently exploring.

Artem is a Stockholm-based artist from Ukraine. He's passionate about creating with mixed media, both traditional and digital, with a unique style that merges Eastern and Western influences. You can see more of his art at www.instagram.com/artemsolop.

1 Idea and inspiration
I refer to my pile of sketches for inspiration. Basically, I just mix an old sketch with exotic graphic design motifs. In this case it's Chinese chewing gum packaging.


2 Preparing my materials
My usual paper size is A4/A5, but when it comes to full-colour works I'm happier using smaller formats. I cut a watercolour pad page into four pieces and use one of them. This is thick 300g/m2 paper with a deep texture, which adds a strong traditional aspect to a drawing.

3 Start drawing
I draw with a black fineliner, starting with the Predator's head. I use the dreadlocks to create diagonal flow, add plenty of details and apply lots of vertical hatching. I use two 0.8mm fineliners. The first one is new and gives me a thick line. The second one is old: perfect for dry, gritty and less-then-perfect lines.
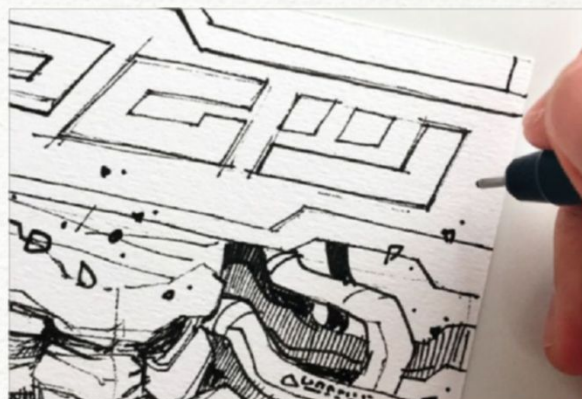
4 Details and text
I draw pictograms on the dreadlocks/cables to create some realism. I achieve a more natural feel by creating long diagonal lines with the old fineliner. My art usually involve text elements. I use graffiti, graphic design and my typography knowledge to create these elements.
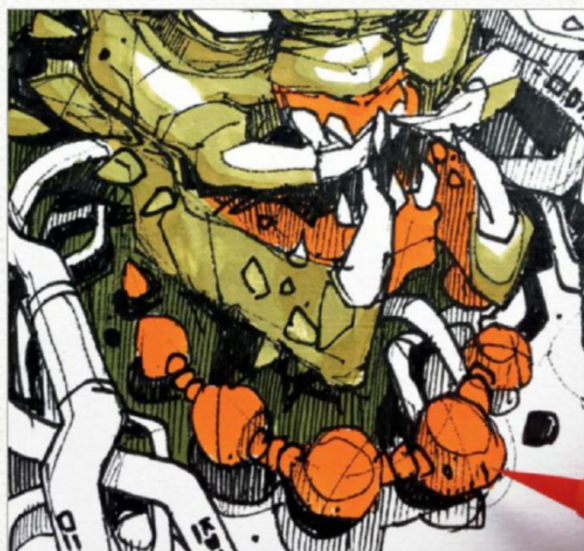
5 Introducing flat colours

I paint flat colour spots with thick brush strokes following the shapes of composition elements. Since I use watercolour brush pens I follow the rules of this medium by painting from light to dark and leaving blank spots to create the light. I use two or three similar hues and layer them over each other with thin brush strokes: this helps to define my basic shadow spots.

6 Bringing in the flow that's missing

I improve the composition by adding bold background lines of violet. It feels quite organic because it repeats the flow of the character's haircut. I check if this combination is good enough. Usually I use two or three contrast colours and one accent, such as the orange in this image. There's no logic in my colour choices; I'm driven by curiosity and the urge to experiment.

7 Filling in the gaps

Unused blank spots are distracting. I get rid of useless white space by adding a neutral colour. I choose grey to differentiate between the character's dreadlocks and cables. Grey also works well for defining the fangs and teeth. I sometimes neglect outlining with a fineliner, which means colours blend into each other. However, I think this makes a picture look more natural.

8 Values and shadows

I lay down darker colour spots to shape the form. I add a darker brown on top of the face and necklace, which blends these elements together. I use the same approach for the violet and grey areas. Another watercolour rule applies here: two or three layers of bright colour will help add vibrancy. ➽

9 Increasing the sense of depth

I make use of additional colours to create values. Green and dark grey help to enrich my composition significantly. I increase my values by painting darker spots here and there.

10 Enhancing the shadows

I use dark blue to create shadows on secondary elements. I paint with spots and long brush strokes, repeating the shape of certain elements. These brush pen strokes look darker when wet, just like watercolour. I check my work when the paint dries.

11 Adding stylised text

I drew a heavily stylised text element: the word says "raw". A cool look triumphs over readability here! I paint the header area with long, bold strokes of a contrast colour combination. I add violet to the corner to support the general composition. Now this picture looks organic, but the text is too crisp.

12 Blending in

I add a gradient to the text for a more organic feel, using bold and thin strokes instead of smooth blending. You may have noticed that I'm afraid to use water!

13 Dirt and dust help the artwork to look natural
I like to throw some occasional marks into the finished composition to give it a more natural look. I draw lines and particles with a dry fineliner. The text doesn't look sterile anymore and blends well with the rest of the composition.

14 Redressing the balance
I reduce the tension between lines by adding dry fineliner strokes here and there. This and the two previous steps can be compared to the mixing and mastering process in audio production, when you equalise instrument frequencies in order to create a well-balanced arrangement.

15 Final, subtle touches
I add a few spots of shadow with a dark grey brushpen, and darken the teeth to push the character's fang towards the viewer. My Predator looks uglier and more aggressive – I like it a lot now! I sign my artwork, which means I'll never make any changes to it. The illustration is complete.

First Impressions

✳ Daniel Merriam ✳

This US illustrator combines flights of fancy with fine art

Where did you grow up and how has this influenced your art?
I grew up in the harbour town of York, Maine, a heaven for New York artists seeking beauty or sanctuary. The community held high appreciation and standards for the arts, connected to the NY pulse but graced by the small town humility.

You're a child, you see a painting or drawing that changes everything… what effect did it have?
I'm five. My parents brought me to a group art exhibit. The works were extraordinary, diverse, erotic and provocative. As impressed as I was with the nudes, the takeaway was my understanding of what incredible things humans were capable of. I saw this potential as my own.

What was your next step in art?
Drawing, painting and sculpting came naturally to me. It was clear not only to me, but those who saw what I could do, that my fate was sealed. As I approached adulthood, I had

OVER THE FALLS
"Why not let our dwellings speak of our imaginations? As clothing can express our personality, so can architecture."

decided that applied arts would better afford a living than a career in fine art, so for a few years I worked as an architectural illustrator.

Does one person stand out as being helpful during your early years?
At 14, I won first place in the student category of an art show. The grand

> ❝ I decided that applied arts would better afford a living than a career in fine art ❞

prize winner was Alan Magee, the master of hyper-realism. He was kind enough to invite me to visit his studio, lending advice that would drive me to a pursuit of excellence in fulfilling my creative potential.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOU AND ME
"The lesson learned from twins is that no matter the differences, we all must master getting along."

Tell us a bit about your first paid art commission.
I did illustrations for periodicals and garnered recognition as a political

cartoonist from the age of 13. Although not as complex and composed as my recent works, they demonstrated an economy of marks that spoke to the power of the pen and publishing.

What's the last piece you finished, and how do the two differ?
It was a painting of a tree mansion, fitted specifically to a vintage frame I recently found. As an illustrator, you represent iconography that communicates the matters of your client. As a fine artist, you indulge yourself in creating the narrative rather than being employed by it.

Can you describe the place where you usually create your art?
My studio is overburdened with shelves and boxes filled with every art supply known to humankind. Racks for paintings, crates with artwork coming and going, objects d'art for inspiration. It overlooks a garden where birds, foxes and raccoons drink from my fountain.

Is making a living as an artist all you thought it would be?
As a young artist I'd made a choice between a life courting curators in hopes I'd befriend the right person and a life immersed in unfettered creativity, working it out for myself. I believe the latter more true to one's artistic self. Both forms of vanity yield their own worlds of success, if you apply yourself in the right way.

What advice would you give to your younger self to aid you on the way?
Create timeless things – unlike your galleries or collectors, you and your name will be around forever. Be prepared for many failures in art, knowing it's those who don't care about art that have truly failed.
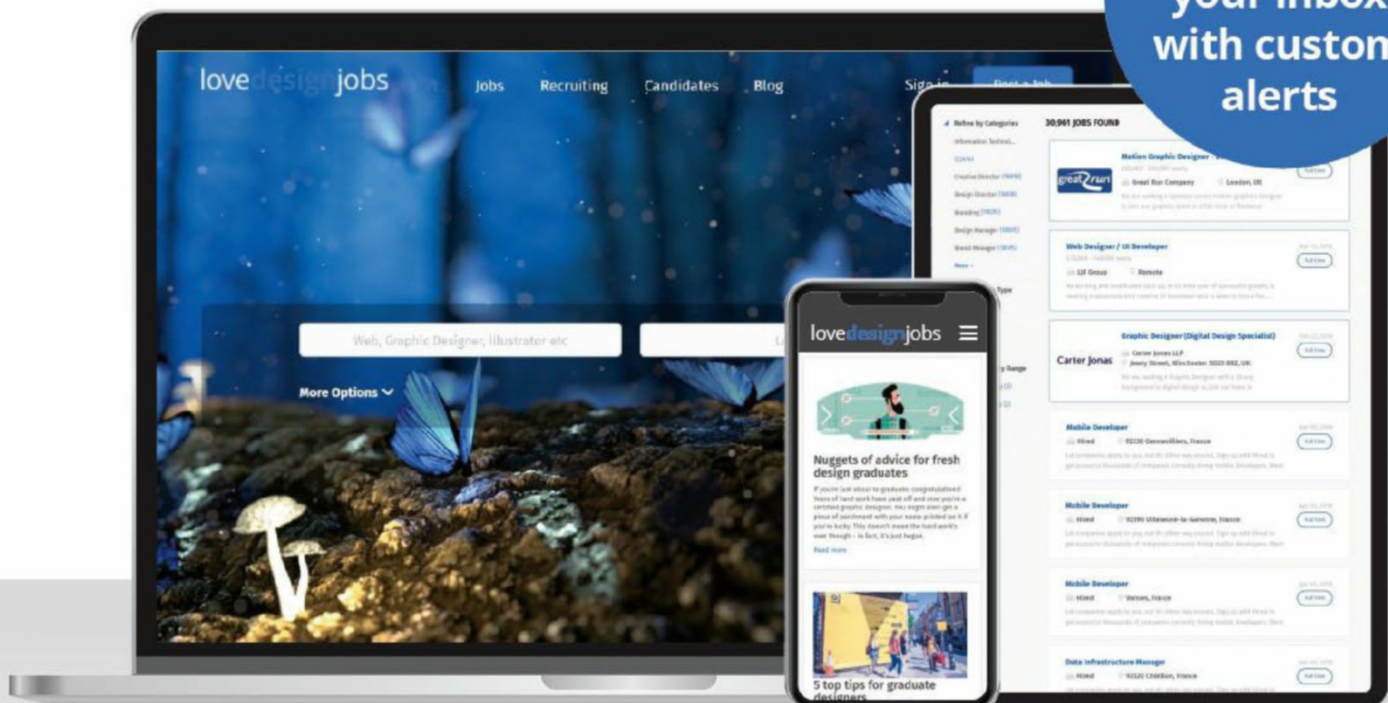*Since focusing on fine art, Daniel's had over 100 exhibitions worldwide. In 2012 he opened Bubble Street Gallery in Sausalito, California, featuring paintings, sculpture and architectural design elements: www.bubblestreetgallery.com.*

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