# Digital Art LIVE
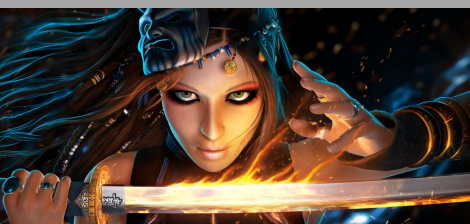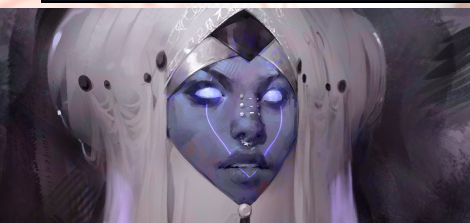
'FUTURE FEMALE HEROES' ISSUE

LEANDRA DAWN

AARON GRIFFIN
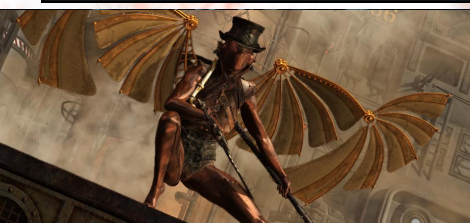
PAUL FRANCIS

ISSUE SEVEN
APRIL 2016

VUE ● TERRAGEN ● POSER ● DAZ STUDIO ● REAL-TIME 3D ● 2D DIGITAL PAINTING ● 2D/3D COMBINATIONS

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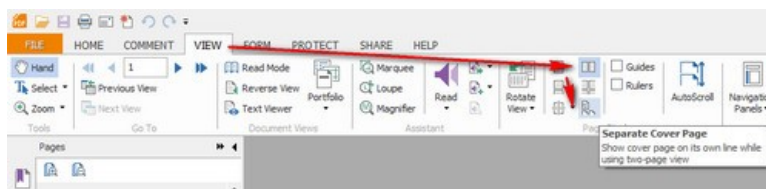


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# SCULPT OF THRONES

**Fan art is an incredibly useful tool** for channelling inspiration and motivation into a real project that can get your work **noticed**. After all, the most useful inspiration is that which is acted upon, rather then left in the back of our minds.

Creating fan art can generate understanding of design and techniques during the process, which may not have otherwise been learned.

In this 1.5 hour webinar session, **John Haverkamp** provided live sculpting of the character Tywin Lannister from the HBO TV Game of Thrones!

From this recorded session you'll learn:-

• The importance of strong proportional and anatomy knowledge so the photo reference doesn't mislead.

• "Reading" the reference correctly to get essential particulars of the features; starting from broad to narrow.

• Using a reference to inform details like wrinkles and skin pores.

• The sculpt technique with the paintover process

• Adding and Subtracting: standard brush, clay build-up brush and dam standard brush.

• Smoothing and trimming: smooth brush, trim dynamic brush and trim curve brush

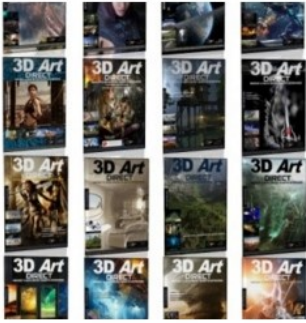• Use of the move brush, move topological brush and snake hook brush.

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## 10% off all *webinar recordings*

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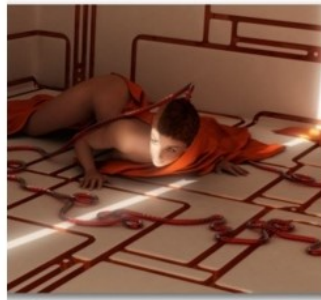
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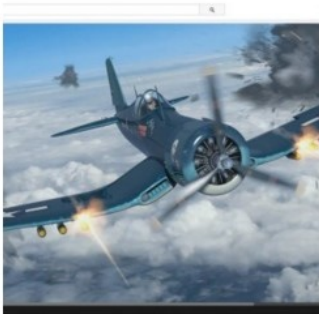# Outstanding Results by Traditional Hand-Painted Texturing

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These are two recorded webinar sessions presented by Kim Schneider in association with her amazing "Ocean Queen" Dragon with vivid texturing sold in the [RuntimeDNA store](#).

Software required to make the most of these sessions:-

* Photoshop Elements (or Photoshop)
* Poser

This is two sessions of webinar recordings with up to 3 hours of instruction.

Content will include amongst other topics:-

* What was there first – shape or texture, texture or shape?
* Hunting for references and analysing them
* Laying out the Parts and Nailing the Method
* Map by Map the Beast grows
* Fine tuning the maps
* From Displacement to Bump
* Finally: Colour!
* Setting up the shaders and last adjustments/checks to the maps

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This **webinar recording** reveals powerful design techniques and hot inspirations used for such work. It includes featuring the work of two special guest artists that have created breathtaking designs that may well reflect what we see in the future.

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**Front Cover:** Detail from "White Out" by LeAndra Dawn.
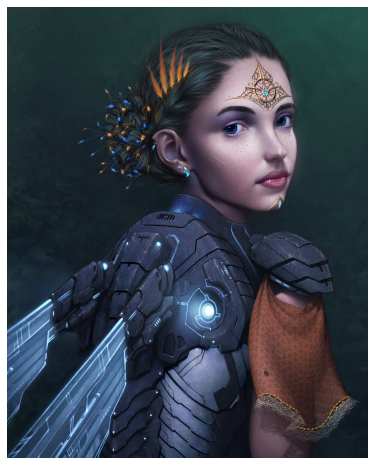
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**AARON GRIFFIN**

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PHOTOSHOP | POSER

"I took a night-shift job to 'pay the bills' ... for three years I practised in my spare time. I then landed my first pro job as a game artist for Gamesys Studios in London, and haven't looked back."
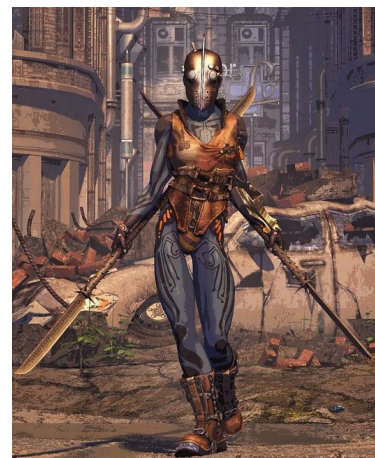
**PAUL FRANCIS**

*Digital Art LIVE* talks art schools, Poser, posters, steampunk, and more with Paul Francis.

POSER | PHOTOSHOP

"When I learned that it is fine to composite different elements together […] my art went to another level [and I saw] publishing success [including] in a Neil Gaiman project, and I got to spend the day filming with the great man himself."

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Credits for backgrounds, from top left: **LeAndra Dawn** for the game *Clockwork Caravan of Mars*; **Aaron Griffin** sketch; detail from "Siren 7" by **Erogenesis**. See this issue's Gallery for "Siren 7".

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## EDITOR'S LETTER

# WELCOME...

"     Lindsay Wagner who played the original "Bionic Woman" in the 1970s television series was a ground breaking female superhero. She created a much needed capable feminist hero working as an undercover agent with super human abilities and the series was admired by girls of the time seeing a striking lead character by Lindsay. She was interviewed recently and remarked:

"*The whole point of having a woman in leadership position of any kind is to hopefully bring the feminine aspect of wisdom and intelligence to whatever they're attempting to do. Hopefully we get used to technology so we don't have to be mesmerized by it and get back to the story.*".

In this issue with the excellent artists we've interviewed, we show a number of good facets of the modern female super hero; strength, character, intelligence, beauty, leadership and wisdom.

On another note, If you've never heard of Patreon.com before and you are producing artistic content on a fairly regular basis, then take a look! LeAndra Dawn reminded us about the service in our interview with her:

"*I like to describe Patreon as a 'tip jar' for your favorite artists who are on Patreon. It's really a fantastic way to support artists so they can continue to do what they love. Before, it was considerably harder to show your support for your favorite artists through monetary means. With Patreon, you can pledge any amount to them, whether it be $1 or $15 or more. You can give just as a 'thank you', to show your support or you can pledge based on 'perks' the artist offers. And there are so many different types of artists on Patreon, too. Musicians, crafters, bloggers, writers and so many more creative fields. It's not just for 3D or digital artists.*

*My experience with Patreon has been very good. I'm not necessarily the most popular artist out there, but I've been very slowly getting more pledges over the year that I've been on Patreon. It's very rewarding and surprising, actually, to see just how many people want to support me or receive rewards based on my art.*"

**PAUL BUSSEY**
**Editor and LIVE Webinar Director**
**paul@digitalartlive.com**

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# LeANDRA DAWN

*Digital Art LIVE* interviews a leading user of both DAZ Studio and Poser, discovering the secrets of natural-looking 3D hair, how to work with Patreon, and hearing details of new art made for commercial games.

**DAL:** Welcome and many thanks for this in-depth interview with *Digital Art Live* magazine. I know time is valuable to a working artist. First, I should ask... your DeviantArt name is 'LeAndraDawn', but you also go by 'KaAnna' and 'Cylithera'. Do you prefer KaAnna, or another name?

**LD:** LeAndra Dawn is what I'm going by nowadays.

**DAL:** Super, ok... so, let's begin. You use both DAZ Studio and Poser with equally amazing results, to make really outstanding compositions. Your work has luscious colours and lighting, and real 'character'. How did you get to where you're now at, and who and what helped you along the way?

**LD:** A lot of what contributed to my improvement in art was experimenting and playing around in the program and stumbling onto things. There weren't a lot of tutorials on Poser or DAZ Studio when I first started

using them, so I had to just 'wing it'. I tried to look to other forms of art for tips and methods of working, too, like photography or painting. However, a good portion of my improvement was just using my previous artistic knowledge from Photoshop tutorials and using and experimenting in the software.

I took quite a long hiatus from art, where I did little to none at all. When I returned, contests, challenges and portraits of generously given characters contributed to a large portion of my art. All of these helped me to improve by allowing me to consistently do art where I may have floundered after such a long time away from art. I highly recommend doing challenges and contests — and not necessarily for prizes.

**DAL:** You do superb lighting and glows. Could you tell us in detail how you go about planning and lighting a picture such as "Mi Na" or "SWD JaeHwa" (seen on this page)?
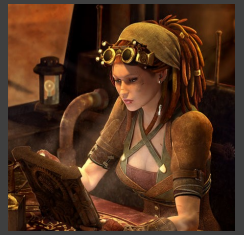
LEANDRA DAWN

USA

DAZ STUDIO |
POSER |
PHOTOSHOP

WEB

Picture: "SWD JaeHwa", showcasing the
Poser character of the same name,
which is available at Renderosity.

**LD:** I wish I could say I plan out my images, but truthfully I very rarely do. I typically just head into my software of choice and play around with things until I start to see something I like. Then I build from there. "JaeHwa" and "Mi-Na" were a little different since they were created for someone (Silverwind, the creator of the characters). She gave me very loose outlines for how she wanted her characters' portrayed and I based my ideas on those outlines.

After that, it's just experimenting. Trying things until I like the way they are going or it inspires me to try something else. As for these two images specifically, it was all about showcasing the character as best as I could. That meant strong lighting on the face and figure, whether it be the fire for "Mi-Na" or the from-above lighting for "JaeHwa". And of course, you can't forget the rim lighting which really brings out the character from the background and adds interest by having an additional light source. I further enhanced my lights in Photoshop, the use of which is definitely more of my strength rather than 3D lighting.

A brief rundown of lights in "Mi-Na": orange point-light right above the blade, for reflection and primary lighting. Additional spotlights positioned at the same place as the point-light, but pointing at her hand or other areas so as to better cast that firelight. Distant lights for rim on either side of her. There was also a blue underlight and various 'fix' lights that may not be realistic, but provide more visually pleasing light or just more light in general.

**DAL:** One of the other things I like about your pictures is the hair. You get it *just* right, and it interacts with the environment and lighting very convincingly. Hair has always been something of problem with Poser/DAZ 3D, and 3D in general. Could you give our readers any tips or advice or workflows, on getting their hair 'done right' in a render, please?

**LD:** Thank you! Again, a lot of my hair work is postwork and done in Photoshop. But, I do almost always have base hairs that I enhance — rather than painting a full head of hair. Though

I have done that as well. For 3D hair, it's important to remember that it has specular or shine. Even the driest hair has specular. In fact, *everything* has specular/shine, even if it's very low. For 3D hairs, you really want to make sure you have a wide, low specular that is set to white. This is so that it reflects your lights properly, thereby making it more realistic and coheres with the scene. Many 3D hairs use the same diffuse texture for the specular, and that doesn't allow the light to be reflected properly in the hair. This can be good in *some* cases, and sometimes I'll use both. But… I always have at least one specular set low, wide and white for that much-needed realism.

Another way of improving hair is morphs. Make use of them in the scene, especially the movement morphs. Think of how your character is standing or what actions he or she has done recently or currently that would have the hair sitting differently. Use deformers if you have to. Remember, even perfect hair is *imperfect*.

Also, if you're delving into your runtime to combine hairs to create some unique combination — which I highly recommend — then try to match hair textures as close as possible. Or better yet, use a tile-able hair texture and apply it to everything. Hair colour packs typically are made up of these type of textures.

**DAL:** Lots of useful hair tips there, thanks. What would you say is the strongest influence on your art? I sense that there's definitely a mix of videogame art and fantasy genre book-covers in the mix? But is there anything more subtle in your range, that I'm missing? Tabletop role-play gaming or card sets, for instance?

**LD:** I'm not much of a reader, so I can't say I've been exposed to as many genre book covers as others may have been. But I have always been into videogames for as long as I can remember. I've also just always loved really rich colors with high contrast, dark atmospheres and themes. Some of my favorite artists as I was coming up in the art world also had an influence over my art. Artists like ToxicAngel, Will Kramer and

Picture: "White Out", featuring
Hoshi hair. DAZ Studio.

Giana just to name a few. Nowadays, my art is heavily influenced by other artists. I can spend hours looking through ArtStation or watching art livestreams. Videogames, too, still influence my art a great deal. Especially with all the indie games out there now with widely different art styles and themes.

One of my most favourite artists, Dan LuVisi. His work is incredible. I look up to him as both an artist and a person, because he is the most driven person I've ever seen and has such passion for his work and art in general. If there was one artist to familiarise yourself with, it would be him. Another one is Paul Kwon, very imaginative designs with a unique style.

**DAL:** Your superb sci-fi "Breach" picture has a <u>complete free time-lapse 'making of'</u> with it. Could you give readers a 'taster' overview of the process they'll find in the time-lapse?

**LD:** The time-lapse video for "Breach" is a video process of the Photoshop portion of my artwork, sped up to fit into a twenty minute time-slot. In this video, you can watch me as I employ many different techniques and methods I use in most of my work. Things such as: my older rim painting technique, enhancing lighting via Photoshop Levels and layer blending modes, my 'White Overlay' technique where I bring out the details in the outfit, add effects such as debris and smoke and so much more. There are also plenty of errors, mistakes and a thousand passes on things I just can't get to look right! You can also see how I built the sci-fi effect around her hand by using premade Photoshop shapes and the warp/transform tool. Pretty much anything you see in the image, you can see how I accomplished it. Even things you don't see!

**DAL:** You take commissions on DeviantArt. Have you also done other professional work that's not shown. What has your experience been of undertaking commissions? Any horror stories? Or great experiences?



Pictures: "Commander Laelyn" and "Shrouded".

LD: I have had overall very pleasant experiences with all of my commissions. I have had one or two that have been hair-pulling and very frustrating, not necessarily from bad clients but from constant revisions. And I do have a few really great clients, like the one I created my recent image "Kaellan" for. She's the best client one can ask for. Nothing impossible to create, very friendly, easy going and seems to love everything I do!

DAL: Is there a difference between 'fan' and 'commercial' work, would you say — or are both equally as demanding?

LD: I think they are demanding in their own ways. For commercial work, you have to worry about how the client will like things, following guidelines or their vision despite however you might feel, dealing with possible revisions, deadlines, etc. Non-commercial work can be as demanding as you want. If you work 'out of your element' because you're trying to learn something new, I think that can be very demanding. I am currently trying to improve my artwork by including storytelling in images, but I'm finding that to be very difficult.

Commercial work does have the added benefit of the client knowing what they want and then you only have to bring it to life. Additionally, with commercial work, you only have to please the client. With your own work, you have to try to please yourself. I find that so much harder! With your own work, the difficulty can also lie in trying to come up with what you want to create — which I have a very difficult time with.

DAL: I heard it suggest recently that one might raid out-of-copyright adventure books for ideas, during 'a dry time' for inspiration. Take a children's adventure book from the 1900s-1930s — there are plenty on Archive.org — find the best illustration plate in it, then re-make the picture by adapting the framing and posing to a wholly new setting. Give credit, of course.

Let's talk about the Patreon service. Patreon may be a new service — perhaps even a wholly new concept — to some of our many thousands of readers. Could you tell us something about it and your experience of being a Patreon member?

**LD:** I like to describe Patreon as a 'tip jar' for your favorite artists who are on Patreon. It's really a fantastic way to support artists so they can continue to do what they love. Before, it was considerably harder to show your support for your favorite artists through monetary means. With Patreon, you can pledge any amount to them, whether it be $1 or $15 or more. You can give just as a 'thank you', to show your support or you can pledge based on 'perks' the artist offers. Perks can include anything from videos to full resolution images. to step-by-step guides. It will vary from artist to artist. And there are so many different types of artists on Patreon, too. Musicians, crafters, bloggers, writers and so many more creative fields. It's not just for 3D or digital artists.

My experience with Patreon has been very good. I'm not necessarily the most popular artist out there, but I've been very slowly getting more pledges over the year that I've been on Patreon. It's very rewarding and surprising, actually, to see just how many people want to support me or receive rewards based on my art.

The biggest thing about Patreon, at least for me, is the motivation that it provides. I consistently put out art mostly because of Patreon and my patrons. There is sort of an obligation, but that's a good obligation. Even if I know most patrons would understand if I didn't have as many art pieces that month, or whatever. It has helped me to strive to do better in my art by experimenting and trying out new styles. And with those experiments, I am starting to find things that I really *like* to do, whereas I might not have discovered them without that motivation and support that comes via Patreon.

**Picture:** "Breach". Get a free 1Gb time-lapse 'making of' movie!

"I am working on the post-apocalypse board game *Stormlands,* by burgeoning game company Clockwork Phoenix Games. It's my first very large and commercial project that I am very excited about! The picture shown here for *Digital Art Live* is of the character 'Emelyn', a medic. She is *not* your average healer!"

**DAL:** So would you say that a mix of DeviantArt commissions and Pateron are enough for a talented digital artist, today? What else might be needed to be added to the mix, in terms of paying the bills?

**LD:** In order to make a living from commissions and Patreon, you will need quite a large following and/or clients. It isn't impossible. But it can take some time, if you aren't that well known. But I think the primary goal of artists should be to improve their art. Always improve. The followers will come. You can do your part with social media and posting artwork consistently, but always strive to do better and find what you love to create. It makes it so much easier.

My one tip for those thinking about going into Patreon, is: do it for the motivation or love for your art, even if you have $0 in pledges. If you're looking to make money/pledges quickly, you might be disappointed, unless you already have a large following. Don't let that discourage you! Have the mindset of loving what you do already and you just happen to have a Patreon page too. And if having it there motivates you to create more art just so you can post to Patreon, then I highly recommend doing it! You can also increase income from your art by checking out merchandise sites where you can put your artwork on mugs, bags, posters, prints etc — and then have those links readily available for fans to buy from. I honestly haven't yet gotten into that, so I can't attest how successful it is.

Contract work, too, can be a source of income, but that can be a little difficult to get into depending on your skill level and exposure. Just keep doing art and keep improving!

**DAL:** It may be risky to ask this… But… do you have any stance in the ongoing online debate about Poser and DAZ?

**LD:** I love both programs. Nowadays, my program of choice for personal work is DAZ Studio while I keep my professional and commercial work in Poser. I use both, I love both. I couldn't do without either of them. That's why it's so hard to see these problems with the new generation figures and the inability for them to work in Poser. Because Genesis 3 doesn't work consistently and reliably in Poser, I can't use those figures for commercial work.

**DAL:** Yes, there is a community solution now. The free Genesis 3 Poser Updater, which allows Genesis 3 to be taken to Poser, and which complements the existing free DSON importer plugin for earlier versions of Genesis. But you're right, that such a community utility is not an ideal pipeline to rely on for doing commercial work. It's probably easier just to render in DAZ, and then take the character out to Photoshop as a 2D masked PNG, and composite.

**LD:** With all that being said, of course it isn't impossible to create art without the new figures or the latest software, of course. I know some artists still work with Victoria 3 (V3) and an older version of Poser.

Concerning the actual community part, things have never seemed more divided as they are now, at least not as far as I'm aware. It's kind of sad — because we're all really in this art thing together. Which makes it that much worse that all of this drama may be causing people to quit art. Yes, there are a hundred ways to be creative, but sometimes everything outside of it can be damaging to that creative process or just the desire to do art.

**DAL:** Yes, antagonism drives away good people. A software's community is such an important part of the creative experience, for a significant proportion of users. If at first glance it *seems* to be full of trolls and nastiness, newbies may just decide to go and use another software, or learn something else that's creative in another field.

What are your opinions on the wider online culture? Do you find that there are certain annoyances that you wish were not there, or which — as a creative — you want to change?

**LD:** I think a lot of today's art is — on the surface — about individualism, but you can still see a lot of art that follow certain trends or what is deemed 'popular'. I'd really like to see more variety in styles, concepts and ideas. I know I'm guilty of not following through with these things.

But I'm looking to change that, and to try to expand my styles and what my images portray. Honestly, I may not be looking in the right place for these things, but the art still seems to follow trends.

**DAL:** Yes, I get something of that feeling, every time I click the "what's popular" on DeviantArt. If this magazine were to do a 'cute sparkly ponies' special issue, it would probably have a zillion readers! /*laughter*/ Do you feel that you're moving toward a 'preferred' style and topic? That you may one day give up on a certain genre, to focus only on one?

**LD:** Lately, I've been experimenting with more stylized art with paint-overs/draw-overs. I love all kinds of genres of art, so I don't think I am or ever want to focus *only* on one. That can be detrimental to my or any other artists' work. I do believe that you should create what you love, but there's absolutely nothing wrong with trying out a different genre or style. It can really open up your eyes and you may learn a lot about art or your methods of creating art. You may even find things that you can apply to your favoured genre of pictures. It's very important to try new things even if you think you might not like it. You never know what you might discover.

**DAL:** Do you have any large projects planned or underway? I see, for instance, that you've recently started making Photoshop time-lapse videos, showing how a picture builds and emerges. Do you see yourself making a future move into tutorials, perhaps?

**LD:** I do have a very large project I am working on, the post-apocalypse board game *Stormlands* by bourgeoning game company Clockwork Phoenix Games. It's been in development for a little while, and I've created some really fantastic pieces for it. It's my first very large and commercial project that I am very excited about! The one shown for *Digital Art Live* is of the character 'Emelyn', a medic. She is not your average healer! She is one of several characters in the game, all with their own wholly unique designs and abilities. This is one of the first times we're showing her off to the public, so I hope everyone likes her!

**DAL:** Yes, she looks like a fine character. Though the syringes are slightly scary!

**LD:** As for tutorials, yes. I do plan on doing tutorials in the future, though it may be once I have finished some of my major projects. I want to make sure the tutorials are very easy to follow and are accessible to everyone. Unfortunately, that can take a lot of time to get just right. But I definitely want to delve into that because I love to help people with their art and see them improve and grow. So, yes, it's definitely in the future! I currently have a 'tip of the month' in my Patreon, but I hope to expand on that in the future while also making sure everyone has access to some form of it.

**DAL:** Many thanks. And finally, what three bits of good advice would you give to someone starting out, just loading up their first copy of DAZ Studio?

**LD:** My first tip for new DAZ Studio users is to learn the interface. I think that's true for any new software you're learning. Play around with things, look up the manual/wiki on the software, etc. Do tutorials if you can find any.

**LD:** My second tip is to make sure your content library is set up correctly. I should note that this tip is ignoring the recent DAZ Connect which *may* make it easier on new users if they've purchased content from the DAZ Store. There are tutorials on this and I believe the wiki also has information on it.

My third tip probably applies to anything you're trying out new: have fun, don't stress. It can be daunting to learn a new software, but take your time. Come back to it later, if it gets overwhelming or frustrating — and make sure you keep coming back. It'll get easier as you work in the program.

**DAL:** That's great, many thanks for the interview, and we wish you well for the future.

**LD:** Thank you very much! And thank you for having me, I'm honored!
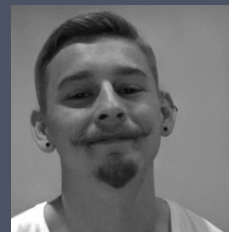
# AARON GRIFFIN

*Digital Art LIVE* interviews 24 year-old **Aaron Griffin** of London, on how he found his way as a young fine artist in the big city, learning outside of the university system.

Picture: "The Holy Lemon Tree" (detail).

AARON GRIFFIN

LONDON, UK

PHOTOSHOP | POSER | WACOM


WEB

**DAL:** Aaron, welcome, and many thanks for making the time to do an in-depth interview with us.

**AG:** You are very welcome and it is my pleasure to do it. Thank you for having me!

**DAL:** Could you tell our readers about your background, please? How you came to be interested in visual art in general, and how that developed during your youth.

**AG:** Sure thing! Art has been a part of me since I can barely remember. Nowhere did I go, without my sketchbook and pencils. I might not even *use* them — I just needed them by my side, like a child's comfort blanket. Art has stuck with me ever since, initially with no idea that it could ever earn me a living. I remember my classes in school, I was sketching monsters and characters in all my books. Geography, history, maths... you name it. I would get through my classwork as quickly as possible so I could sketch in the empty spaces of the page. Some teachers were not so impressed... others were surprisingly supportive of it, considering. So long as my academic work was good, those teachers overlooked the doodles that accompanied it.

DAL: Yes, it's such a pity that schools still tend to see artistry as 'time wasted', time taken away from the 'proper' focus… which is on ideas and rationality.  They don't tend to see how art can explore and *express* ideas, can lead children to-and-through the history of how ideas have been tested, changed and developed over time.  Of course it can also express the inexpressible — that which is humanly true, but which can't be put into a rational chain of words.  But even at the more mundane level of the creative industries, schools careers advisors do tend to be a sorry lot, when it comes to promoting an arts career as a possibility.

AG: Originally I was unaware that illustration and conceptual design was even a potential career option. My junior knowledge in these fields stretched as far as graphic design, so that became my area of study in later years. This carried through to the college years, where I continued my studies in the — now capitalised — Graphic Design. There I was slowly introduced to 2D illustration. I began experimenting with vector illustration.

An additional small point to make on this, is the general discouragement of the digital medium. I have heard many people say that it is a dead end, including teachers/tutors. This could not be further from the truth.

DAL: So true, especially now the Internet and crowd-funding and Patreons, and digital content vending, have all opened things up.  But how did you fare when you left college?  For our American readers I should perhaps note that 'college' in the UK means the education given between leaving school and starting university — the years between age 16 and 18.  It's a time when many of our creatives fall by the wayside, never going on to higher education.

AG: After leaving college I spent almost 18 months seeking graphic design jobs, to no avail. Yes, I should mention that I did not go on to university — and there are many reasons for this decision. I then discovered the famous DeviantArt website, and my world turned upside down! I knew *this* is where I belonged, and was a big turning point in my life.

My family very kindly bought my very first graphics tablet as a gift, which helped me to enter that community.  I took a night-shift job to 'pay the bills'…

DAL: Ah, yes, I've been there.  I once spent 18 months stacking supermarket shelves on the night-shift, to save the money to take a one-year college course — that would allow me to try for a university place in the late 1980s.

AG: So for three years I practised in my spare time. I then landed my first professional job as a game artist for Gamesys Studios in London, and haven't looked back.

DAL: Wonderful. Old London's famous 'magic' worked, then, for you. Congratulations, since the city also spits out many creative people. So, were there any early formative influences from landscape, seasons, and suchlike?  I often think that an artist growing up in England can't help but become quite closely attuned to very fine gradations in our 10,000 different types of weather, and also to subtle effects of light on a landscape, glows bleeding through the autumn fogs, that sort of thing.  We may also benefit from the imaginative 'interiority' that the dark winter period encourages us to slip into, in which we have a chance to delve deeply in art.

AG: I could not agree more about the influence of the ever-changing weather and seasons here in the UK. It never ceases to surprise me, even today. It can be a beautiful place. Such as the sun bursting through the clouds on a stormy day and dappling the landscape in warm sunlight. The chill of a crisp Spring morning. The sweet smells of autumn from  the falling of the fruits and leaves. The senses can truly come to life in England. For me, though, I have a big soft spot for Scotland. In my younger years I would visit Inverness a lot. I would do nothing but experience nature and really take in the environment. I would visit the mountains, go hiking or simply sit on the seafront and watch the world go by.

DAL: Yes, I visited my sister for a few years when she was on an RAF airbase in the wilds of Scotland. It's a wonderfully fresh landscape, albeit often very denuded and bare. And wet.

Picture: "Evening Sketch".

AG: For me today, I get my inspiration from the countryside. It is forever changing and is always full of surprises. Though I often incorporate science fiction into my designs I usually take an organic approach, as you can see my inspiration often derives from nature. It's likely that my work is encouraged by the changing seasons too. In the warm summer days I might paint colourful and vibrant pieces, to match my lighter mood. In the winter it may be somewhat bleaker and darker. I use emotion in my work a lot. It is likely that my emotional state influences the designs accordingly.

DAL: There's a strong sci-fi strand in your work, which we're specifically picking up on in this interview.  Where does that come from — movies, comics, games, reading sci-fi, the early pulp artists of the pre-digital era?

AG: That's a difficult one. As a child I was always attracted to fantasy over sci-fi, rarely watched TV and had no idea that comic books really existed... shocking I know.

DAL: Gosh.

AG: There *were* the odd few movies or TV shows that I remember my father watching as a child. Such as *X-Files*, *Stargate*, *Starship Troopers*, *Alien and Predator*.

Videogames, on the other hand, would definitely have an influence. I have always been a gamer — and so were my entire family in fact. To this day my parents likely playing videogames more than I do! Science fiction is something I discovered in my later years, as a late bloomer, finally getting caught up with the whole *Star Wars* series at the shamefully late age of 20.

**DAL:** Yes, it's amazing how late people can come to things. A friend of mine is nearly 50 and he still hasn't seen a major keystone work like *The Lord of the Rings* DVD trilogy.

**AG:** I fell in love with sci-fi art around the age of 19 when I first came across digital painting. I discovered artists such as Dan Luvisi, Andre Wallin, Marc Brunet and Reid Southern. They inspired me from the very beginning to explore new worlds. Since then I have found so many more amazing artists that continue to inspire me every day. I am also a big fan of the costume design. The drapery and headpieces worn by Padme in *Star Wars* Episode 1 for example were definitely an influence.

**DAL:** Yes, and that design comes from real ethnography — records of traditional ethnic clothing that was once worn in real-life.

I'm sure readers would also be interested in knowing about wider creative influences, in the contemporary art world or from art history?

**AG:** Just like my earlier influences as a child… I was sheltered in that sense. 90% of my inspiration is drawn from modern digital and traditional artists. This is not out of ignorance or dislike of historically renowned artists. I just never knew how *big* the world of art was and is. Other than the well-known handful I knew in school — such as Mucha, Picasso and Van Gough — I knew rather little. I'm making up for it now of course, visiting as many galleries and museums as I can. I am a huge fan of Frank Frazetta.  His pallette, compositions, characters… they amaze me.



Pictures: "Daily 1, 2, 3".

**DAL:** Yes, I often think that his work doesn't come across as well as it could, on the screen. It really needs to be seen in a big print portfolio, or as a framed original.

**AG:** Historically I am also very fond of the high Victorian era. Their intricacy in floral designs inspires me a lot. The delicacy and flow of shapes have definitely influenced my more detailed ornamental designs. Jeremy Mann has also made a distinctive impact. His brushwork and edge control to 'define importance' in his paintings is brilliant. He also has a great way of capturing mood and emotion in his work. Same can be said for Casey Baugh and his beautiful charcoal portraits.

**DAL:** So did you undertake any part-time training as an artist, after college?

**AG:** I applied for an illustration course, but due to a clerical error my response to accept the position got lost. I was actually thankful of this, as I had my misgivings already. The sheer cost and limited tutoring time was a big deterrent. From what I later heard about the course, it turns out my misgivings were correct.

I spent the following few years just learning from home. If you can discipline yourself to work independently, there is no reason why you cannot be successful. Broadband Internet offers an abundance of learning materials, tips, tricks and other people to lend a helping hand. Everything you need is at your fingertips.

Sure, it can be a difficult road. You may hate it sometimes and you will make a *lot* of mistakes. I can honestly say it's worth it. All that hard work and sacrifice pays off eventually.

**DAL:** You're now in London, at the heart of the world. Does that mean you get to visit the major gallery shows? If so, which of those have impressed or influenced you recently?

**AG:** Living in London opens the doors to endless shows and exhibitions. My favourite is the National Portrait Gallery, as it appeals to my comfort zones.

**DAL:** Ah, yes… and *real* comfort zones are so important. I remember traipsing around the British Museum for a day, with nowhere to sit down other than two overcrowded and noisy cafes. Seats, please, gallerists!

**AG:** Yes, the Royal Academy of Arts, Tate Britain and the National Gallery are also must-sees. Seeing portraits are a personal favourite, and I think that shows from my portfolio/gallery. In London, there are also galleries that pop up and disappear, all the time. Recently I attended an Instagram-hosted exhibition, showcasing some incredible talent from the online community.

**DAL:** What barriers or problems have you found in making your art, and how did you overcome those or fix them?

**AG:** The life of a rising artist can be a very difficult time and I will cover some barriers that I too have had to battle. One of these is comparing yourself to bigger artists. Analysing your own work, in comparison to that of working professionals. This can be a cycle of self-destruction and self-aggravation. It is also perfectly normal to feel this way. These artists you compare yourself to have likely had the same feelings too! Just focus on *your own* learning and pushing yourself. That is how you will improve.

The same can be said for feeling that there's a lack of ongoing improvement in your work. You may see no progression for some time, and this can be de-motivating. It could be a case of pushing your comfort zones or trying new learning methods. After these slower moments of improvement you usually find a breakthrough moment *will* occur, where something just 'clicks'.

The life of an artist is not without its sacrifices. To really study your craft takes a lot of time and devotion. If you have to hold a job in the process, then your time becomes even more limited. Dealing with this concept is not always an easy thing. This was one moment where I became a social hermit and missed out in other activities. Balancing your work life, hobbies, social engagements, sleeping, eating and generally staying alive became one of the more difficult barriers to overcome.

Picture: "Cyber Fairy".

Discouragement from those around you… now this is something that requires a bit of stubbornness and a thicker skin to deal with. People around you are not always supportive, even in advice from friends. I was very lucky to have a family that gave 100% support to my decisions. Friends, however are not always so encouraging. If art is your true passion, any negative discouragement has no value.

DAL: Yes, there can often be some subtle jealousy there, especially among adolescents.

You're obviously developing a great talent as a portraitist, and I should think that a large part of your future 'pay-the-mortgage income' might be in that field — and especially in family ensemble portraits.  At age 24, have you really thought hard about your 'career strategies' yet — or are you still finding your feet and exploring your potential?

AG: Thank you for the kind words. Portraits are definitely my preferred area of study. They are personal and highly engaging and the smallest subtleties can alter an entire paintings mood. That said I don't think I would want it to become my *sole* income. I would definitely

prefer to be more diverse and touch upon various aspects of design. Professionally I would like to create illustrations that include all manner of sub-genres. I would continue portraits in my personal work indefinitely, though.

DAL: We first found you via your superb portrait "Cyber Fairy".  You also have a very generous presentation showing exactly how this picture was made.  Could you talk our readers through the steps of this process in technical detail, please?

AG: Of course. The first stage is getting my sketch down. I keep my sketch fairly rough, thinking about the pose and basic composition of my character. There is no step for this next bit… but I add a silhouette on a new layer below to quickly see if it 'reads' well. I follow this with my basic palette of colours and values. My area of focus is to create a solid base that sets up the rest of my image. All this happens underneath the sketch layer and is kept quite loose. In the third step I merge my layers together. I then create a new layer above and begin refining the values and lighting. I add a saturation filter above my other layers to toggle it in grey scale.
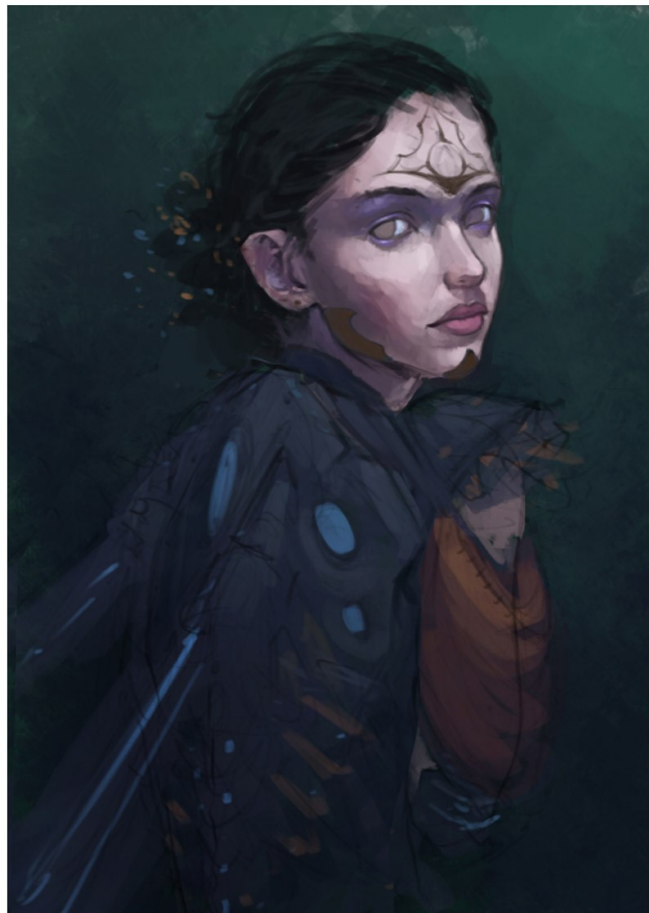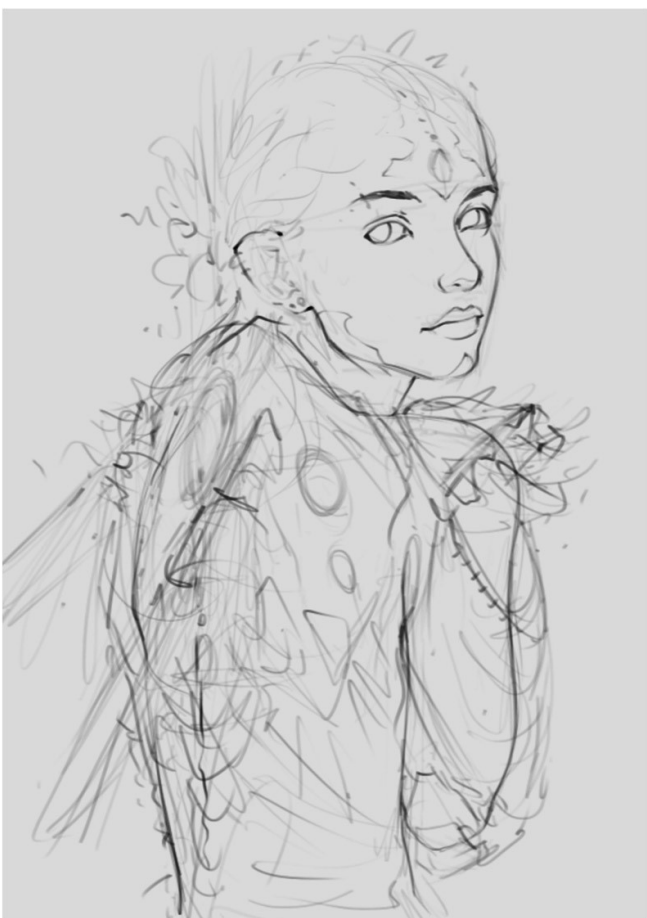
I use this to check my tonal values as I go. The following three or four steps are not so defined… instead I scatter my attention over the image more randomly. I do not stick on one detail too long at this stage and move around the image. This way the painting builds as a whole and more consistently.

You can see that the face has become more rendered by stage seven — it will not change much from this point. Getting the face rendered early on is something I do as a 'benchmark'. I want it to be the clearest focal point, and so getting this area polished first allows me to build the image around more carefully.

All the time I am merging my layers down for preference. I like working on one flattened layer as it encourages me to make smarter decisions and not rely on the states of Photoshop's History palette.

At stage eight I render out the hair and add small flowers to the back knot. I choose colours that compliment the blue and orange in her costume. Having these small similarities adds balance and harmony to the palette. I also

polish the lighter metal on her back piece. In step nine I render the cloth on her arm, paying close attention to the natural fall of the fabric. I try not to stretch the fabric beyond its capabilities, since this can counter the illusion of believability. I design a small headpiece and leaf design for her plaid and add a small luminous earring. Lastly I add the finishing touches… on a Screen layer I add all the light-based elements into the design, using a lighter saturated blue. These include the wings, glowing lines and LED's.

When texturing the metal it is important to focus on the lighting. Will it be reflective or matte... painted or raw... clean or tattered/scratched? These decisions help choose the correct lighting approach and make the textures more believable.

**DAL:** Interesting, thanks for that. You're also interested in making strong tonal/value studies, but looking at your gallery you seem to have 'moved on' from these recently? Were these just undertaken to strengthen the skills that underlie more major colour paintings, or do you have an interest in developing such pictures in their own right?

**AG:** Absolutely. These studies were performed as learning exercises, focusing solely on the fundamentals — light, colour, composition, perspective etc. I would always have ideas in my head, but the execution would not be as strong. As I improve on my fundamentals and study regularly, it becomes easier to draft these ideas. I have recently been producing concepts more comfortably from memory, thanks to these exercises. I always choose a study with the pretence of 'not understanding' a particular aspect of it. That way, the rewards will be greater.

**DAL:** Could you tell us about your current technical setup, please, in terms of the software and hardware that you use to make and print your work?

**AG:** Sure thing. My set-up has changed here and there from PC to Mac, and a variety of graphics tablets. Right now I have a laptop PC and a Wacom Cintiq 22HD. Personally I prefer the Cintiq, as you work directly on the screen in a manner similar to that of traditional artists. Hand-eye coordination, for one thing, makes the Cintiq more intuitive than a screenless tablet.

Photoshop CC is also my chosen software for painting.

**DAL:** One of your early "Scraps" pictures from 2011 is titled "Screen problems" — which vividly illustrates the way that a Mac screen can show pictures darker than a PC. For the benefit of our readers, could you explain this problem, and any workarounds you may have found in the last five years?

**AG:** Ah yes, this can be a frustrating aspect to painting digitally. Screens are very diverse and display differently from brand to brand. My particular predicament was using an LED backlit Mac screen. I find the gamut range on Mac screens have a wider range than most PC screens. The darkest values are more even on a Mac, but on a PC screen there is often a great jump between black and dark grey. It often creates a blotchy finish or banding in gradients. It is advised to steer clear of using pure black.

A tip that I discovered can help you. When working in Photoshop on newer Mac screens, add a white filled layer at 5-10% — and place it above everything. The darkest values will now
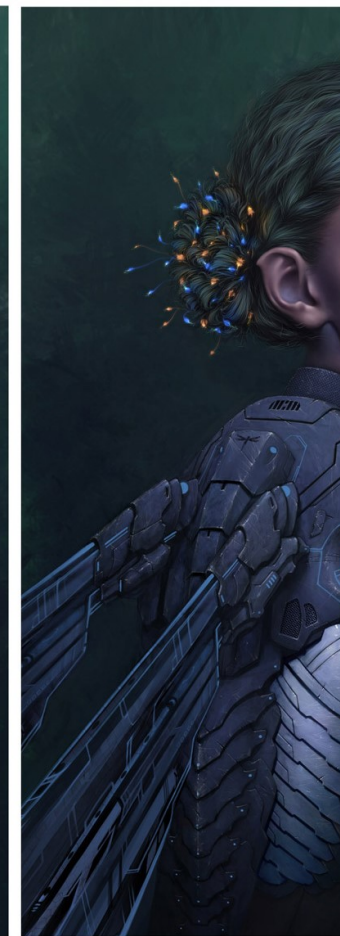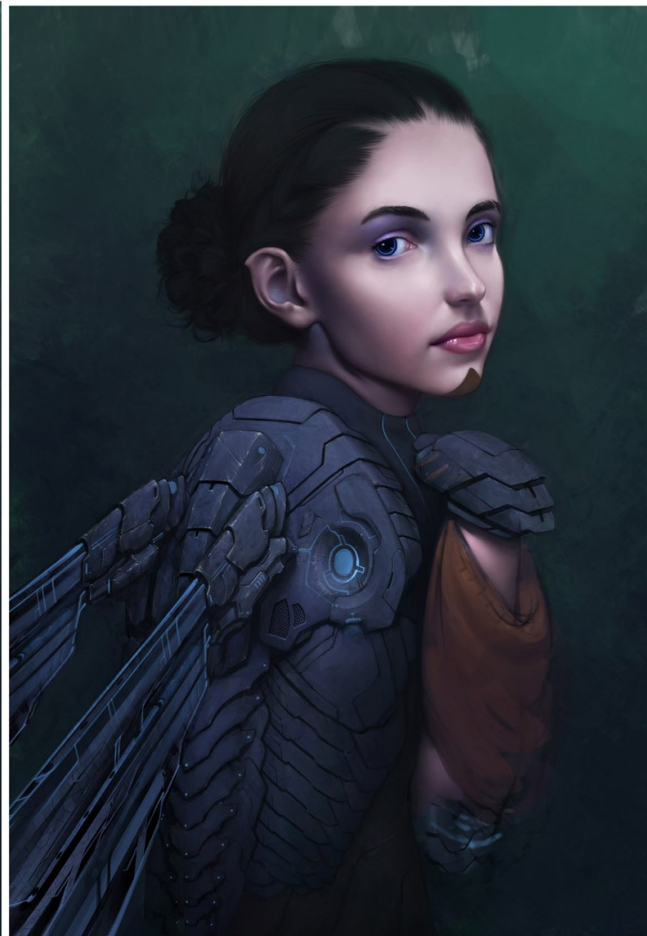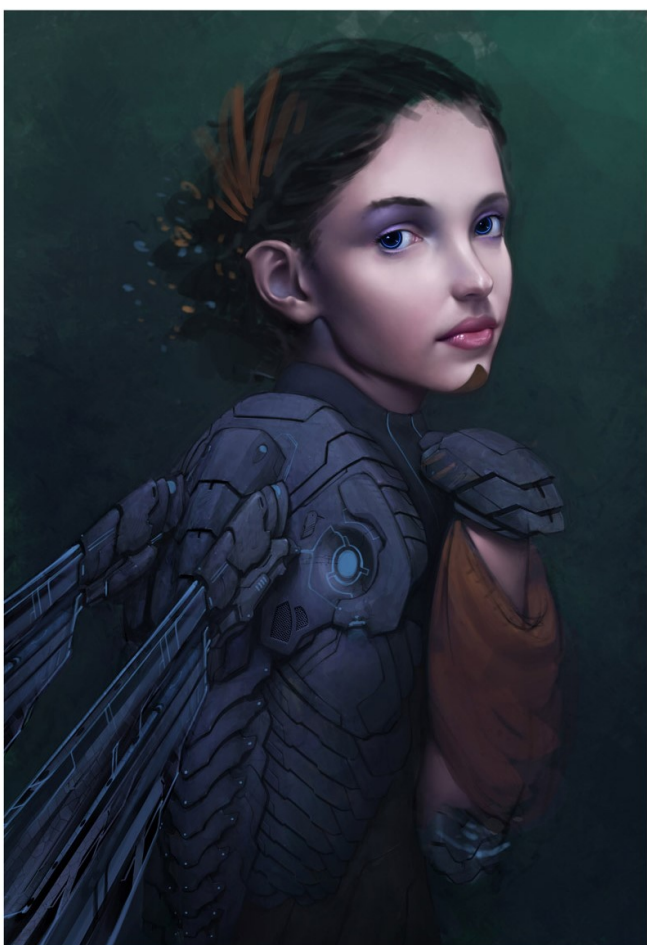
become more separated. This is actually a better replication of consumer PC screens and their somewhat washed-out gamut range.

DAL: Thanks. Tell us about speedpainting, please — because that's a production method which many of our 3D artists won't be too familiar with. And it's a skill at which you seem to be becoming a master, too!

AG: 'Speedpainting' or 'spitpainting' is a process of painting in a short time-frame. These are great exercises for practising your drafting skills, especially in the field of concept design. One common misconception of speedpainting is 'to work fast'. This will probably cause you to fluster, and so make more mistakes. The truth is actually to work *smart* and efficient. My speedpaintings are relatively slow, as I spend time planning my actions more carefully. One correct brush mark can show more important information than a handful of messy strokes. So in this case, slow *is* fast.

DAL: Yes, 'more haste, less speed'. Have you ever considered spending a week making a complete 28-page comic book or a children's storybook with it? Telling a story with your art?

AG: In truth I can't say I have thought about this. But — sparked with hearing such an idea — I think it would be a great plan. I often make daily speedpaints due to the efficiency of time. I will take this into serious consideration for the future.

DAL: We've launched our new magazine to be able to cover all sci-fi art, rather than just 3D (our old magazine was only 3D), since the fields are rapidly merging and mingling. Do you personally see a place for digital 3D software — such as Poser and DAZ Studio — in terms of planning pictures, working out how light would fall, quickly testing a range of different looks, maybe even using it to create a base layer for digital overpainting?

AG: Yes, I see 3D having a big involvement with digital painting in the future. The gaps between these two worlds are already becoming smaller by the day, especially in conceptual design. It can be highly efficient to plan a bigger painting in 3D, as it can provide a stable base to work from. So Poser is also a tool that artists will utilise a lot.
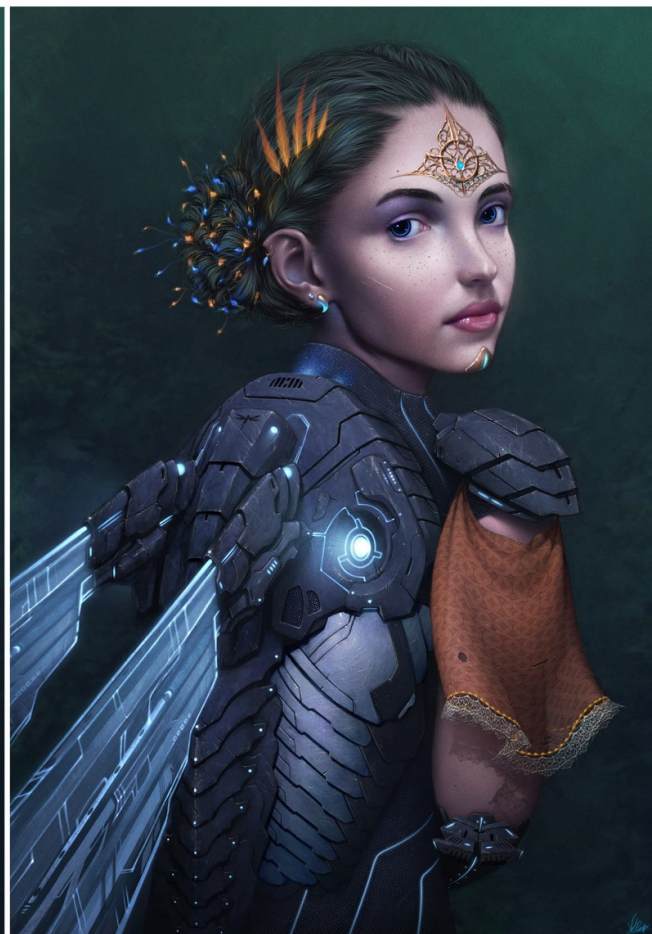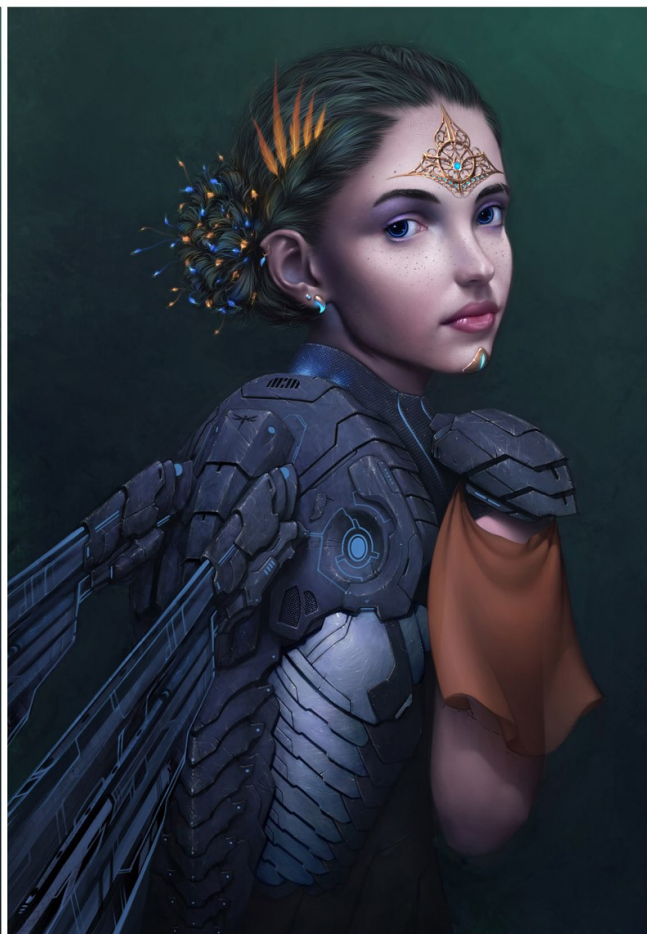
I've even used Poser to plan a gesture, one that I had no reference for. But I am quite the traditionalist in my approach, so I never use the 3D as a base to paint over. I love the process of building a painting from the ground up. But it has helped me to plan a painting, as reference.

Using 3D software also helps us 2D artists understand an object in a 3D space. This helps us visualise the object when we return to paint it in 2D. The same principles apply for the infinite variation in lighting. Seeing the shapes react in lighting, under so many conditions, is solid and valuable learning material.

**DAL:** Three of your pictures depict a sort of bio-luminescent 'fantasy forest'. We open the interview with one of these pictures. Could you tell readers about this short series, please — was there a story behind it, were they perhaps intended as part of a larger work such as a children's storybook?

**AG:** I have a huge fondness for bioluminescence in nature. Visiting Pandora, the natural world seen in *Avatar,* would be sheer paradise for me… you know… apart from everything there trying to kill you! The concept that Mother Earth actually has a defining presence and balance in the world is inspiring. Visually I love the contrast of nature, and the almost surreal futuristic lighting. It simply *is* an aesthetically beautiful thing to me.

I also love light against dark… something bright and attractive against a contrastingly dark surrounding. So it was my love of this visual contrast, and longing to be surrounded by nature, that inspired this series of illustrations. The little orb-like creatures in the opening picture depict the children of Mother Earth. These little critters act as guardians of the forest, pottering around, healing and protecting. Somtheing similar can be said about my deer illustrations. The deer are like pure and highly rare spirits. The unicorns of the forest!

**DAL:** Super. Yes, and I perhaps sense a Miyazaki influence in such themes?

Can you tell our reader what you have planned in the near future, and in what direction(s) do you see your work going in the next few years?
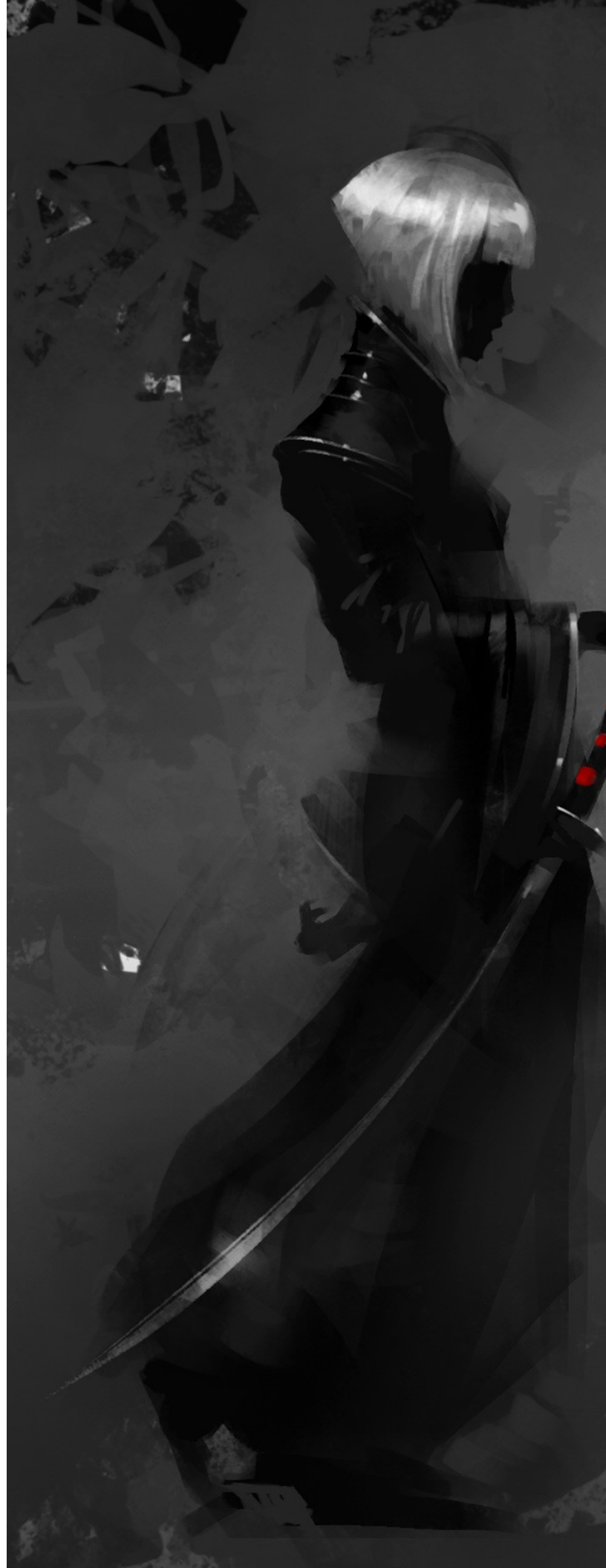
AG: I'm very much a 'go with the flow' kind of guy, and like to be surprised by the future and what it holds. If I had to choose, I would love to create larger illustrations for card-based games. These include *Magic the Gathering*, *Legend of the Cryptids*, *Wizards of the Coast* etc. Alternatively I would like to get more hands-on with conceptual design for movies, and would love to work on a triple-A videogame.

DAL: Yes, card games are very popular, especially with the rise of new methods by which to finance their production. I see that the best-selling *ImagineFX* has a complete 'special themed issue' magazine out on card game art and artists, this month.

AG: In my personal work I want to push my technical abilities and explore storytelling more. I want to push the concepts in my work, to tell bigger stories — by delving into deeper meanings and emotional range. I'm currently in the early stages of a 'Dark Materials' series, a variety of illustrations exploring the darker emotions and states of mind. These will hold personal meanings that people can hopefully engage or relate to.

DAL: If you could reach back to your 14 year old self, from age 24, what three key points of good advice would you want to give him — about his creative interests and path in life?

AG: If I have learned something from my journey, academic knowledge is important, but still second in priority.

If I could go back in time… I would tell myself to 'push my comfort zones socially'. Communicate more with people, hang out, have fun and just have a bigger social presence. Being confident in yourself not only affects you in social aspects, but it also impacts your professional life too. I have held myself back due to lack of confidence in the past.

Happiness is key. This is not just in art, but life in general. Find what makes you happy. You get one crack at this life, and it would be a shame to spend it in a state of unhappiness. Let's not waste it. It's easier said than done… but I have definitely had to face my demons in the past

and overcome some dark moments in my life. I see now that I should have focused on the positive aspects and not caught up in negativity. I find it common amongst artists to feel this way in particular, and so I encourage them to heed this piece of advice.

On a more art related note… a good piece of advice would be to indulge in culture. Branch out, travel, explore and learn as much as you can. Technical knowledge is one thing, but as an artist your greatest arsenal will be a mental library of resources and a knowledge of what's already been done in history. These come from the things you learn. The more you learn the more diverse your art can become, and the better stories that can be told. I was late on the scene and truly wished I had started learning more about the world when I was younger.

DAL: Yes, I do tend to think that the horizons of formal education in the UK — and probably the USA — have sadly shrunk over the last 20 years.  It's a pity in one way, but in another way it's good — because when the overlooked gems of quality *are* finally discovered on one's own initiative, then they're not tainted by having been badly 'taught' at school or college. It's like: "wow, I just discovered this… *so* fresh!" So many people get put off something for life because they were taught it badly or not-at-all at school, or had to plough through ponderous exams on it. I dread to enquire too closely into what effect teaching Carol Ann Duffy and Paul Auster has had on people's ideas about what poetry and novels should be like, for instance.

Well, it's been great… thank you very much for the in-depth interview.  We wish you well with your future career and will watch for your sci-fi pictures and involvement with the videogames industry with interest.

AG: Thank you once again for having me in this interview. It has been a real pleasure!

## Aaron Griffin is online at:

http://aarongriffinart.deviantart.com/

Picture: "Exo Suit" (lunch sketch).

**Pictures:** Sketches in a page of Aaron Griffin's ideas sketchbook.

# THE COSMIC COLLAGE OF
# BOB MAY

**Bob May** terms himself a "recombiner". He manually extracts public-domain art from original vintage print material, and then painstakingly recombines it into superb new sci-fi 'cosmic' collages. We're very pleased to be able to present a small gallery of his fine work.

**Picture:** "SkyDive".
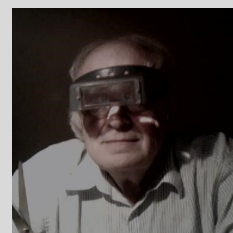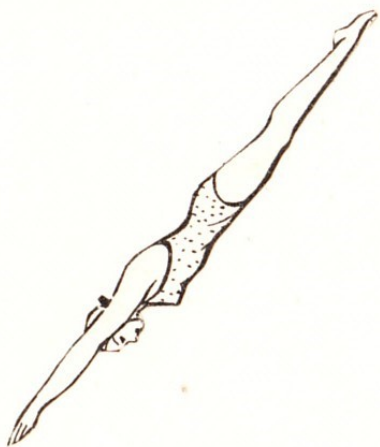
BOB MAY

SOUTHAMPTON, UK

VINTAGE PRINTS |
CRAFT METHODS

WEB

Pictures: "Beams" and "Collaborative Elevation".
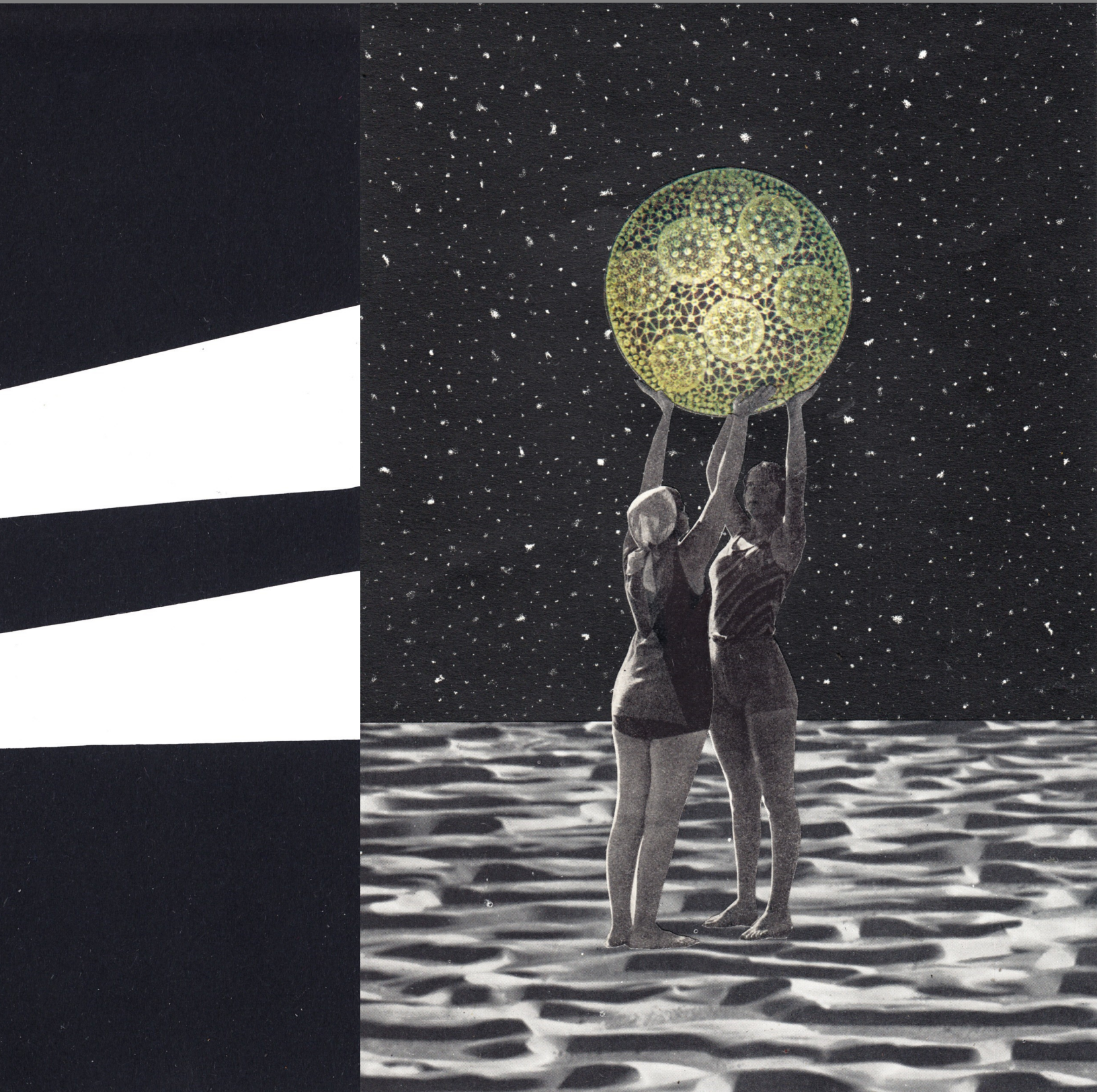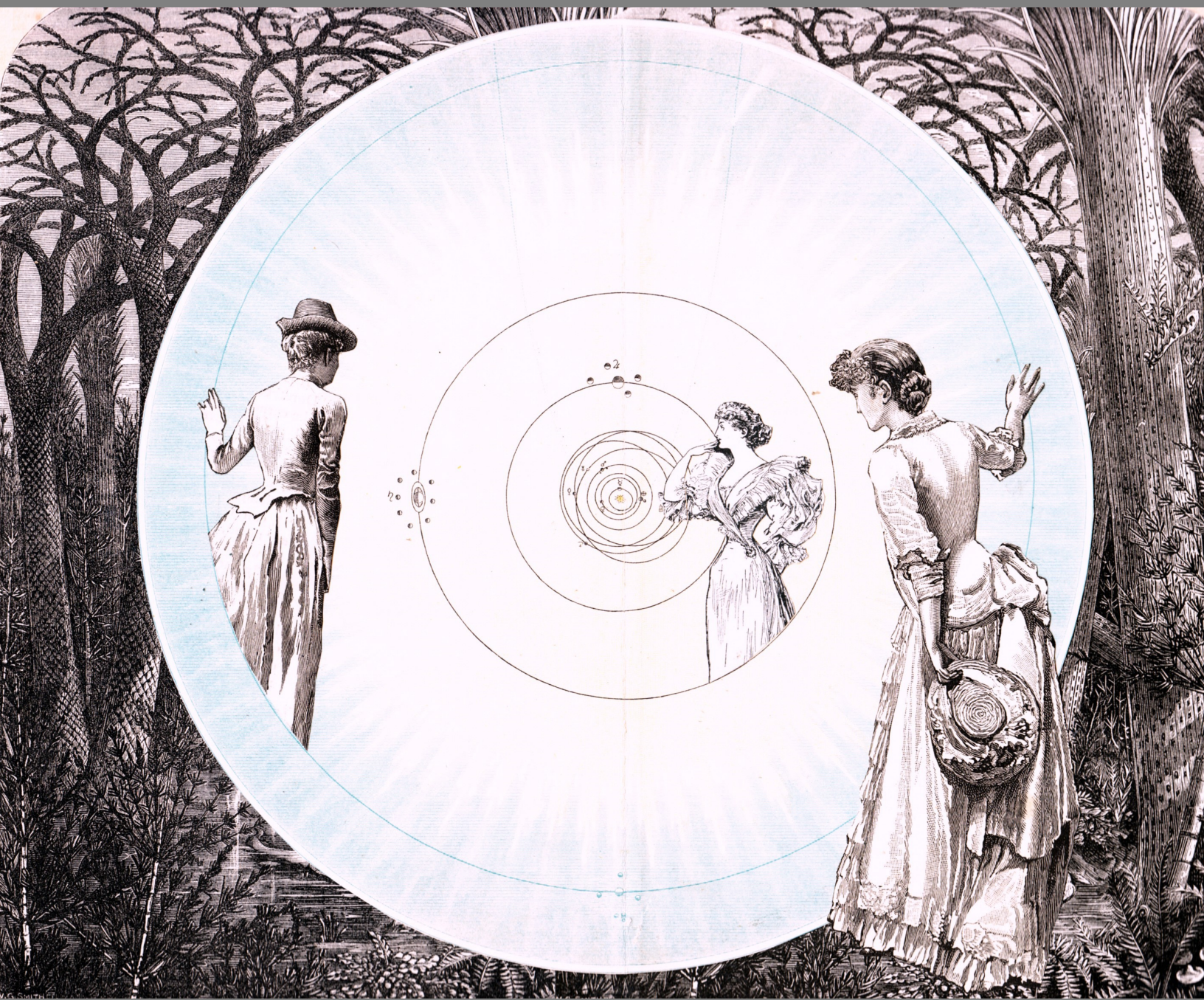
**Pictures:** "Botanical Garden" and "Nonconformist".

**Pictures:** "Enter" and "Trajectory".
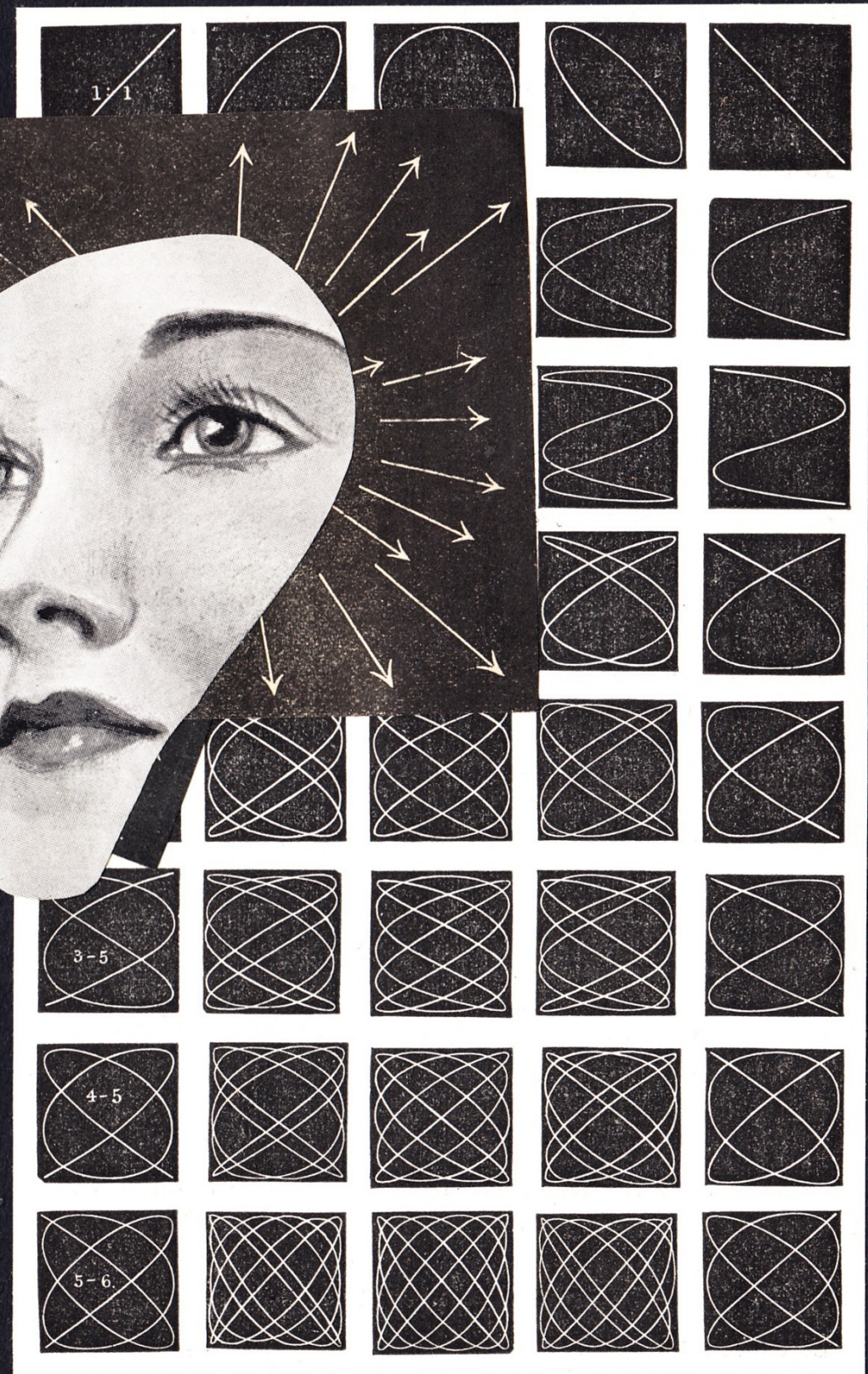
Pictures: "The Spectrum" and "Keep on the Run".

**Bob May** is online at Flickr:
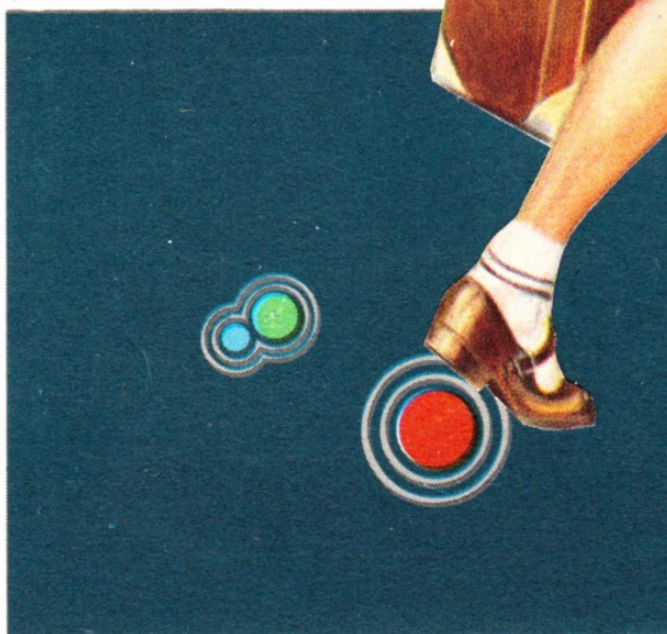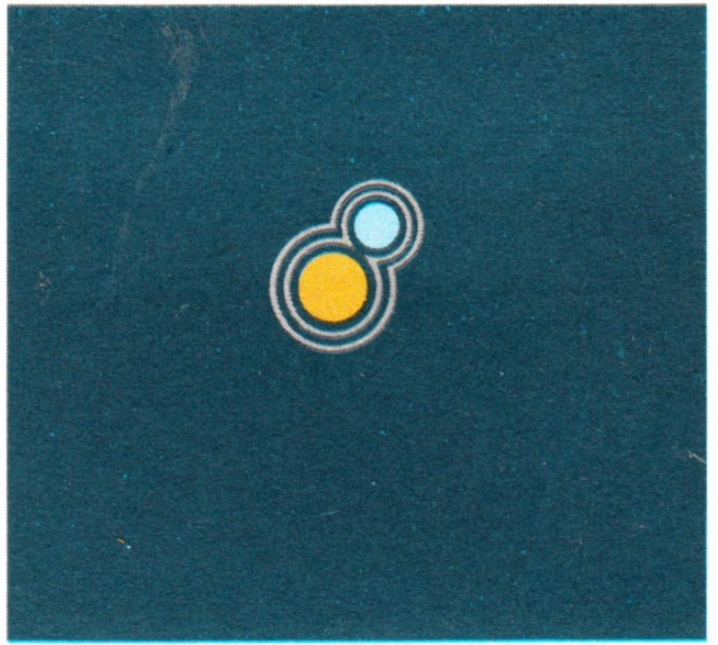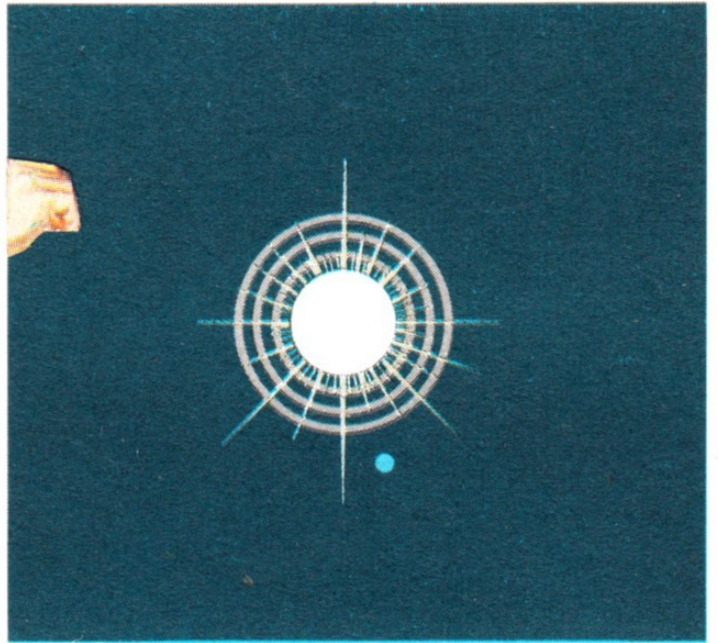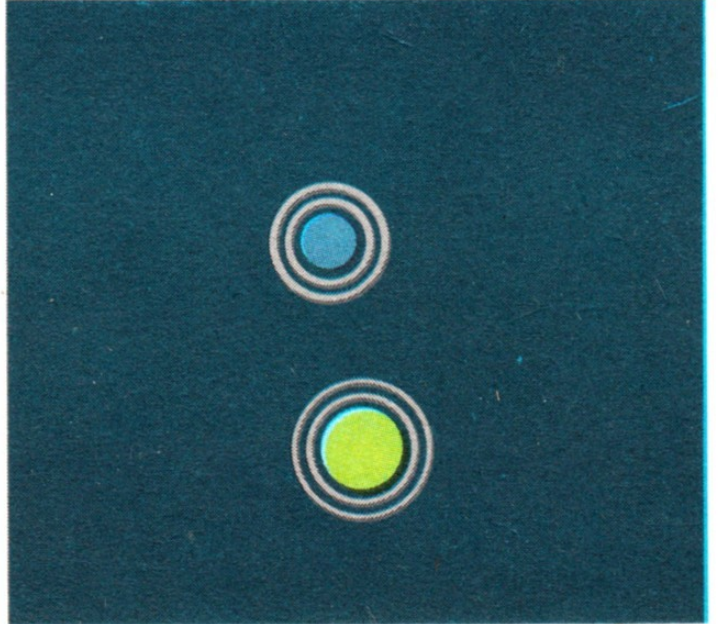
# PAUL FRANCIS

**Paul Francis** has recently given up his 3D work to focus on his photography. But he was happy to talk about his body of 3D work — inspired by steampunk, pulp art, and Frank Frazetta.

**DAL:** Paul, welcome to the pages of *Digital Art LIVE* magazine. Many thanks for giving us this in-depth interview.

**PF:** No problem, though I must say that I've been leaving the CG artwork alone for a while — and so it's been fun going back, and seeing my work with fresh eyes.

**DAL:** You trained in the English Midlands as a Fine Artist in painting and photography, at a time when the old 'art school' tradition was still alive in the UK. Then you became an artist/illustrator. What do you think those experiences gave you, that has stayed with you and proved useful?

**PF:** I went off to art school at Leicester Polytechnic in 1979 with a head full of dreams about being a famous record and book cover artist… I was brought down to earth with a bump.

PAUL FRANCIS

UK

POSER | BRYCE |
PHOTOSHOP |

WEB

Picture: "Steampunk:
Eternal Vigilance" [is the
price of freedom].

The teachers told us all, on the first day, to put our paints and brushes away. They then issued us all with a hard pencil each and told us to forget everything we knew, or thought we knew, about art. They were going to teach us to draw and to get back to basics. I hated it, to start off with, but after several weeks my skills at translating the real 3D world onto a sheet of paper in 2D form had progressed beyond all recognition.  And I had learned two essential artistic skills: discipline and application.

**DAL:** Your online gallery shows a strong interest in early 1930s and 40s heroic pulp sci-fi, and also in some of the great artists inspired by pulp's 1970s reprint revival — such as Frazetta. Tell us about that interest, please, and how it came about?

**PF:** It was a different world then, in the 1970s. I lived in grey old England — but through the medium of art books, record covers — and in particular a massive market in posters, which you don't see so much any more — I discovered a whole universe of fantasy art and worlds that blew me away.

**DAL:** Yes, you're right, I'd forgotten that. Huge flippable racks of giant print posters, and also specialist fold-out poster magazines. Yes, I *just about* remember those from my youth, though I seem to remember that they had mostly gone by the mid 1980s, when I could actually afford them. Swept away by the global recession of 1979-1984, I suppose, with retailers deciding to focus instead on giving space to products like the early PC videogames and the then-new CDs.

**PF:** Yes, any student worth his or her salt in the 1970s would have walls full of print artwork by Roger Dean, Rodney Matthews and Frank Frazetta. I know I did! Almost every month new art books would come out, all of this against a backdrop of record covers and comic books that was most art students' introduction to fantasy art. In the days before the Internet you had to actually go out and track down your favourite artists and these mediums were where you would find the stuff you wanted.

**DAL:** Yes, looking back on it, it seems like there was effectively a whole other form of informal 'art school' slowly emerging from 1975-1995, in the form of commercial print products, before the arrival of the mass Internet in 1995. Doubtless someone will write a one-volume scholarly history of all that, before long, if they haven't done so already.

**PF:** My older brother used to make a point of giving me Frazetta books for Christmas and birthdays, which was where my particular obsession with Frank's work got started. Also in Newcastle [in northern England] we were lucky in having two brilliant poster/comic book shops in the Handiside Arcade, which have sadly now gone now, but I would spend hours on end in there. The interest in pulps came about through researching fonts and graphic styles of the 1930s and 40s for my own projects — I suddenly *saw* what had originally influenced Frazetta and all the other fantasy artists I admire.

**DAL:** Some of your work also uses comics techniques, such as the zoom-in in "Steampunk: Eternal Vigilance" which opens this interview. And you also have an interest in album covers and the sort of magazine covers once found on the Warren horror magazines such as *Creepy* and *Eerie*. I remember those well, though they came to be in somewhat tatty 50p form via secondhand bookshops in the early 1980s, rather than shiny and new from a 1970s news-stand. Have you also made whole comics? Or do you aspire to do so?

**PF:** I would love to do comics, but I'd be hopeless. I don't take art direction easily, and I guess that's the reason I'm happy as a semi-serious amateur. I look at the drawing and compositional skills of comic artists and am just amazed at how talented and creative they are. I love how comics which used to be the preserve of young men who didn't see enough daylight, but are now such a massive influence on popular cinema, TV and graphic art. You see them on the side of buses nowadays and my wife has a pair of *Suicide Squad* baseball boots!
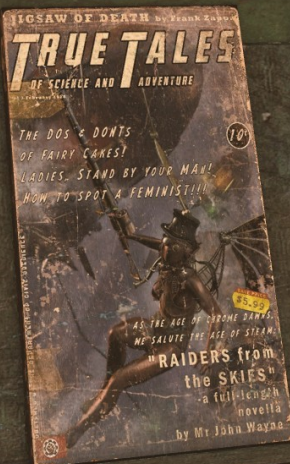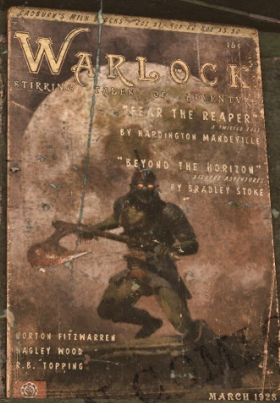
**DAL:** You have a strong sense of composition and depth, and colour. One of your pictures is titled "Kirby made me do it!", for instance. Have you closely studied Kirby's or Frazetta's famously dynamic character-posing and evocation of depth? Or does your skill in composition and depth come more from your degree training in Fine Art?

**PF:** All three actually, composition and depth were key areas of the drawing element that opened my degree course. If one wanted to make a study of them today, then Frank Frazetta would be the beginning and end of your studies, as he is simply amazing, audacious, creative and accomplished. Kirby is one of my personal favourites, I love the way he uses hard edges, even outlines in his work and his compositional skills are up there with fine artists. He uses clouds and other decorative elements in really creative ways that draw the eye in. In that picture I had found a way to make Kirby-esque clouds, as actual 3D elements that could be used in a scene as compositional devices too. I was really pleased at getting that hand-drawn, organic look into Poser where it is all too easy to make things look stiff and wooden, which if nothing else has been what I spend most of my time trying to avoid.

**DAL:** Which other artists have influenced you, and what form has that taken?

**PF:** I used to love the Pre-Raphaelites for their skill level and ability to convincingly portray worlds that never existed; it used to get me into rows at art college — because they were deeply unpopular with lecturers and other students, but I never lost my love for their work.

**DAL:** Yes, I was lucky enough to grow up in Birmingham, England — lucky because the city gallery has one of the world's best collections of Pre-Raphaelite paintings and Burne-Jones tapestries.  I've often wondered if that collection influenced Tolkien (*The Lord of the Rings*), since as a boy he went to school just a few steps around the corner from the gallery, at a school in Corporation St., and the gallery's Pre-Raphaelite collection was apparently on display at the time he was schooling there.

**PF:** A bigger influence for me was Patrick Woodroffe — I used to study his work and techniques microscopically.  His pictures are amongst my favourites *ever*, especially his jewel-like 1970s book covers for Michael Moorcock and some beautiful hand-tinted etchings he did. I was lucky enough to get two of these from eBay a few years ago. I was so pleased at getting them that I wrote to him to let him know I had them. I was over the moon when he wrote back — he died recently, which was gut-wrenching. It was he who gave me my love of bright colours and shiny textures, which was what first drew me to computer graphics in the early 1980s.

**DAL:** Your works are all made with Poser and Photoshop? Do you have any thoughts about Poser's evolution over the years, and any opinions on the new Poser 11, which we reviewed in-depth a few issues ago.

**PF:** I've had Poser since version 2.0, which I think was issued in about 1997. I never found much use for it for years, but picked it up again with Poser 7. I'm not sure of exactly what they had changed, but all of a sudden I knew how to light Poser scenes properly, and that really is *the key* with Poser, getting the lighting right, and particularly paying attention to falloff and shadows. Once I cracked those aspects, I used Poser almost exclusively, and it replaced Bryce as my renderer of choice. I have to confess though that I didn't even know there was a new version 11 — I find that if a piece of software works, I'll stick with what I've got. I wish it could generate terrains and handle Boolean modelling like Bryce though.

**DAL:** Yes, we had a long in-depth review of Poser 11 Pro a few issues ago, for any readers who want to learn about the latest version.

I'm sure that readers would also be interested in hearing about your professional TV work. I understand that you have been a special effects technician, working on major British shows such as the sci-fi comedy *Red Dwarf* and the long-running children's education show *Blue Peter*, among others. Was that as fun as it sounds?

Picture: "Protected".

**PF:** Actually my work in TV and film was initially as a 'camera grip', about as far removed from art as you can get, lugging around camera dollies and building two-ton cranes several times a day — I used to look like Arnie! I later worked in special effects for my brother at Shepperton Studios, where I was lucky enough to get paid for model-making and blowing things up. I also dabbled in landscape generation with Bryce which looked fantastic on screen.

**DAL:** Sounds fun.  So, this is our special "female future heroes" themed issue. Could you tell us about your interest in depicting female heroes, please? How that  theme in your work developed, and any sub-themes within it that you feel that you've explored in your body of work?

**PF:** Heroic females were what I first loved about Frank Frazetta's work. I got an email a while ago, out of the blue, from an African-American artist thanking me for my portrayals of strong African women. I had to do a double-take, as I hadn't made a conscious effort to do so. But, on looking back, I realised *all* my best pieces featured a strong African female, and I realised that not a lot of fantasy art did depict such, so it became something that I was pleased to explore.

**DAL:** I also love your steampunk pictures. And I get the sense that they might all be part of a larger storytelling whole? Or that they were planned to be? I like the way you've managed to blend the radical nostalgia of steampunk, with a sort of visual answering of the question:- "What would happen if traditionalist 1890s steampunk had gradually moved on in time, evolved and developed over 50 years, and then had found itself in the 1940s?"

**PF:** I was drawn to steampunk because of the level of detail you can work into your pictures, and I've always had a thing about juxtaposing disparate elements — so steampunk is the perfect vehicle for that. Then I became aware of Dieselpunk which is the next evolution, but a lot of it is a bit *too* industrial for me, I like to blend steampunk elements with *art deco* and other

stuff from the 1930s. Producing artwork in these genres is a great excuse for researching fonts and graphic design of the era as I like to get those things right and spend a considerable proportion of any project doing so.

**DAL:** Yes, getting the choice of fonts exactly right is *so* important — especially for comics and book cover work — and is something that's often overlooked by many 3D artists.

Now, I'm sure that many readers will be interested in the details of your techniques for overpainting or Photoshop-filtering 3D, to make the pictures more like 2D paintings. Could you talk us through how that process happens, please? I presume you're isolating elements and then compositing them back into the picture?

**PF:** It took me a while to settle on a working setup. I render the foreground figures in Poser, and usually use Bryce for backgrounds and skies. I also produce depth map renders and alpha mask renders at this stage. All the rendered scenes and elements are then taken into Photoshop where I use the depth maps and masks to isolate elements from each other if I need to. I start adding in effects by hand in Photoshop, atmospheric haze and depth and light glows and smoke and steam effects in front of and behind the differing elements. So I can end up with 20-30 layers in the .PSD.

Once I've got them all composited together, and the effects are finalised, I flatten the image and run it through Alien Skin's "Oil Paint" filter. With the original version underneath, I then selectively erase the painted version to draw the eye to the important elements and leave the other areas looking painted and indistinct. I then add any weathering or texture effects and try and stop before I go too far... I haven't seen a plugin which will do *all* the work for me - not sure I would use it if I could find one, as I'm happy with the creative control this method gives me. The final stage is to add the signature — it's pure coincidence that the first three letters of my surname are the same as the Mighty Frank Frazetta — means I can even use a signature like his!

# HOW TO LEAVE THE
# CITY
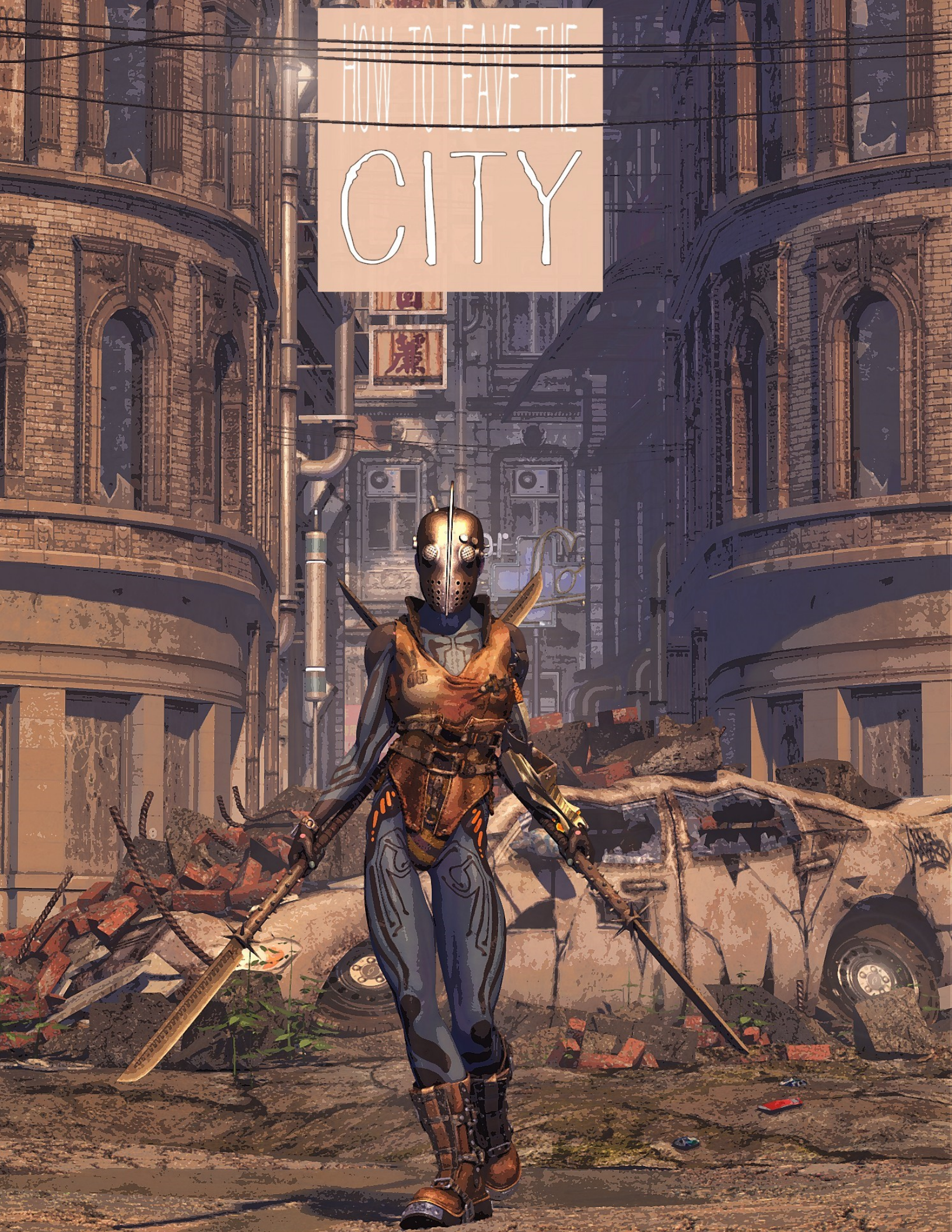
**DAL:** What advice would you give to someone just starting out in sci-fi art?

**PF:** I wasted years trying to get my pictures all rendered as single scenes. Once I learned that it is perfectly fine to composite different elements together, then I suddenly took my art to another level — which was reflected in publishing success...

**DAL:** Absolutely right. That is a great piece of advice. Just also make sure one gets the light direction and general colouration right, across the various rendered elements that you're going to composite in Photoshop.

**PF:** After starting to do work that way that I had some stuff published in a Neil Gaiman project, and I got to spend the day filming with the great man himself. More recently had some full-page pieces in a dieselpunk book, alongside a whole bunch of artists I really admire. The lesson is this — if it works, it's fine!

**DAL:** Yep, there's a quote from Tilda Swinton, relavant to that: "It [creativity] is all done with smoke and mirrors, and it always will be."

I see from your gallery that you own some very fine Husky-style sled dogs. Readers will be able to visualise the breed, if they think of the type of dogs often depicted hauling an Arctic explorer's sled. So, I'm curious about those. They certainly photograph well! Also about how you came to your decision to give up on 3D art, recently, to focus on developing your skills in photography of the real-world?

**PF:** Yes, we have three Northern Inuit dogs — they are most famous for being used as 'the Direwolves' in *Game of Thrones*, so they're becoming quite popular now. The kids in the

village where I live are convinced that they are *real* wolves! As for giving up on the 3D art, I finally ran out of ideas, and that coincided with me getting my first decent digital camera. I used to be a photographer and darkroom technician — so the creative possibilities of putting my Photoshop skills to use in my photography has just completely taken over.

**DAL:** Yes, one can't force creativity down a path when it wants to take another direction.  What projects do you have underway or planned?

**PF:** I have an idea to produce some urban night-time photographs and treating them like my 3D renders, i.e. to blend differing versions of them together to enhance the compositions and draw the eye in and to add effects. It's still an idea that I'm experimenting with.

**DAL:** Yes, interesting. I've recently started noticing owls around where I live, which were not there before. I suspect that there's an opportunity fo someone — not me, as I like my bed at night — to make a whole picture-series to be made about 'the return of urban night-time wildlife'. Which is booming for various reasons too complex and contentious to mention here. And such night pictures might then perhaps, as you suggest, have various Photoshop manipulations — or maybe it could be done as a side-by-side diptych — to add a very subtle sort of supernatural 'spirit animal' enhancement to the picture?

Ok, well thanks very much for the interview, and we wish you well in your new focus on fine photography.

**PF:** Thank you.

Paul Francis is online at:

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TROK MENKE

USA

DAZ STUDIO |
REALITY PLUGIN |
PHOTOSHOP

WEB

# TROY MENKE

**Troy Menke** is a 3D artist from Wisconsin, USA. *Digital Art LIVE* talks with him about selling art at fan conventions, getting the best from the Reality plugin, and how he discovered his love for steampunk.

Picture: "Approach by Stealth".

**DAL:** Troy, welcome — and many thanks for the interview.

**TM:** My pleasure, and thank you for the opportunity to discuss myself and my artwork.

**DAL:** You have a fine gallery online, nearly all DAZ Studio — the lighting, composition and the evocation of character all take a very consistent form across your pictures. Did you train in an art school, or are you self-taught?

**TM:** I'm very glad you enjoyed it, thank you.

My education background is in commercial photography and video. Beyond that, I've never had any formal art training. Everything I've learned, as far as 3D art is concerned, has been self-taught. Though I have found my photography background being of some use, in terms of the composition and lighting. I've often wondered if going back and getting a more formal art school education might help my artwork, since I'm self taught it obviously takes more time to learn certain things, if I'd had the scholastic background for it.

I have thought about going back and taking at least some formal art classes, but have yet to take that next step.

**DAL:** Yes, these days I'm afraid that the classic 'old school' artisanal tradition has rather died, at least in the Fine Art departments. Although, of course, the Web and Skype now offers abundant opportunities for people to start new digital training *aletiers*. And some universities do have excellent courses — my nearest, for instance, has a new Comics and Cartoon Arts B.A. degree that takes an exemplary 'old school' approach. It often depends on who heads the course, and how independent they can be from all the management and politics of it.

How and when did you find your way to 3D art?

**TM:** I've always enjoyed art, and had up to that point been doing mostly ink, pencil and chalk drawings. Landscapes and still life for the most part. In 2006 I came across a website that had the most spectacular 3D artwork. I was so blown away I quickly registered at the site, and couldn't wait to get started — but then 'life intervened' and I didn't do anything with it, and I eventually forgot about it. About a year later in late 2007 I was asked to assist with creating some artwork for a convention. It was at that point I remembered the 3D artwork and did a more thorough round of research. This search, in January of 2008, led me to once again register with DAZ3D, having completely forgotten that I had previously registered with them back in 2006. I've been working with it almost exclusively since then. I know it's not a terribly exciting story, but it did lead me to where I am today with my work, and I cannot complain too much about that.

**DAL:** And then… you took the plunge in 2010, and got a powerful PC for your 3D work?

**TM:** I did, I called it my *Über* computer. My wife knew I was frustrated — because my system at the time would take days to render a piece of artwork, and then would often fail after having run out of system resources. Additionally all the artwork I could do with the old machine had to be very simplistic, because the more complicated the scene the more resources it would use — and so the better the chance the system would crash. In fact the system's resources were so low, that if it was rendering I would not be able to use it for anything else, not even solitaire.

**DAL:** Yes, I remember being there. Crash, crash and *crash*. Thank goodness for 64-bit O.S.'s, better software and faster PCs.

**TM:** Another impetus for getting the new system was due to the fact that people had also started inquiring about possibly purchasing some of my artwork, so my wife and I discussed it and we went out and got the new system, along with a large format printer with which to make prints to try and sell. The new system allowed me to do more complex images in a more timely fashion, not to mention improve my severely lacking solitaire game skills.

**DAL:** You're currently using DAZ Studio 4.8 with iRay, and also Reality. As an experienced 3d artist what's your take on the balance of abilities and speed, between DAZ iRay and Reality 4.2? Also, do you have any tips, on making either of them render faster?

**TM:** I'm actually using a Mac Pro now, as the 2010 *Über* PC computer I mentioned previously, which performed dutifully for many years, has now been retired as well. I still have it, but it is rarely turned on. My hope is to eventually turn it into part of a render farm with several other older systems I still have. I was fortunate enough to be gifted a Mac Pro, from a friend who no longer needed it for his photography business. But, in answer to your question, yes — I'm still using DAZ Studio 4.8 with iRay or Reality and LuxRender.

One positive thing about being self-taught is that you never stop learning. My classes never stop, and truthfully, I'm a very tough instructor. Since iRay is still relatively new to me, I'm still experimenting with it, and am not nearly as experienced yet, as I am with Reality and LuxRender, but so far for me right now the difference between iRay and Reality is the look I'm trying to achieve.

If I want something more photorealistic, I choose Reality and LuxRender.  If I'm going for more of a storyboard or book cover then I think DAZ's iRay has the edge.  As for the speeds of each, I don't believe an honest comparison can actually be made, because LuxRender will continue to render 'forever' until you stop it.  The longest render I've done in iRay has been about 6 hours.  With LuxRender I have let it go for over *a week* before, not on purpose of course, but I left on a holiday and forgot it was running!  In most cases, though, I allow my Reality pieces render for at least 12 hours.

As far as tips go for rendering faster, I only have a few.  With Reality and LuxRender it's important to know that the system will process any object and material in a scene — even if it resides outside of the cameras view. So, to speed it up, be sure to remove or hide anything that is not showing in the camera frame.  If the object is hidden then LuxRender won't spend resources trying to render it.  What people forget is that *this includes body parts* that are covered by clothing on models, such as a hand that is covered in a glove.  Reality and LuxRender will still process information on the hand and fingers, even though they won't be seen in the render.  So if you hide them, LuxRender can focus its efforts only on what is seen, which will hopefully speed up the render.

For iRay, my only hint for a quicker render would be to keep things as simple as possible, though that may not be feasible or even desired depending on the work your doing.  It's the most basic principle, the more complicated the scene, materials and lighting, the longer it takes to render, but that's true for both iRay and Reality.  Hope these help.

**DAL:** Very useful, thanks. Do you use other software as well?

**TM:** I have always experimented with other software, when I get the chance, or can afford it.  Currently  also Hexagon, Bryce, Poser, Vue, Carrara, Photoshop CC 2015 and Paint Shop Pro.  My go-to applications, however are both DAZ Studio and Poser.  I'm equally familiar with each, though personally I find lighting in DAZ Studio easier to work with, but that's just my own personal preference, from years of using it.  Each application has its pluses and minuses.  Rather than debate those I'd rather spend my time working on a piece of art, rather than arguing about something on which my own personal views will have little to no bearing.  Seriously if I'm going to spend time reading I'll spend it with a good book, rather than a chat room or forum.

**DAL:** There's a nice wide range of subject matter in your collection.  Fantasy, dragons, the Orient, 'Americana' with a post-Lovecraft gothic twist, sci-fi.  What are your cultural influences?  I sense you might be someone who's mostly a reader of novels?

**TM:** I am indeed a voracious reader, but I'm also a big movie fan.  I grew up living only a few hundred yards from both a drive-in movie theatre, and a multiplex indoor theatre, so I spent most of my youth watching movies on the big screen.  Movies are a major contributor to who I am, and have had definitive impacts on my work as an artist, just maybe not in the way most would think.  I love weird camera angles, low angle shots, tilts, extreme close ups and such.  Like the Dutch tilt in the old 1960s *Batman* television series with Adam West — whenever the bad guys were on screen, or when the opening shot of a movie has the camera flying through a keyhole in a door.  Those are great perspectives, and can be used for fantastic works of art.  So while what is seen in my artwork may not come directly from what was on the screen, the mechanics of what you see very well might have been.

The thing about movies and television though, at least from an artistic standpoint, is that you are already seeing someone else's interpretation of the story.  Since all that information is already there on the screen, there is nothing really left for your imagination.  This is why I really enjoy reading fiction, and why books have such an influence on my artwork.  I get to put what I see in my mind's eye into a piece of artwork.

Even though I've never taken a specific scene from any book and tried to make a work of art out of it, I have taken the underlying concept of a book series and came up with an original piece based off of that concept. It's like 'fan-fiction meets fan-art'.

Other cultural influences I would have to list are the horror genre and specifically Halloween. If it is spooky, creepy, weird or disturbing, I'm all over it. Naturally this would make Halloween my favourite holiday and I thoroughly enjoy that entire season immensely. Living the heartland of the USA, we have our fair share of pumpkin patches, hayrack rides and haunted houses. It's a great time of year. I have a certain selection of artwork that can be listed as 'dark', and would probably have lots more if my wife didn't bring me back to the lighter side.

**DAL:** I was also pleased to spot some quality *Doctor Who* fan-art in your gallery. How do you think our new Doctor has done with his first two seasons?

**TM:** LOL, it's pretty funny, I get lots of very nice comments about my *Doctor Who* fan-art, and I'm very grateful for the comments. I'm really glad people like the artwork; but to be perfectly honest I've never watched even a single episode of *Doctor Who* in my entire life.

**DAL:** Ah…

**TM:** I know, I know, *blasphemy*, right… I simply created those pieces for a friend who is really into *Doctor Who*. Unfortunately this also means I don't actually have any judgements on the most current iteration of the Doctor, though I imagine the fact he's lasted more than a single season, is probably a pretty good indicator he's doing well by the role. The thing about *Doctor Who* is the characters, the villains and the props are very iconic, and resonate with so many people worldwide; you'd be hard pressed to find anyone who had not at least heard of them. I'm very glad I ended up doing them. They are to this day they one of my most popular series.

**DAL:** Ok. Well, admittedly *Doctor Who* can be very 'patchy', which makes him somewhat difficult to get into. And you have to remember

that most Brits have been watching the show since they were age six, so we perhaps take a lot of back-story and the overall approach for granted. I'd recommend the best of the David Tennant and Matt Smith series, minus their filler 'monster-of-the-week' episodes, and then judiciously selected episodes from the first and second of the most recent two Peter Capaldi series. The latter series has been very choppy — so much so that they're now having a total re-think about the show — but was much better than his creaky first series. Someone should really put together a 'viewing list' which excludes the skip-able and the more kiddy-fied episodes. Maybe they already have...

**TM:** If it helps restore some of my British sci-fi street-cred though, I was a big fan of *Red Dwarf*, and am quite pleased they are making new episodes. Does this help? Yes? No? Maybe?

**DAL:** Ah yes, that'll do it… /laughter/

**TM:** Maybe someday I'll actually get around to watching an episode or two of *Doctor Who*. And who knows, if I end up enjoying it, maybe I'll add a few more pieces to my fan-art collection. I know my friend would appreciate it.

**DAL:** Tell us more about your interest in the steampunk genre, please?

**TM:** My interest in the steampunk genre is accidental actually, and one I never thought I'd have. I was in a bookshop when a specific book, and more specifically its cover art, caught my eye. The book was Cherie Priest's *Boneshaker* and the cover art, by Jon Foster, was simply amazing; it was dirty and gritty with muted tones and colours except for the copper goggles which really stick out. It was simplistic and yet very complex. I loved it. Anyway I'm sitting there looking at this book, without having ever really read *anything* steampunk related. Next thing you know I'm walking away with not only that book but the second in the series as well, which also just happened to use Jon's artwork on the cover. So, there I am with two steampunk books which I basically purchased because I loved the cover art.

"Anyway I'm [in the bookshop] looking at this book, without having ever really read *anything* steampunk related. Next thing you know I'm walking away with not only that book but the second in the series ... purchased [just] because I loved the cover art. [So] the entirety of my steampunk artwork owes its very existence to me seeing "that first book cover.""

I eventually ended up reading the book. At which point I was hooked. The artwork, along with the story, opened up a whole new world. One I'm sure I would have never entered, if it hadn't been for Jon's artwork. I have to say the entirety of my steampunk artwork owes its very existence to me seeing that first book cover.

I'm not sure what it is about steampunk that resonates so deeply now, other than it's a fun genre, which lends itself to some fabulous artwork. I suppose if I think about it, it could be the melding of old and new technologies, or perhaps it's the contrasting of formal Victorian attire with dirty, and grimy steam and metal. Or maybe I just like the colour of copper and brass. All I know it steampunk is and will remain a favourite.

**DAL:** You also have a taste for weird Americana, although we're focussing in this interview on your 'female heroes' pictures. Does that Americana interest perhaps relate to the place you live in? Which I believe is… Nebraska? For readers unfamiliar with U.S. geography, that's a state located right in the heartland of America.

**TM:** Weird Americana, that's an interesting description. I guess I never really thought about how my location might affect my art, but I suppose it just might. I was born and raised in Omaha, Nebraska and reside here still to this day. The heartland can be described in many ways; flat, friendly, inviting, and even neighbourly.

Unfortunately another word often used is: dull. I'll be honest, at times living in the heartland can be pretty anti-climactic, so perhaps, sub-consciously, this is why I look to the weird, the strange and the gothic in my artwork. For the most part, I really like where I live, but it definitely could use a personality upgrade at times, and maybe a little less corn. Maybe this is me projecting that into my art. This is a great observation, thanks for noticing.

**DAL:** Could you talk our readers through the visualisation and creation of your latest picture, "Tracker LG", please? It certainly shows off your skill in character pictures, perfectly lit and

composed, and with a hint of a back-story behind it. We show it over on the right.

**TM:** Thanks, this was a fun piece. Lately I had been doing mostly portraits. I do that a lot, when I don't have any ideas for a good story piece.

My process began as it normally does, looking through props, choosing one, and then building the scene around it. I also wanted to work on specific materials with DAZ iRay, in this case glass or clear plastics, so I started with the goggles. I kept adding and changing pieces and props, until I got the character the way I wanted, all the while the story formed in my head. Once I had the story, the rest of the scene came together pretty quickly.

Next came lighting the scene. I tried several ways to light it, both with point and mesh lights, couldn't get it to work quite the way I wanted, so I finally used a single mesh light, off screen, and made the light strip behind the subject an emissive material, then added the additional lights for the robot, and flying computer during post work using Photoshop.

The final picture turned out pretty well. There are a few things that I might do different, should I revisit it, but all in all I'm happy with how it came out, and people seem to like it.

The story behind it, is:—

> This person is working as an investigator for the security detail of a space station. The space station has been experiencing a series of violent crimes, at each of which a simple painted skull in a circle is left behind, to seemly tease the stations security personnel. This person has just come upon yet another symbol, and is down looking at it, when she is suddenly surprised by a bright light from down the corridor. Who knows what happens next…

**DAL:** "Soldier of Love" is another cool portrait, in terms of conveying a character. Do you always create little back-stories for your pictures and characters?

**TM:** Thanks. "Soldier of Love" (seen right) came about as one of my first DAZ iRay images. The idea behind this is a modern take on the god Cupid. Actual full backstories do occur mostly for my story pieces, liked the one for the "Tracker" piece. Character histories and stories are especially helpful when trying to come up with the right facial expressions. I don't usually have backstories when I'm working on straight up portraits, usually because I'm testing or trying something different, to see if I can get an interesting result. With this piece I think iRay did a fabulous job on the materials, which kind of surprised me, as up to that point I had pretty much stuck to Reality and LuxRender for most of my work. That was because DAZ Studio's default 3Delight render engine never gave me the results I was looking for. I was very happy how this one turned out, and people appear to like it.

**DAL:** You sell art at conventions, I read somewhere in a online comment. I can see how your skill in conveying character would go a long way in that kind of sales environment. How has that venture been going for you?

**TM:** It was the art shows at conventions that originally drew me into fandom, and into becoming an artist. Though until digital 3D art came about, I never would have been able to sell anything there. I've been attending conventions for nearly 30 years, but only selling for the last five or so. Unfortunately, in my area of the United States, the market for this type of artwork is pretty saturated. This is not too surprising however, considering some of the local conventions have been going on annually for over 40 years, and — with the exception of bringing in an out-of-area artist guest of honour — there's a tendency to see the same artists with the same pieces year after year. It's gotten to the point where I've seen artists stop showing their work in certain areas, due to the fact their artwork was no longer selling as it once did.

As for how my own work goes, I've been pretty lucky. For each show I have the ability to print my own artwork and change it up every year,

so my stuff doesn't get over-exposed at any specific convention. Having said that though, I've had good showings, and I've had shows where I've not sold a single piece. Another thing affecting art sales though is the economy. When times are hard, there just isn't the disposable income for people to be spending on artwork. The US has been in a bit of downswing economy wise, but is slowly getting better. Unfortunately I am taking a break this year from conventions. Though I may still show in some shows by mailing in the pieces.

Another advantage of the convention circuit is that you get to make great inroads with the authors. I was able to do just that, and have been fortunate enough to have licensed some artwork for a book cover. I have also been approached by a music band in Ireland who wish to use a piece of my artwork for an album cover. Those are great opportunities, and I certainly wouldn't mind doing more of that in the future if the opportunities arise, but for now, I'm content with making the artwork I want to, and selling it when and where I can. The funny thing is I never got into art to sell it, or even to show it. My artwork was for me, and it is my form of relaxation. It was only after my wife and my friend told me to do it, that I decided to share my art. Even if I never sell another piece, I will still create pieces if only for myself.

**DAL:** Which artists inspire you, and what aspect of their work is the most inspiring to you?

**TM:** As mentioned earlier Jon Foster's and then Cliff Nielsen's work with the *Clockwork Century* series of book covers certainly inspired me, both in my reading preferences as well as my artwork. Cliff's work on other books series, are also very impressive. One example is the *Age of Steam* series by Devon Monk. In it his work is finely detailed, and the point of view is something I always try to emulate.

There are a few other non-steampunk artists whose work I really enjoy. Alan M. Clark and the way he can take the ordinary, and make it very dark, has been very inspirational for when I'm feeling moody.

As far as digital art goes there are a couple of artists — Arun Kumar and Michelle Monique whose photo manipulation works are so simply fantastic — they drive me to learn more about all kinds of software, and photography.

There are of course others, but these few are the ones I feel personally influenced my work the most. Everyone should check out their works. They're fantastic.

**DAL:** What advice would you give to someone starting out in 3D art, specifically if they've just opened their first copy of DAZ Studio?

**TM:** I have three pieces of advice I would give to someone just starting out. First of which is; we are fortunate enough to live in an age where information and answers are only a few keystrokes and mouse clicks away, so learn the techniques needed to efficiently search Google and thus take advantage of what's out there. Chances are if you have a problem or you're not sure how to do something, there's a video out there to show you how, several probably.

Secondly I would tell them to not be afraid to try something crazy. Even if you're sure it won't work, try it. Sure, the end result may not be what you were looking for, but all you will really have lost is time.

Lastly and this is probably the most important. Be patient. If you aren't getting the results you're looking for and you feel you're getting really frustrated, step away. Go read a book, watch a movie, or spend time with friends and family, just do something to get your mind off what you're doing. Let your subconscious work on it for a while, and then come back at it with a fresh perspective. I cannot tell you how many times I've been so frustrated when something wasn't working that I had to step away. I had to cool off and not think about it for a while, and then as I was doing something else, the answer or an idea would come to me, and I could continue the work.

**DAL:** Wise words. Troy, thank you for this interview, and we wish you well in the future.

**TM:** Thanks it's been a pleasure.

## Troy Menke is online as Torgan Art Studio, at DeviantArt:

http://torgan-art.deviantart.com/gallery/

Troy has a wide variety of popular prints for sale through the DeviantArt prints delivery service. DeviantArt uses a bank of high quality printers to get the best from digital artwork. Depending on the size ordered and type of picture, purchasers can have a single picture printed using: an HP Indigo press 3050; a Fuji Frontier 390 Minilab; an Epson Stylus Pro 11880; or a LASERLAB (up to 20" x 30" photographic color laser printer). DeviantArt uses the FedEx courier for shipping, though. Which is fine if you can get it delivered to a business address, but couriers often have difficulties with completing a residential delivery. So some customers may prefer to purchase a downloadable high-res version and print it themselves or have it printed locally. ●

# GALLERY

This issue's gallery opens with pictures shown in our recent
**Community Mastermind** 'critique' free webinar, then
segways into additional pictures which further explore this
issue's special theme of **"Future Female Heroes"**.

**Picture:** "Soaring" by Terry Allitt.  Modelling in MODO, rendering in Vue.
Terry was a Digital Art LIVE 'Community Mastermind' webinar participant.
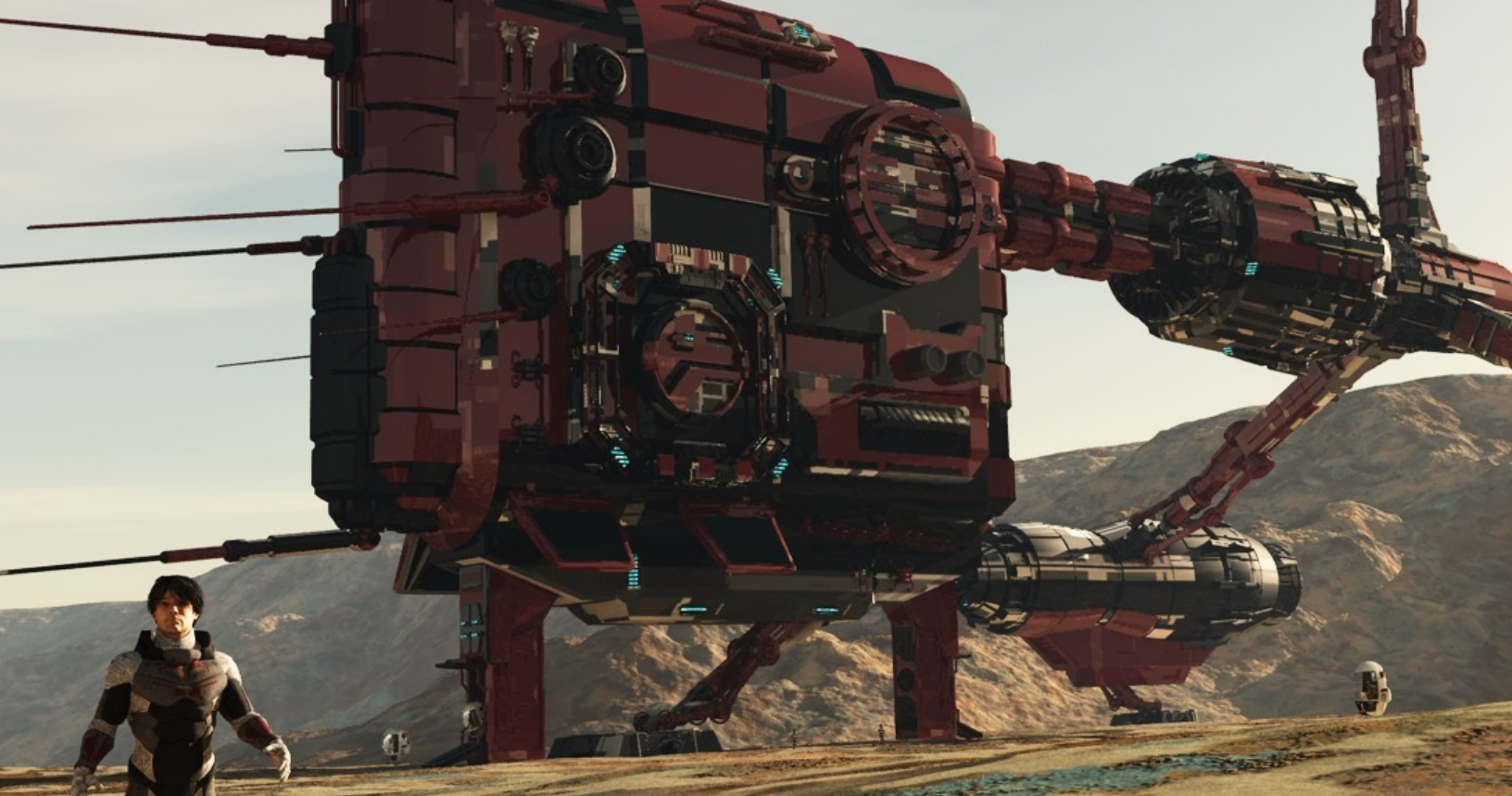
**Terry Allitt** participated in our recent free *Digital Art LIVE* 'Community Mastermind' webinar. His models are made in MODO, then Vue 2014 is used to texture and render. The characters are created in Poser 10. Terry also writes short back-stories for his pictures. The back-story for these two is:

With the arrival of the 'Kestrel Drive' in 2086, TMA Future Productions continued to venture into tech that would push the boundaries of human exploration. Ultimately this led to a Star Drive capable of powering huge vessels, deep into the uncharted space beyond our Solar System. "Commander Mike Williams, Mission Status. With a safe landing on Kepler-186f of the *Dauntless* (Discovery Class Vessel), preparations are underway for the first survey team expeditions. Just like classic old sci-fi television, the atmosphere is breathable and the world is habitable. End log." 'Onwards and upwards', as Mike remembered his Dad saying.

**Picture, right:** "Rogue class: overdrive gear" by Bryan Flynn.

**Pictures, top/bottom:** "Landing Craft" and "Arrival at Kepler-186f" by Terry Allitt. Terry Allit was a Digital Art LIVE 'Community Mastermind' webinar participant.

Here are two more pictures from **Terry Allitt,** which were shown at our recent Digital Art LIVE 'Community Mastermind' critique webinar. Terry's short back-stories for these pictures are:

**Red Alert (top):** "With *Albion*, *Dauntless* and *Discovery* currently on deep space exploration we have encountered a problem with our communication network. In fact, our nearest Comms Beacon on the edge of the Solar System is offline. We have boosted our signal, in the hope that it will reach our second Beacon in the DSN (Deep Space Network) — transmit a priority message to recall to Earth. A historical moment in the history of the human race may be about to unfold. Our sensors have detected a large Vessel entering our Solar System and it is not on our database. We have launched the three remaining Discovery Fleet Ships, Daring, Endeavour and Endurance — they are heading to welcome and escort the ship to Earth. This could be the moment we have waited centuries for…"

**Paradise Lost (bottom):** "First Rule: *never* take your headgear off. So, my HUD goes blinky on me, the ComLink is static and everything is flashes and sun-bursts. Cant see a thing! So, I take my helmet off to check out the circuits. Wrong thing to do, this creature leaps out of nowhere at me. I dropped my freakin' headgear. All I can do is run — and hope these things don't hunt in packs!!"

Picture: "Is it like this in Death's Other Kingdom?", by Esther Mann. Esther was a Digital Art LIVE 'Community Mastermind' webinar participant.

**Pictures:** Various examples of 'Work in Progress', from Hani, Arthur and Max who were all Digital Art LIVE 'Community Mastermind' webinar participants.

From top left: Hani Habash, "Anaconda". Max Hirshfeld, "Small Haunting" (detail), and Arthur Dorety, "Vora Hawk".

Bottom right: "AT-0246" line art character concept, one of a series made by Agito666.
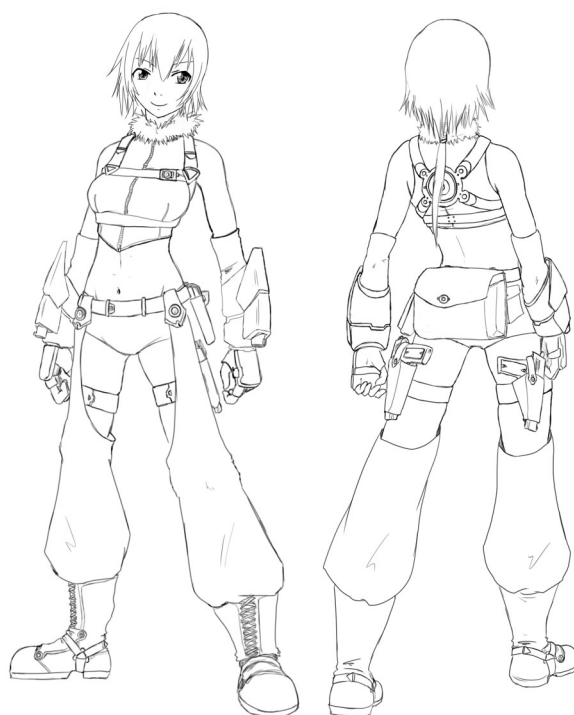
Pictures: Dan Zen, from the "Brainwave Concentrator 2020" picture series made with his daughter.

**Picture:** "A Girl Made from Galactic Space Dust" by <u>Surian Soosay</u>.
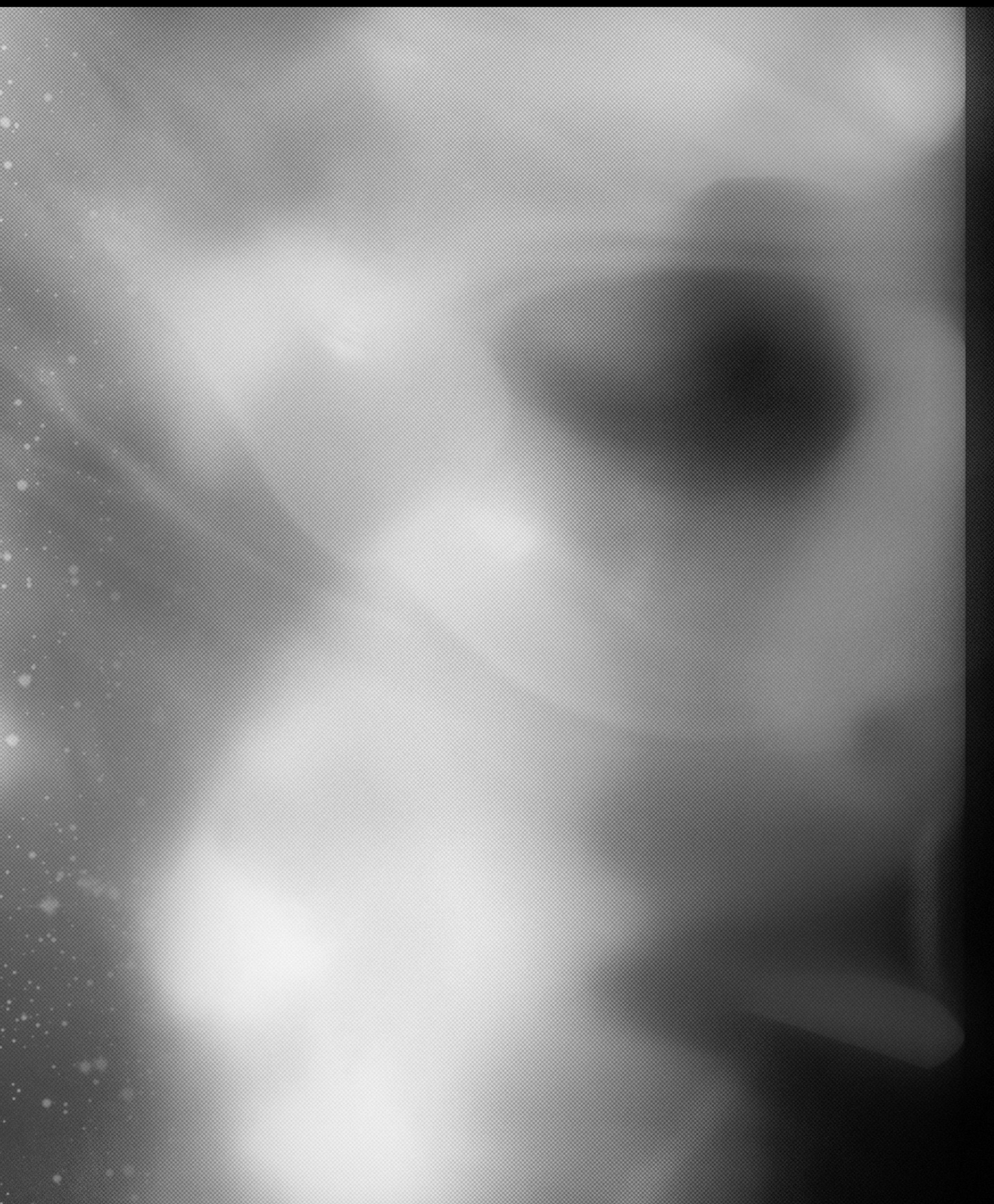
## "Will someone get this walking carpet out of my way?!" — some notes on female heroes in early science fiction.

There are few memorable screen depictions of confident female space heroes, until **Princess Leia** in the first *Star Wars* trilogy (1977 on) — after which the floodgates opened. Leia's most important screen predecessor appeared in the original 1960s *Star Trek* TV series, in which **Lieutenant Uhura** (Nichelle Nichols, seen right) was uniquely depicted as a competent scientist, a key part of the command crew, good at her job and cool under pressure. Though a scientist, she was not depicted as a frump or a nerd. Uhura's positive influence continued via re-runs of *Star Trek* — shown on prime-time TV in the USA and UK throughout the mid 1970s.

Until the early 1970s a science-fiction reader could have found a scattering of female heroes in literary science-fiction — if they had looked hard enough and had a few encyclopaedias of science fiction plots to hand. Such a seeker could have discovered, for instance, that **Rhoda Gibbs** in *The Moon-Maker* (1916) was a genius female mathematician who predicts a dangerous asteroid, and then flies into space with the brave team sent to deflect it from Earth. George Allan England's *The Flying Legion* (1920) was led by the female **Captain Alden**. It's hard not to see such examples as reflecting the admiration felt by a few Edwardian male authors for emancipated female pilots — whom they had known during the very earliest days of aviation.

Outside of flight, Edgar Rice Burroughs also created **Dejah Thoris** and **Thuvia** ('Maid of Mars', seen right in an early 1920s spin-off from *John Carter of Mars)*, while Robert E. Howard created several more gritty fantasy warrior-maidens and fierce piratesses. Doc Savage's feisty female cousin Pat was also a notable female adventurer in the pulp magazines of the 1930s and 40s.

As space science-fiction came of age in the 1940s, a few more adventurous female heroes emerged in literary SF — alongside the much more common 'helpless space babe' who needed to be rescued. These were once again pilots, such as the female **Lensman Clarissa MacDougal**

in the classic *Lensman* series of books, and **Plaxy Trelone** in Olaf Stapelton's major novel *Sirius* (1944). No doubt there were more, who went unremarked by the historians of sci-fi because of their lesser quality — see the pulp magazine covers shown overleaf, for instance.

As the dust of the war years settled, a great female hero emerged. **Dagny Taggart** was the key lead character in the famous near-future novel *Atlas Shrugged* (1957). While space travel doesn't feature in the novel, it has futuristic technology and Dagny is a pilot who flies her own advanced airplane. Dagny is an outstanding and unique female character, by the standards of the mid 1950s — skilled and brave enough to seek out forgotten breakthrough technology in the badlands, to face down crooks and bullying scientists, and to fly her airplane through a mysterious force-field.

At the other end of the spectrum from Dagny, the final and parodic culmination of pulp's 'space babe' stereotype was *Barbarella: Queen of the Galaxy* (1968), a major movie full of erotic metallic jump-suits and sci-fi hair. The film had success but it was fleeting — it was adults-only 'X-rated', was shown uncut in few cinemas, and there were no home videotapes back then.

Admittedly, these examples are too few. One has to look even harder to find optimistic girl heroes who happen to get anywhere near a spaceport — unless perhaps one counts the girl companions in the British TV series *Doctor Who*. But a little-known example of girls in space is *Bol'shoe Kosmicheskoe Puteshestvie* (*The Great Space Voyage*, 1974). A decade before *Ender's Game* (1985) the Soviets produced this stylish feature-film, in which young girl cosmonaut **Sveta Ishenova** leads an attempt by a team of junior trainees to pilot a stricken spaceship.

A decade later there was another breakthrough for girls with Miyazaki's classic *Nausicaä* (1984, but only dubbed into English in 2005) — and like many female sci-fi heroes before her, **Nausicaä** was a skilled pilot. The latest *Star Wars* movie again tapped into this long-standing approach, making the adolescent heroine into a co-pilot on *The Millennium Falcon*. ●
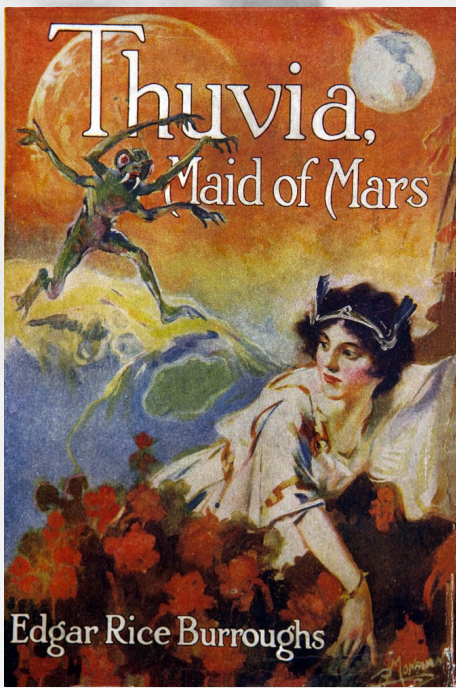
**Insets:** *Thuvia, Maid of Mars* (1920); main character in *The Great Space Voyage* (1974), looking somewhat like Luke Skywalker.
**Main:** Nichelle Nichols seen as Lt. Uhura, in a public-domain recruitment picture for NASA.

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# Digital Art
# LIVE



# IMAGIN

Our pick of the hottest inspirational art and science. Make your imagination LIVE!

*Robinson Crusoe on Mars* (1964) was a big-budget movie saddled with a silly 'spoiler' title, an unknown leading actor, and no 'love interest' other than an ugly monkey. Predictably, it crash-landed at the U.S. box-office. But it had evocative Death Valley location scenery, a strong lead actor, and a symphonic soundtrack that has always been appreciated by audiophiles and musicologists. The film's orchestral music, by Nathan Van Cleave (*Planet of the Apes*), is what some have called "the sounds of a retro-future when science fiction films were still produced with true optimistic sincerity." Now the soundtrack has been released as a vinyl LP in a limited edition of 1,000 pressings, from the original 35mm three-track scoring masters, and comes complete with fabulous new artwork and graphic design done by We Buy Your Kids. http://mondotees.com/collections/music



ARIUM

## Valerian and The City of a Thousand Planets

When Luc Besson (*Fifth Element*, *Leon*, *The Extraordinary Adventures of Adele Blanc-Sec*, *Lucy*) announces he's putting the finishing touches to his new sci-fi movie, we naturally sit up and take notice.  When we learn that he's adapting a classic series of 1970s French graphic novels (a key visual inspiration for *Star Wars*, no less) then we start chewing the carpet in anticipation. Yes... Besson is adapting the *Valerian* graphic novels that were his first childhood experiences of sci-fi in the rural France of the 1970s. So we have a feeling this is one project he'll be taking *very* personally. For *Entertainment Weekly* he once recalled that: "At the time [of my childhood] there was no Internet; there wasn't even a TV at home. So I read and just had my imagination. So when I look at bluescreen [when making a movie], I see *everything*. My imagination is very comfortable with bluescreen." And he'll be needing that formidable imagination, since he's currently adding a massive 2,400 visual FX shots into the bluescreens on *Valerian and The City of a Thousand Planets*.

The movie's storyline seems basic at first glance: two intergalactic cops are sent to a sprawling city called Alpha, in the outer colonies, to investigate reports that someone is plotting to blow up the Earth.  Yawn.  But... this is a Besson movie, so we're fairly sure that it won't stay in such a mundane groove for more than the first ten minutes.  If you really can't wait for the July 2017 release, we're guessing that the movie will be a fresh blend and re-build of two classic *Valerian* graphic novels — "On the Frontiers" (in the English-translated *The New Future Trilogy*, seen right) and "The Empire of a Thousand Planets".
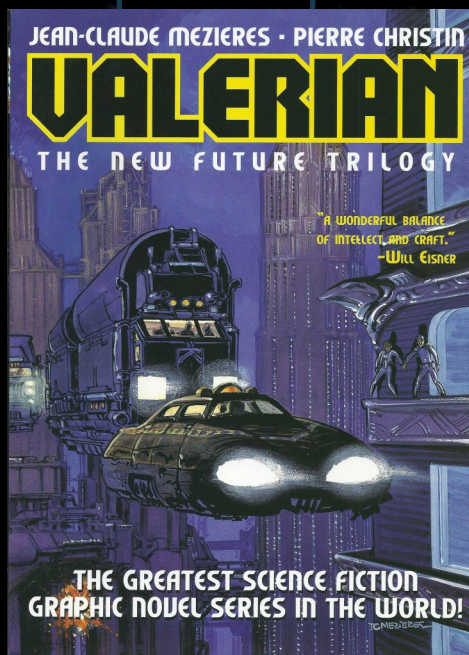
"... when I look at bluescreen [when making a movie], I see *everything*. My imagination is very comfortable with bluescreen." — Luc Besson.

**Centre:** Dane DeHaan and Cara Delevingne will be playing the parts of Valerian and Laureline, in the $180m blockbuster. Hopefully the new movie won't suffer the same fate as Besson's *Arthur* trilogy of animated movies, which were crudely butchered by their American distributor to make them 'acceptable' for American mainstream audiences.



JEAN-CLAUDE MEZIERES · PIERRE CHRISTIN

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*—WILL EISNER*

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*Valerian: Spatio-Temporal Agent* is a famous French-Belgian comics series written by Pierre Christin and drawn by Jean-Claude Mezieres. The series appeared in twenty-one 'albums' (graphic novels) from 1967 through to 2010. It is set amid the Terran Galactic Empire, a galaxy-spanning civilisation in which technology enables citizens to live a life of leisure, overseen by technocrats and defended by the time-jumping police of the Spatio-Temporal Service. The series takes a broadly optimistic open view of the future, based around exploring, understanding and resolving differences. Valerian and Laureline don't always follow their orders, they avoid violence wherever possible, and often have little to improvise with in order to complete tasks. Mezieres's hand-painted art visualised Valerian's galaxy perfectly, and added huge levels of fresh visual inventiveness. The series' art strongly influenced the visual style of the first *Star Wars* trilogy, and is also said to have influenced a variety of other major movies including Besson's own *Fifth Element*.

Promotional press pictures: courtesy of Darguad and EuropaCorp.
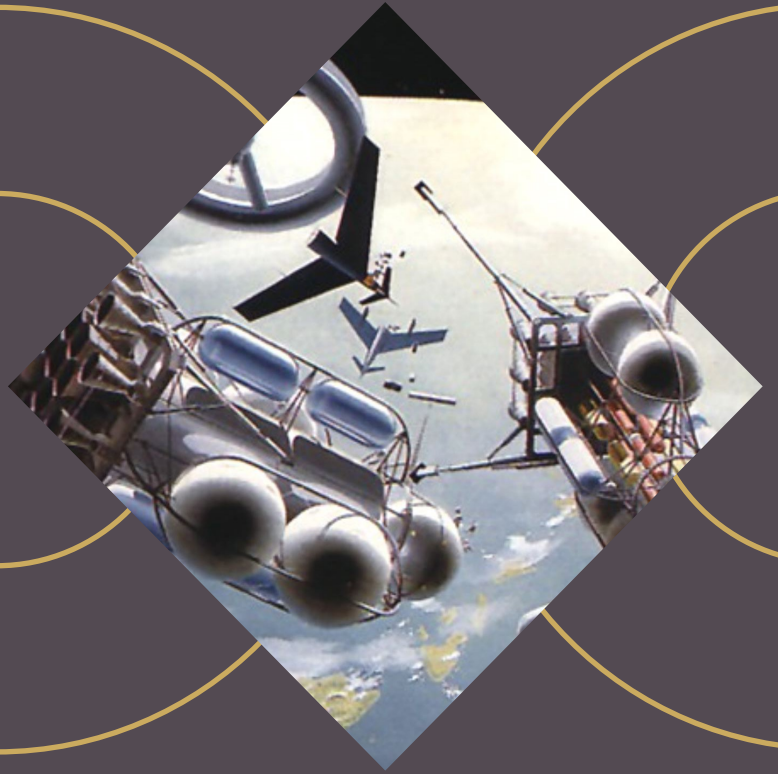
## Destination: STAR TREK Europe

### 7th—9th October, Birmingham UK

The English Midlands city of Birmingham is to host a three-day fan convention and exhibition to celebrate Star Trek's 50th anniversary.  **Destination Star Trek Europe** runs from 7th to the 9th October 2016, and the guest of honour is none other than William Shatner (Captain Kirk). There will be an opportunity to meet cast and crew from the various incarnations of the famous series, to explore sets, see original props and costumes, meet other fans and more.

This major convention will also be host to the major exhibition "*Star Trek*: **50 Artists, 50 Years**", featuring artworks inspired by the show's history, including works by Leonard Nimoy (Spock).  The show will first tour the USA, opening at Michael J. Wolf Fine Arts in San Diego, then moving to *Star Trek Las Vegas* convention and finally to the Canadian National Exhibition in August — before departing for Europe.

http://www.destinationstartrek.com/

http://www.startrek.com/art_exhibition

## Imagined Futures

### 7th April — 10th July, Seattle.

Paul Allen, the *other* billionaire founder of Microsoft, owns a vast collection of science fiction art and objects from spaceflight history. From 7th April — 10th July 2016 a big selection from his collection goes on public diplay at the new Allen Institute building in Seattle, in the show "**Imagined Futures: Science Fiction, Art, and Artifacts from the Paul G. Allen Family Collection**".

Visitors to the show will see the finest original artwork from science-fiction artists of the calibre of Chris Foss and Chesley Bonestell, astronomical masterwork photography from the likes of Ansel Adams, and original artifacts from the Space Race.

Allen also funds Seattle's famous and highly successful **EMP Museum** of music and pop culture.  The EMP museum celebrates the risk-taking, iconoclasm, ambition and commercial dynamism which fueled the best of our popular culture in the 20th century.

http://www.vulcan.com/news/articles/2016/pivot-new-exhibition-imagined-futures

## To the Moon and Beyond

### To 14th August, Washington DC.

The Museum of the Moving Image in Washington DC has a new gallery show, **"To the Moon and Beyond: Graphic Films and the inception of** *2001: A Space Odyssey***"**. This low-key and modest show explores some of the back-room technicians and visual artists who helped to bring *2001* to the screen.

Specifically, the exhibition is about the team at Graphic Films, as seen through their rare letters to Kubrick and their pre-production sketches. The team had made a short film "To the Moon and Beyond" which Kubrick had seen at the World's Fair in 1965, leading him to sign Graphic Films up to work on pre-production for *2001*. The show is open now, and runs through to 14th August 2016.

The Museum also has a companion exhibition running at the same time, **"Computer Films of the 1960s"**.

http://www.movingimage.us/exhibitions/

## Free Comic Book Day

### The 1st Saturday in May, global.

Coming soon in 2016 is the world's **15th Free Comic Book Day**. This day happens on the first Saturday in May each year. This year it will include a free *Lady Mechanika* special issue (seen above), especially created for the day. To get rhe best from the day ou do have to go to your local indie comics store to get your free comics in print form, although some digital stores also participate in the Day. Find out more, and get the details of local indie retail store participants, at:

https://www.facebook.com/freecomicbook

**Pictures, from top left:**

Spock and Kirk, public domain press picture from Wikipedia.

Detail from a Chesley Bonestell painting, courtesy of the Paul G. Allen Family Collection.

Detail from Franklin P. Dixon's 1963 painting of the planned Mars Excursion module, public domain from NASA.

*Lady Mechanika* by Joe Benitez.

Interested in being interviewed in a future issue of the magazine? Or offering a webinar for our series?  Please send us the Web address of your gallery or store, and we'll visit!

paul@digitalartlive.com