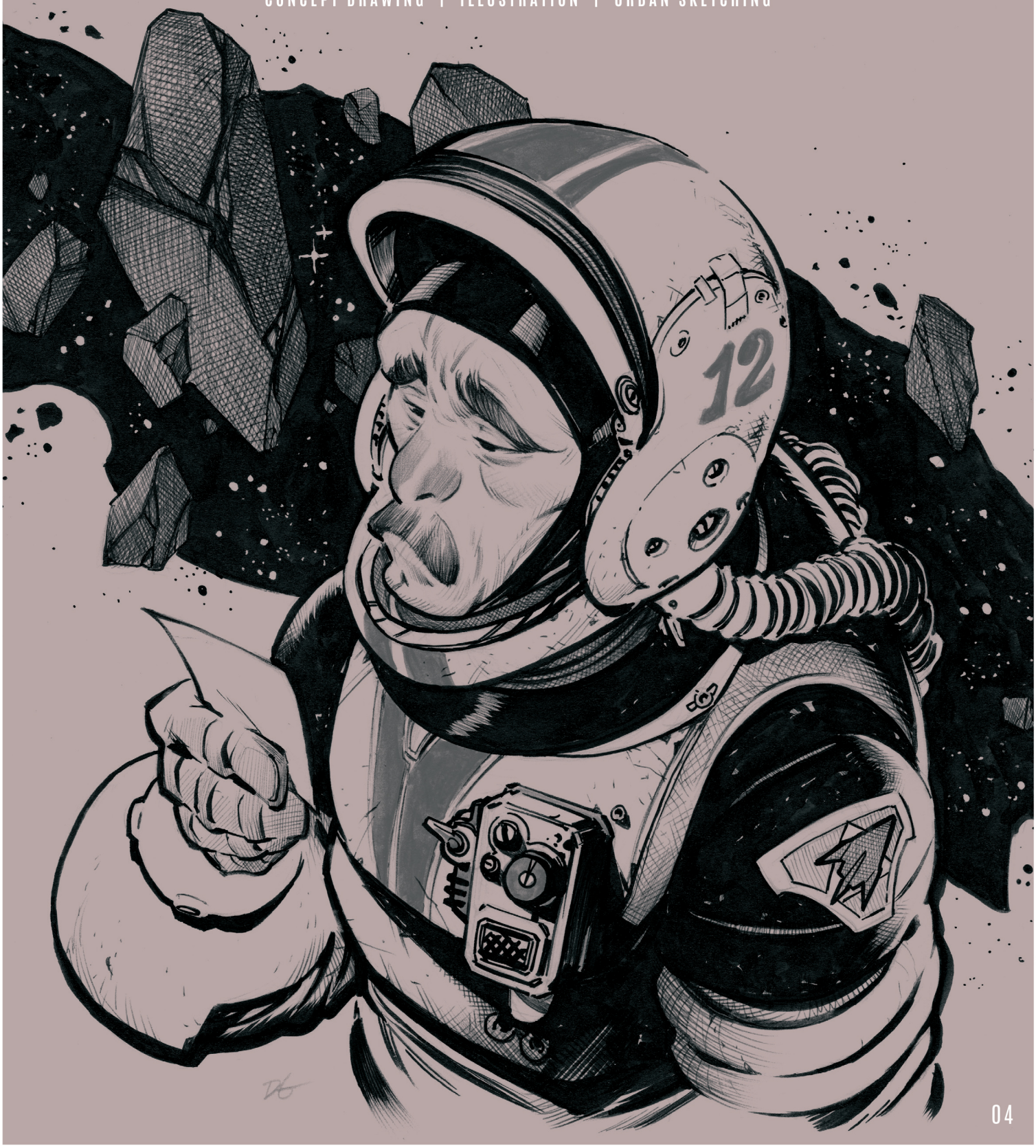
GRAPHITE

CONCEPT DRAWING | ILLUSTRATION | URBAN SKETCHING



G R A P H I T E

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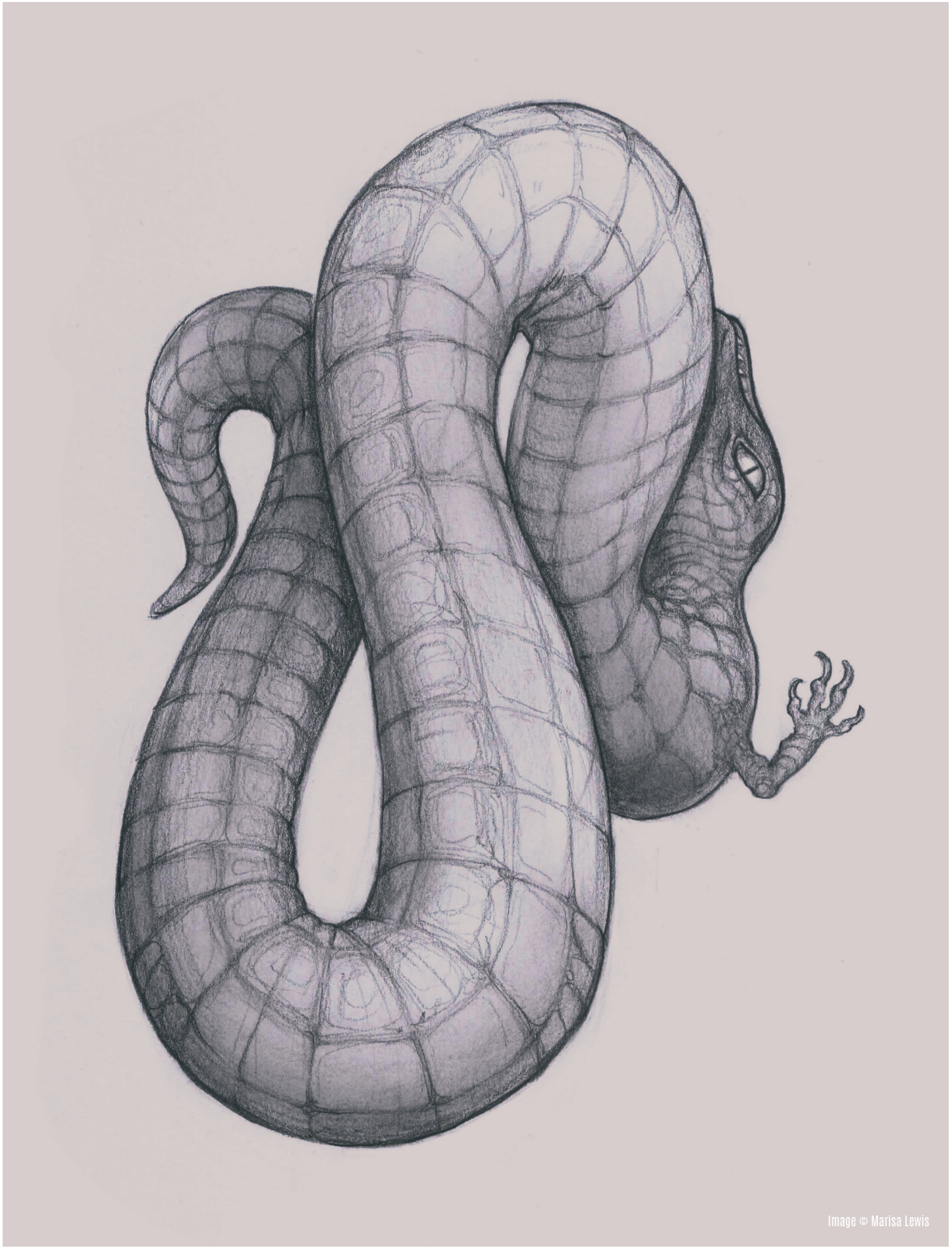

Image © Marisa Lewis

EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to the fourth issue of GRAPHITE magazine!

This first quarterly run has been an exciting and instructive time for us: perfecting our ideas for the content and design, meeting new artists, and working out the logistics of publishing and distributing our first print magazine. With the feedback and encouragement of our readers, we've produced four issues of which we are very proud.

This issue was a pleasure to put together, as always. We hope you enjoy our selection of great articles and images from talented creature designers, concept artists, illustrators, urban sketchers, and more that you'll find in the following pages.

We appreciate the time people have taken to read and show their support for GRAPHITE. Please consider subscribing, if you haven't already, or perhaps picking up a subscription for a creative person you know! We look forward to joining you again for the next issue.

Thank you.

Marisa Lewis
Editor

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UNWRAPPING CREATUREBOX®

An interview with CreatureBox

We speak to comic and character artists Dave Guertin and Greg Baldwin, together known as CreatureBox, about their artwork and careers so far.

Q· Thanks for speaking to GRAPHITE, Dave and Greg! Could you start us off with a bit about yourselves, where you're based, and what you do?

A· Thanks so much for having us! For the last twenty years, we've been wandering the vast landscape of the entertainment industry, looking for monsters and assorted strangeness wherever we can find them. In some ways, we live dual lives. During the day we serve as Principal Artists at Insomniac Games, namely in character design and modeling for consoles and virtual reality. Once the sun sets, we equip our tentacle mascot outfits and fight all sorts of battles at the art table as CreatureBox. Over the last ten years or so, we have had the privilege of working alongside amazing teams at Disney, Marvel, LEGO, and many others.

As far as location goes, after spending several years in Los Angeles, we made the move to North Carolina with a small core of "Insomniacs" to start a satellite game studio. We traded crowded highways for farmland and suburbs, all while trying to get these crazy cartoons on the page.

Q· Who or what inspired you to start making art? What inspires you today?

A· DG: Like most kids of the 1980s, I grew up on a healthy diet of comics, *Transformers* cartoons, and 8-bit interactive adventures. I would spend endless afternoons designing my own *Metroid* maps and tracing *Garfield* cartoons, in hopes of living in fun fantasy worlds. Yet when I discovered *Calvin and Hobbes*, my entire world seemed to bend. Bill Watterson's timeless cartooning redefined what was possible in my mind for the medium. From then on, I couldn't imagine doing anything else.

For inspiration, I find myself staring at people – watching their millions of stories play out. This hasn't gotten me into trouble yet, but it might someday. Body language speaks volumes and can do wonders for providing the life blood of any character design. I try to keep a small pocket sketchbook at the ready for recording the show.

GB: Most of my early years were spent working in my dad's basement workshop trying to build robots, medieval armor, or ninja training equipment. As far back as I can remember, I've been trying to escape into other worlds. The day one of my friends offered to trade some Iron Maiden cassettes

All images © CreatureBox

“We equip our tentacle mascot outfits and fight all sorts of battles”

for designs of his *Dungeons & Dragons* characters is when things really clicked for me. I was hooked and was ravenous for anything I could learn about what a character designer was and how I could become one from that day on.

I find a lot of my inspiration comes from my own life. Whether it’s the look on the face of a little girl pouting because she wanted Froot Loops instead of Cheerios, or the face of the guy who just cut me off on my way home. Those moments of rare candid emotion are like winning the lottery. Translating those snapshots of real life into a character’s story has an honesty that I love exploring.

Q· When did you both realise that you made a good team?

A· DG: Greg joined Insomniac Games as we were wrapping up the first *Ratchet & Clank* game for the PlayStation 2. I remember one of his first creations was this amazing rocket ship. The concept, model, and textures all had such charm and craft. I think I may have hated him. Haha! But it was obvious our goals and sensibilities were locked. In the years that followed, we spent countless hours in the trenches of game development together; fighting for stylization and humor, culminating in the question, “Hey, what if we start a blog?”

GB: When I met Dave for the first time, he was showing me the pages and pages of character designs he was doing for the game. I was floored. But more so I was completely fired up by the idea of working alongside someone who was just as passionate about delving into what makes a character tick. Maybe it was the relentless grind of game development, or maybe it was the unfettered eagerness to continue to grow, but we found ourselves pushing each other to become better artists day after day. At some point that challenge grew larger than even the demands of our day jobs, and so CreatureBox was born.

Left
Dave at his workspace

Above
Greg drawing a creature

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Q· Could you tell us more about this issue's cover images?

A· DG: The cover images were a couple of adventures from InkTober, an initiative that our buddy Jake Parker started a few years back. It's been exciting to watch the event grow by leaps and bounds, and it's a blast to carve out October to really push working with ink. For the spaceman piece (titled, *"Ready for launch...almost"*) my hope was to allow the viewer to tell some of their own story. I've always been a sucker for treatments that allow interpretation – they tend to breathe in a way, revealing just as much about the audience as they do of the creator.

GB: The piece on the back cover, titled *Verne*, came with one of our short stories that went, *"Verne wondered how many more crashes he would have before he finally learned to fly."* This is a perfect example of how we use our own lives to create characters and stories from a unique perspective. InkTober is the kind of self-brutalizing project we voluntarily impose on ourselves just to see if we can make it out the other side. I made this piece at about the halfway point of the month-long ink battle and was feeling the weight of it all. There are so many amazing artists posting their pieces at the same time, and it's easy to get rattled. But each night, we sit down and look at our failures and assess what we can learn from them so that the next battle isn't quite so daunting. I think Verne will fly one day.

Left: *Ready for Launch... Almost*
Brush and ballpoint on Strathmore 400 paper
Size: 8 × 8"

Above: *Verne*
Sumi ink on watercolor paper
Size: 8 × 8"

“It’s safe to say that when we started this journey in 2007, we had no idea where the road was heading”

Left
The Creeps
Ink wash on Crescent
illustration board
Size: 8 × 8"

Right
Turk
Sumi ink on
watercolor paper
Size: 8 × 8"

Q· How do the two of you work out ideas and artistic processes together?

A· Our process tends to be extremely organic, though we find ourselves brainstorming constantly. We’ll often be chewing on an idea for a story or theme or character, and shoot the ideas at each other. Then we find ourselves in a tornado of “What if?” “Maybe we could…” “How about…” It’s a lively process that always reminds us of the value of an alternative point of view.

With some ideas in hand, we head to our art tables to execute our individual pieces. We keep talking about themes and direction while sharing roughs, finishes, and techniques. Over the years we’ve found this great balance between collaboration and independent discovery where our individual voices can contribute to a larger whole.

Q· What materials and tools do each of you like to use?

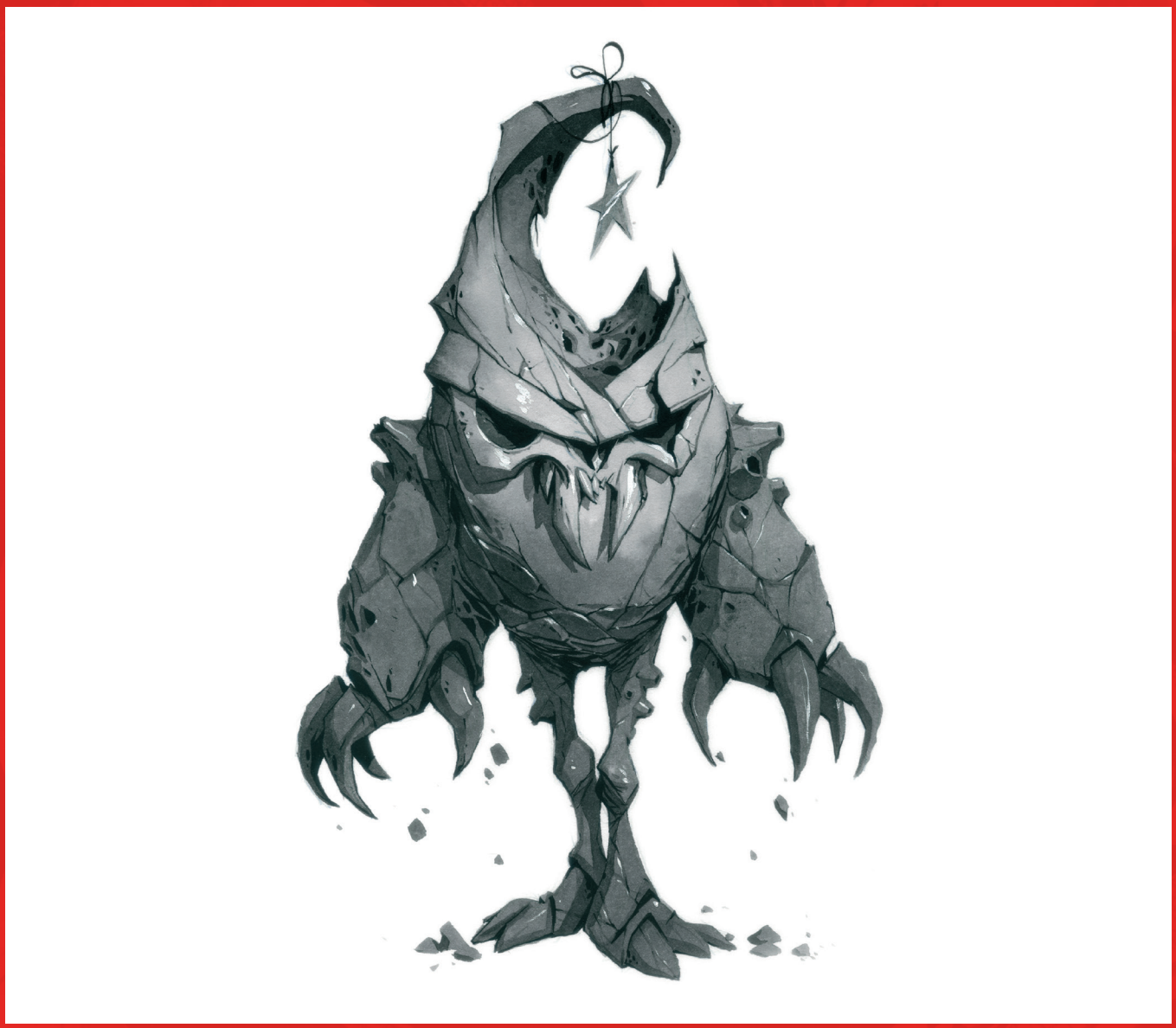
A· DG: I’ve always been a huge fan of playing with new toys. Different feels can produce unexpected results, or force you to approach a piece in new ways. But I definitely have a handful of go-to tools. For sketching, I love the feel of black Prismacolor pencil on newsprint paper. I’ve tried countless papers, but haven’t been able to find an archival alternative to the shading feel of that combo. It’s like butter! For inking, I am a big fan of Raphaël Kolinsky 8404 Size 2 brushes, Strathmore 400 Bristol, Koh-i-Noor Ultradraw ink, and Daler Rowney FW Scarlet Red ink. I also keep a trusty Sakura electric eraser at the ready; I need her assistance often.

GB: In college, after falling prey to all the luxurious materials, I began to find myself a bit overwhelmed and artistically constipated as I stared with fright at an immaculate blank sheet of expensive paper. So I went back to my childhood standbys of Bic ballpoint pens and cheap copier paper. The pens have a wonderful dry line that is almost like graphite. Lately I have switched to animation bond paper and using sumi ink for my spotted blacks and washes. For heavy wash-based pieces, I use Arches hot press watercolor paper. It’s still pretty luxurious for an artist like me, so I always test a composition on a cheap piece of copier paper first.

Q· How much has CreatureBox evolved since its inception ten years ago? Where do you think it might go next?

A· It’s safe to say that when we started this journey in 2007, we had no idea where the road was heading. Initially, we started the blog to offer a glimpse into our bizarre thought processes. We were passionate about cartooning, vintage sci-fi, die-cast toys, comic strips, and much more, yet we had no idea if anyone else in the world cared about what we were doing.

Once the ball started rolling, we were extremely fortunate to connect with like-

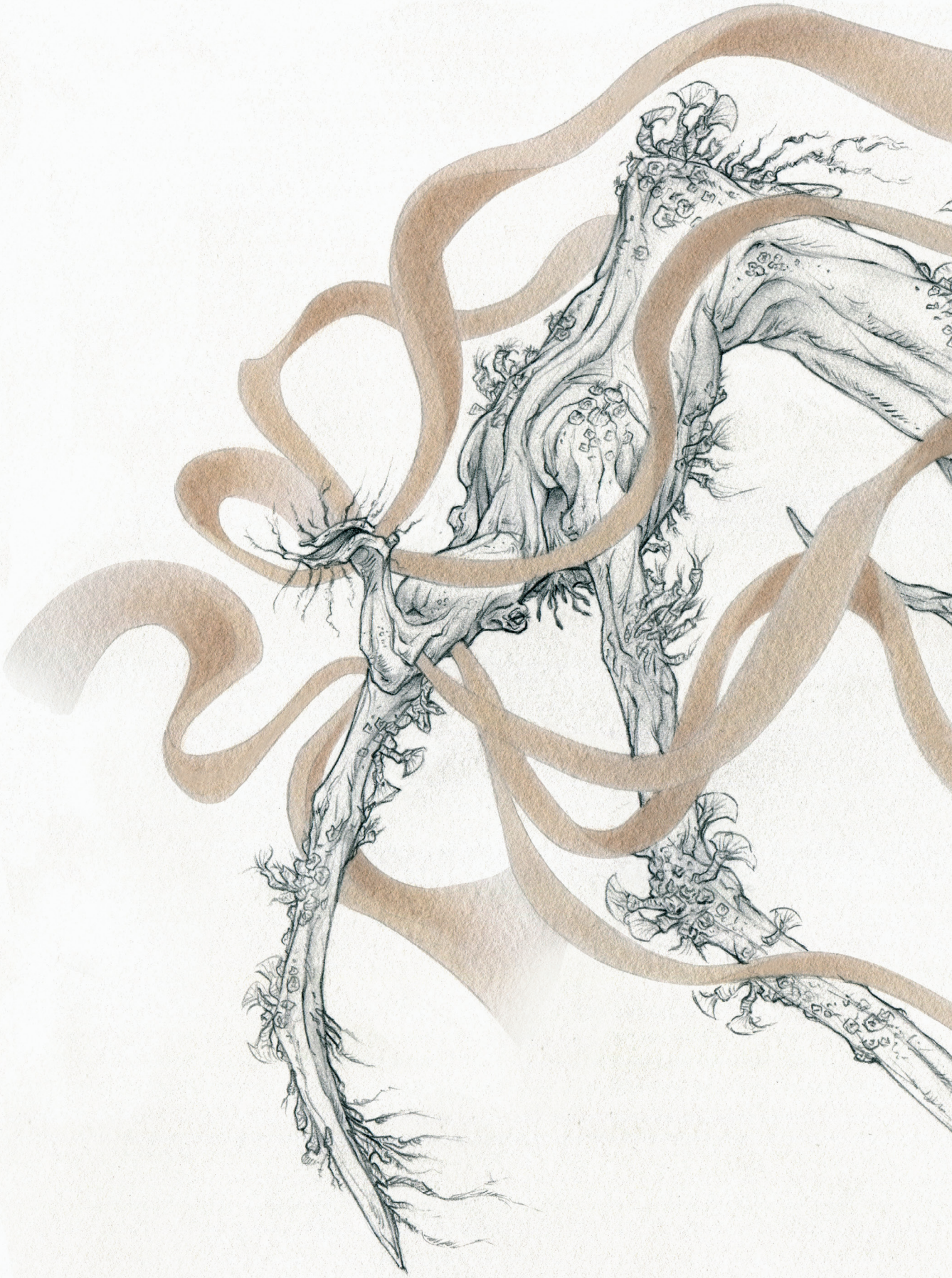


minded monster lovers across this planet of ours. Through their support, we were given the opportunity to release a series of sketchbooks, culminating in our first major hardcover publication: *The Monster Volume*. The project was a massive learning experience, allowing us to dig into our passions with publishing, web design, and video editing. A new door had been opened, and then we wondered, "What now?"

A couple of years ago, we were looking hard at what we had created and asked ourselves plainly, "What exactly is it?" We had designed hundreds of characters, all with their own stories to tell. It almost felt as if we were neglecting our own creations by not letting them out into the world to share their adventures. So we switched gears and began focusing on a follow-up to *The Monster Volume* that highlights the next step for CreatureBox: storytelling. While that may only seem like a slight shift to everyone else, for us it's been earth-shattering.

Our goal has always been to create experiences indicative of how we felt as kids when discovering new inspirations. We're always searching for that sense of reverence. How we tell stories is no different. This new book will be our foray into the world of comics, as well as some more unconventional storytelling techniques. Meanwhile, with the door wide open, we're also experimenting with interactive stories, 3D, and animation. There will also be a large horde of new characters because, let's face it, we'll always be character designers at our cores.

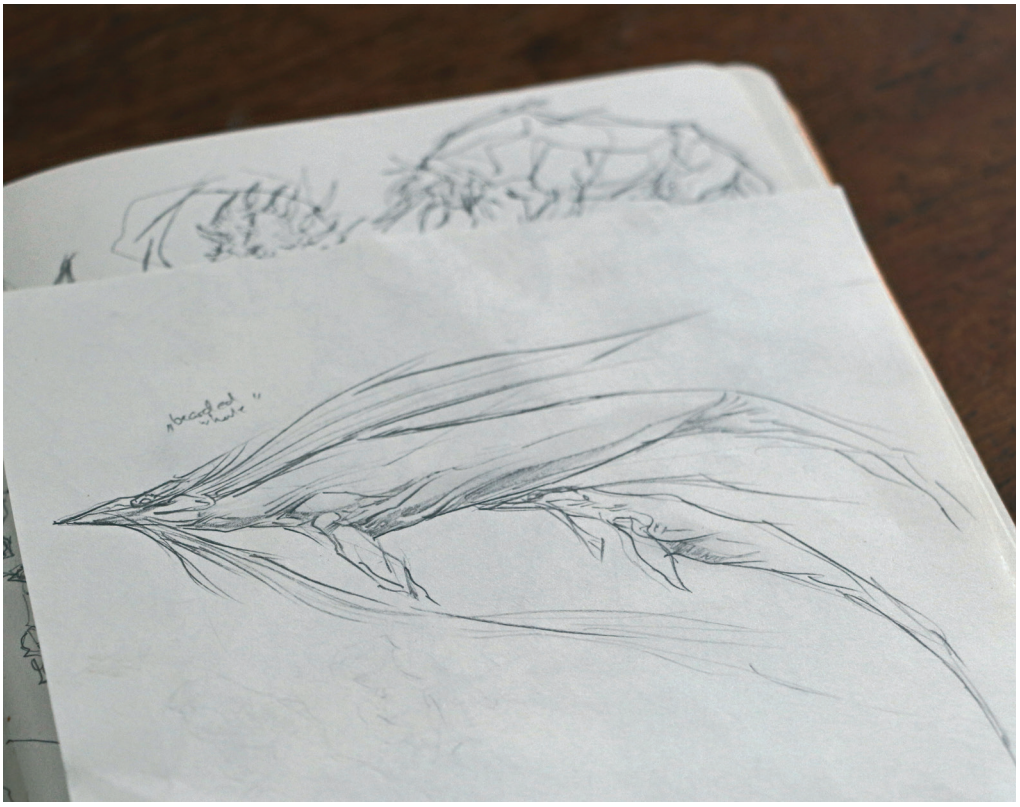
Visit creaturebox.bigcartel.com to find Dave and Greg's digital books and original artwork for sale.

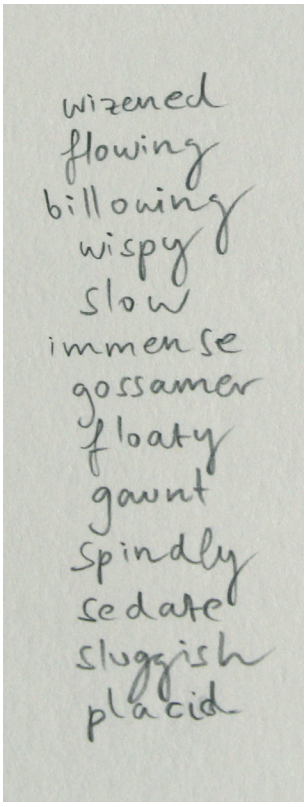


CREATING CETACEANS

Creature concepting with Kristina Lexova

In this article, freelance artist and ex-biologist Kristina Lexova shares her process for researching, designing, and drawing a fictional marine creature using pencils and ink.





Initial idea

It can be easy to forget, at times, that we share our planet with animals whose lives are just as vivid as our own; possessing incredible features created over myriad years of evolution. Creature art offers a wonderful way to show appreciation for them and the ways in which they enrich our human lives, while simultaneously giving them representation in the public eye.

In this tutorial, I will be giving insight into the thoughts and methods that go into creating a creature from scratch, from nascent sketch all the way through to fully fledged design.

Unless I have visual material to work from, most of my creatures usually start out as a simple idea. What sparked this design was finding out that whales, like all mammals, have the ability to grow hair. Whales and dolphins on our planet evolved to lose most of their hair in adulthood (save for some light stubble), but what if they didn't?

Once I've assured myself that an idea is one I want to go forward with, the work can begin.

Word list

To refrain from falling into the trap of creating a superficial design, I have adopted some habits to help keep me on track. One of these is the creation of a word list before I start sketching. This list contains any words that convey what I want the final design to feel like, and can be edited as the design evolves. This way, if I'm unsure about the visual aspects of my creature, I can refer back to the list and double-check if I am heading in the right direction.

Ideation sketches

I now start to explore the design in all its facets, sketching whatever comes to mind. The materials here are mostly unimportant – printer paper and whichever pen is nearest will often do the trick.

This stage is all about getting ideas out of your brain and onto paper, without the pressure of making them look perfect. It's always useful to have a sketchbook on hand should ideas pop up on the go!

Elimination

After each round of ideation, I go through the sketches again and use a colored pen to mark the ones that adhere to my idea the most. This makes it easier for me to refer back to them while I improve the design. Think of it as distilling your idea down to its essence.

Far left
The original "bearded whale" sketch I jotted down in my sketchbook when I first thought of the creature

Near left
Writing down descriptive words for your creature will help keep the design on track

Top right
You will be using up a lot of paper in the ideation stage, so there's no need for it to be fancy!

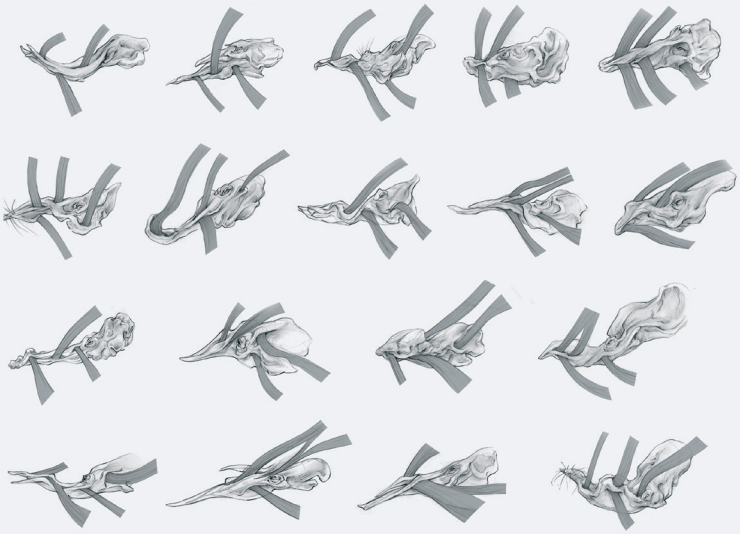
Bottom right
Drawings that are going in the right direction are marked with a colored pencil to make them easier to spot

AN EARLIER SKETCH

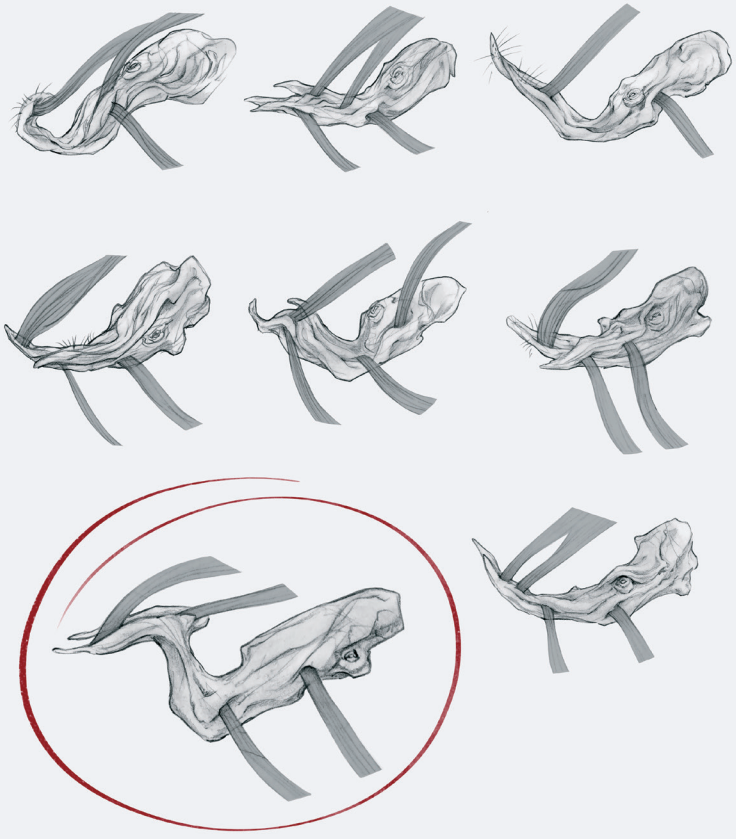
CURVATURE STUDIES

IMPROVED SILHOUETTE

ROUND 1



ROUND 2



Improving the silhouette

After deciding on a couple of designs I like the most, I find that the silhouette isn't yet conveying what I want it to. To fix this, I examine some reference images that have the feeling I am aiming for – mostly of elderly people with hunched backs.

Many of the images' subjects have the same curve running through their body, which I extrapolate to my creature. I also push certain features, such as the rolled shoulders and a low-hanging head, to strengthen the pose further.

Designing the head

I knew the head was going to be a focal point of this creature (as it is the origin of the hair strands it uses to feed), so I make some drawings to nail down the look I want, using the same process of elimination as before.

The head I end up with is inspired by the flowing shapes of cetacean skulls, and has a strong upwards bend to it to visually support the curvature of the body. There is also some indication of the jawbones having fused shut over time from disuse.

Studying specimens

If you are fortunate enough to have access to live animals or specimens in zoos or museums, sketching from life can provide valuable insight to further inform your design (and allows you to escape the confines of your indoor workspace).

For this creature, creating some observational sketches of a dolphin skull enables me to take a closer look at the incredible cranial structures of cetaceans. There is a noticeable visual disparity between the flat skull and bulbous head of the toothed whales (*Odontoceti*). This is primarily due to the "melon," a fatty organ that acts as a sound lens.

Far left
Influence for a design can be found everywhere you look - it doesn't have to be limited to animals!

Near left
After some rounds of variation, I am left with a head that best supports the sweeping shapes of the body

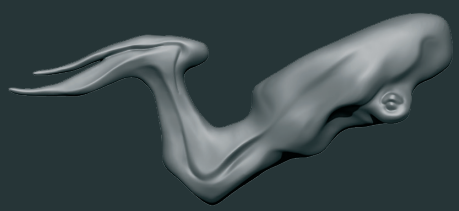
Above
Studying a dolphin skull helps me to better understand the anatomy of my creature (Image courtesy of UCL, Grant Museum of Zoology)

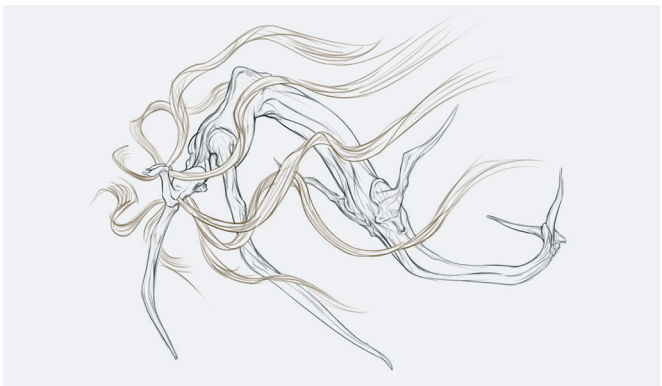
ARTIST'S TIPS

Creating a maquette

When I'm dealing with complex shapes in perspective, such as the head of this creature, making a simple maquette can be incredibly helpful in making sure everything reads correctly.

A method I've recently become fond of is creating maquettes using a digital sculpting program (such as Pixologic ZBrush, shown below); but any medium, be it traditional or digital, will do.





Refining the anatomy

Having an understanding of anatomy is vital to creature design. Knowing every single muscle fiber by name is not necessary (unless you'd like to), but skeletomuscular components that show up through the skin will help you to simplify the shape of your creature and add a sense of flow.

Protruding skeletomuscular components, such as shoulder blades and hip bones, reinforce the slim look of this whale. The melon (in yellow, above) rests atop a flattened skull. Since I want my whale to be very skinny and there will be little fat to hide the anatomy, I make some loose charts to prevent any guesswork on the final image.

Gestures

Once most of the design process is finished, I make some gestural sketches of my creature to explore potential poses. In addition to anatomy, having a knowledge of animal behavior is beneficial here – what might this creature do in its natural environment, and why would it assume a given pose?

Videos of animals in motion help a lot. Try your best to see through the creature's eyes. I use a lightly colored marker to define the broad gesture, then add detail with pencil.

Digital checks

I choose the strongest, clearest gesture sketch and scan it in, so I can perform some digital checks in Adobe Photoshop before I put anything on paper. I check the perspective and anatomy to ensure I am not missing any glaring mistakes, in order for the actual drawing to progress as smoothly as possible. To be able to transfer this pose to paper more easily, I go over my lines using a dark color, separating the body and hair portions onto two separate layers.

Transferring the drawing

Using a makeshift light box (I attach the paper to my screen and turn the brightness all the way up), I carefully transfer the drawing to a new sheet of paper using light pencil strokes. Under ample lighting conditions, tracing by means of a window is also possible.

Since I will be adding an ink wash to this piece, I am using hot press (texture-free) watercolor paper. Smooth, heavyweight paper is my favorite when working with pencils.

First drawing pass

After transferring the drawing, I mount the paper on something sturdy – a piece of cardboard, in this case – and fix it in place with some masking tape.

The purpose of this first round of drawing is to establish the main shapes, so I have something to work with for the next step. My lines tend to be very deliberate and dark, making them difficult to erase once they're placed, so it is doubly important for me to warm up. I fill a sketchbook page or two with some loose drawings to get my brain ready.

Far left
I reduce guesswork by planning out the anatomy in more detail

Top near left
This creature has a fairly rigid spinal column and short neck, while the flippers and tail do most of the work to propel it forwards

Bottom near left
The body of the whale will be rendered in pencil and the hair strands in ink; separating them onto two layers makes for easier tracing

Top right
Using a light box (or in this case, a screen) is helpful when the conditions don't allow for window tracing

Bottom right
The first lines to go on the paper define the main shapes of the creature

Adding ink

Now I will apply an ink wash for the whale's hair strands. For this, I am using Winsor & Newton ink in Nut Brown. I do not want it to overpower the pencil sketch, so I take care to dilute the ink well and build up the gradient in layers.

I make sure that every layer I paint on dries completely before I add the next, speeding up the process a little by using a hair dryer (on a cool air setting). It only takes me three or four coats of ink wash before I have the tones I want.

Detail pass

Now that the majority of the heavy lifting is done, it's time to indulge in my hitherto suppressed perfectionism and add the details! As my whale is a fairly slow-moving filter feeder, I decide it would be an interesting touch to have other organisms growing on its body that take advantage of the easy pickings.

For these small details, I find it easiest to use a 2B or 3B mechanical pencil to attain the type of line I enjoy.

Final touches

The last step in the process is to produce a high-quality scan of the image (this one was taken using an Epson Perfection scanner) that can then be taken into a digital program for clean-up.

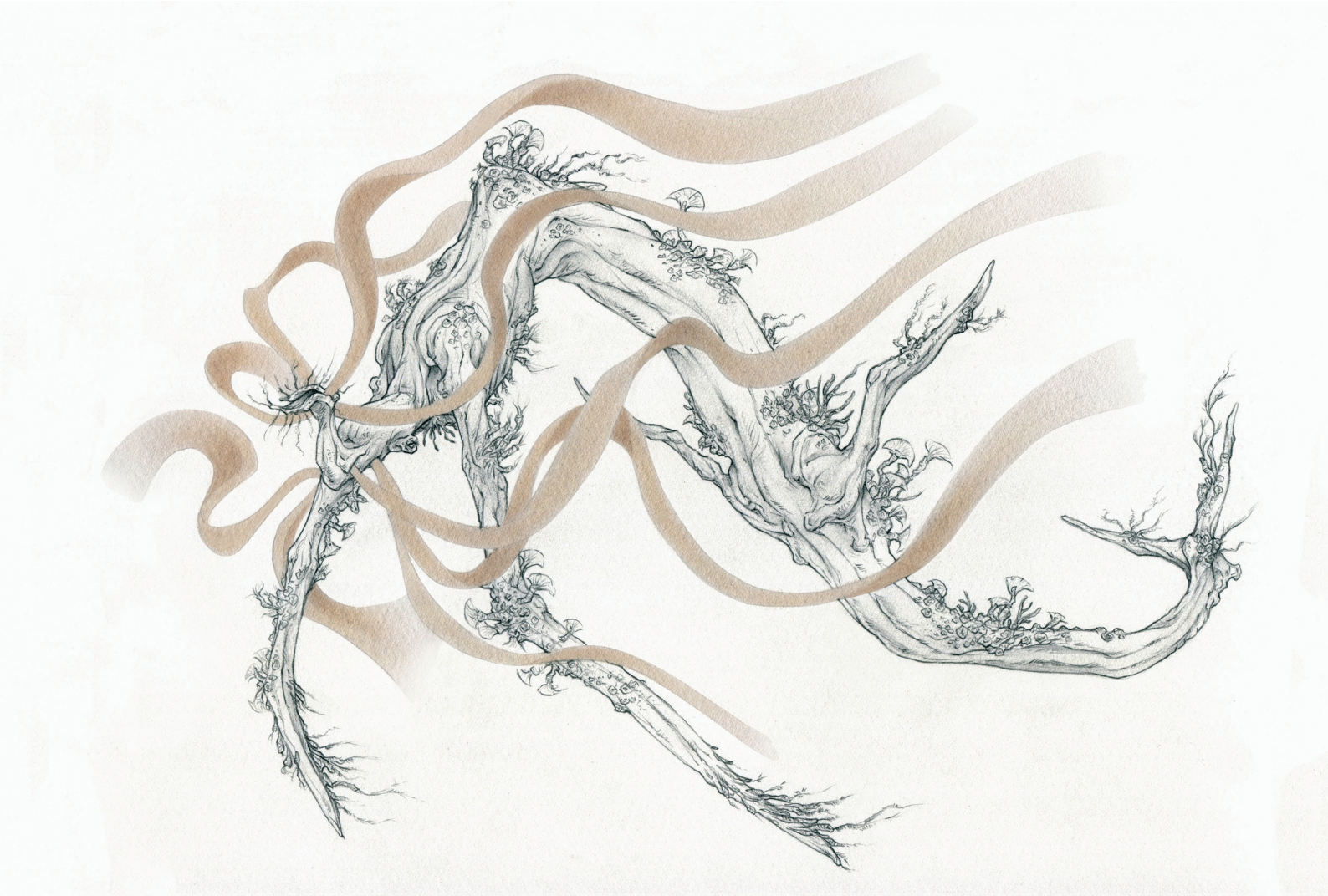
I use Adobe Photoshop's Smart Blur function to minimize the grain of the paper, and the Clone Stamp tool to iron out smaller errors.

In order to preserve your original piece, you may wish to apply a fixative spray to protect against smudging and damage.

Above
Ink washes are excellent for subtle gradients, such as in this piece, but are also useful for a variety of other techniques

Top right
Barnacles, worms, and other filter feeders grow on this whale's skin, adding pockets of visual interest

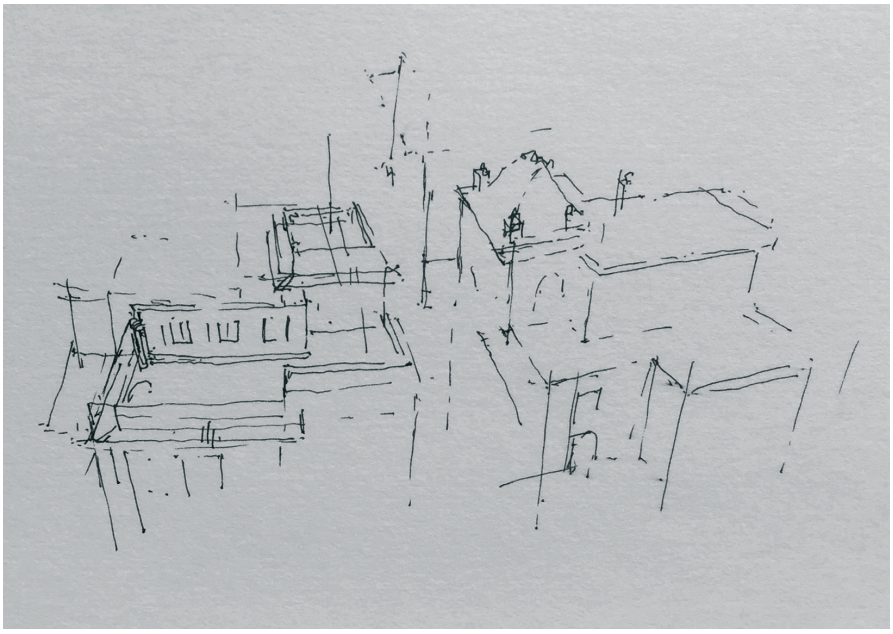
Bottom right
The finished design after scanning and clean-up. Watercolor paper lends an interesting texture to the flowing hair strands surrounding the whale
© Kristina Lexova



Viewing Valencia

Urban sketching with Hugo Costa

In this article, we visit Valencia, Spain, with architect and urban sketcher Hugo Costa. Equipped with pens and watercolors, Hugo shows us some of his favorite local spots to draw.



I am a Portuguese architect currently living in Valencia, Spain, and teaching courses on Architectural Form Analysis and Landscape Representation at the Superior Technical Architecture University (ETSAV).

Since October 2010, I have been sketching every day and blogging about the resulting drawings. Day by day I am constantly searching for potential spots to sketch around the city and mentally organizing them: the places I can draw if it's raining; if it's too hot, if I only have fifteen minutes to sketch; if I have some spare time on my commute path; or if I want to use watercolor. I can't afford to lose too much time searching for these places on my limited schedule, which is why I always have this list in my mind.

This article will cover the process of some of my daily drawings, made while wandering around Valencia. I have intentionally chosen to cover four different kinds of sketches, each using different formats, techniques, and types of perspective.

"Reporter Neighborhood," Calle de Juan Martorell

My first sketch is focused on the so-called "Reporter Neighborhood," a set of individual houses next to high residential towers (like the one where I was sketching, from a pleasant and sunny eighth-floor balcony).

It was a chilly winter day, but the balcony's south-facing orientation, combined with a cloudless sky, made the sketching conditions very agreeable. In moments like this I feel privileged to live in Valencia, when one year ago I was struggling to sketch in New York City's frosty winter.

I always take the time to reflect on the final outcome of my drawings before starting them: how I plan to frame them, where the different shapes and values are going to be, and how I can communicate the sense of a particular space. This drawing's perspective was probably the most unusual that I've ever done: a fish-eye perspective, facing down from a high vantage point.

The human eye's visual range is very limited, and I wanted to frame a wide setting where I could convey a "neighborhood" feeling, so I chose this fish-eye perspective that forced me to shift my head to different positions while drawing. I also wanted to enhance the scene's aerial aspect, so the vertical lines of the scene converge towards a vanishing point at the bottom of the sketch.

Above left: A photo of me drawing, back when I was based in New York City

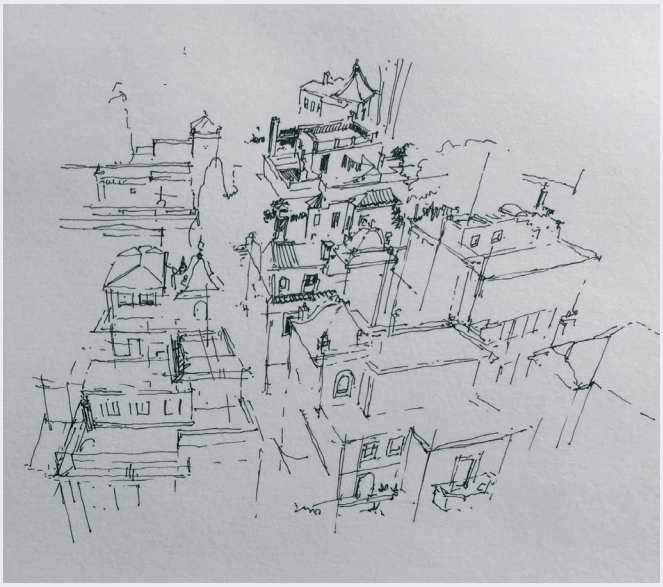
Above right: I started directly with a rollerball pen. These first strokes block out and define the composition

Top near right: Here the individual buildings' forms become more defined

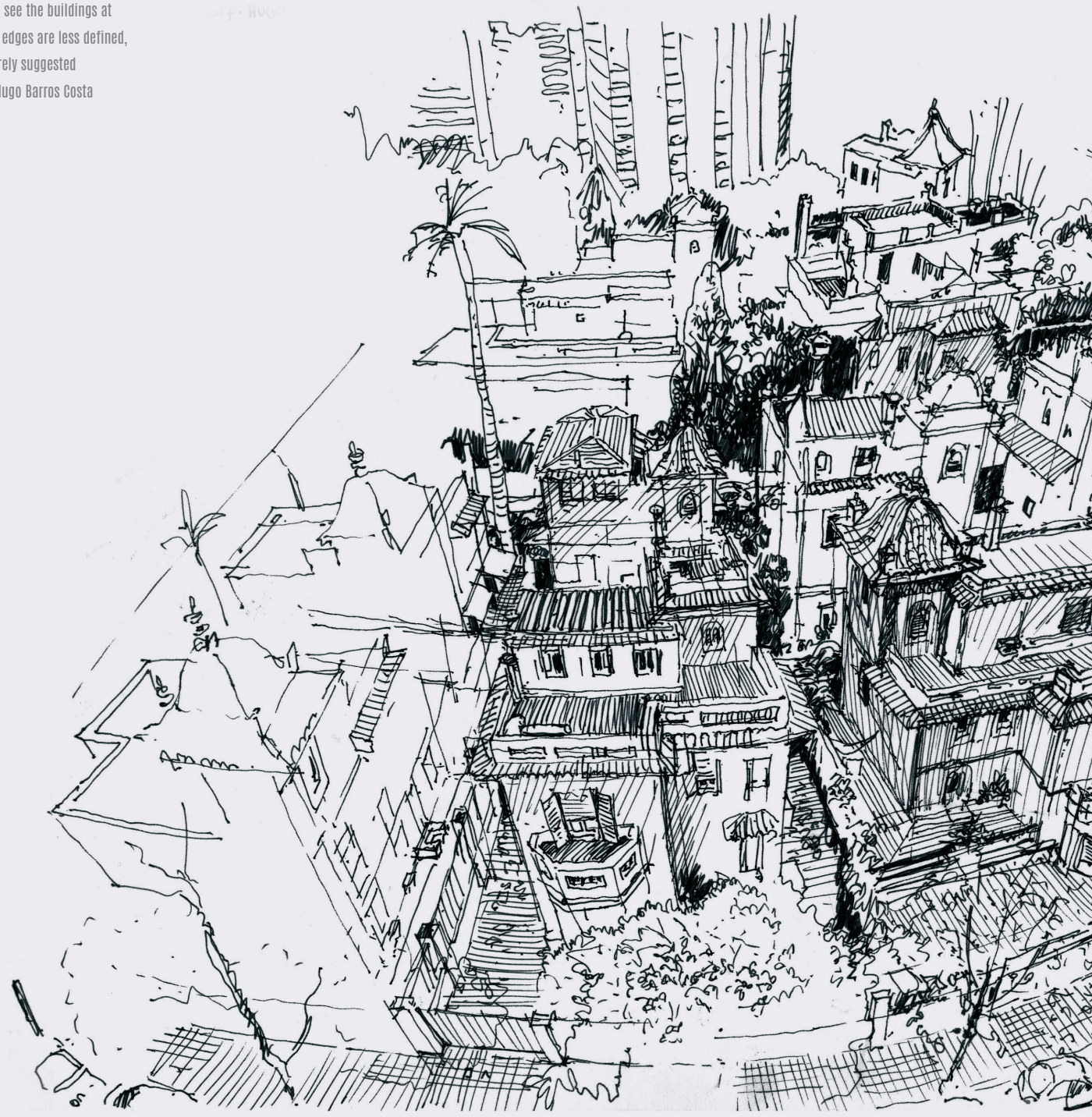
Top far right: More secondary elements and some dark values have now been added

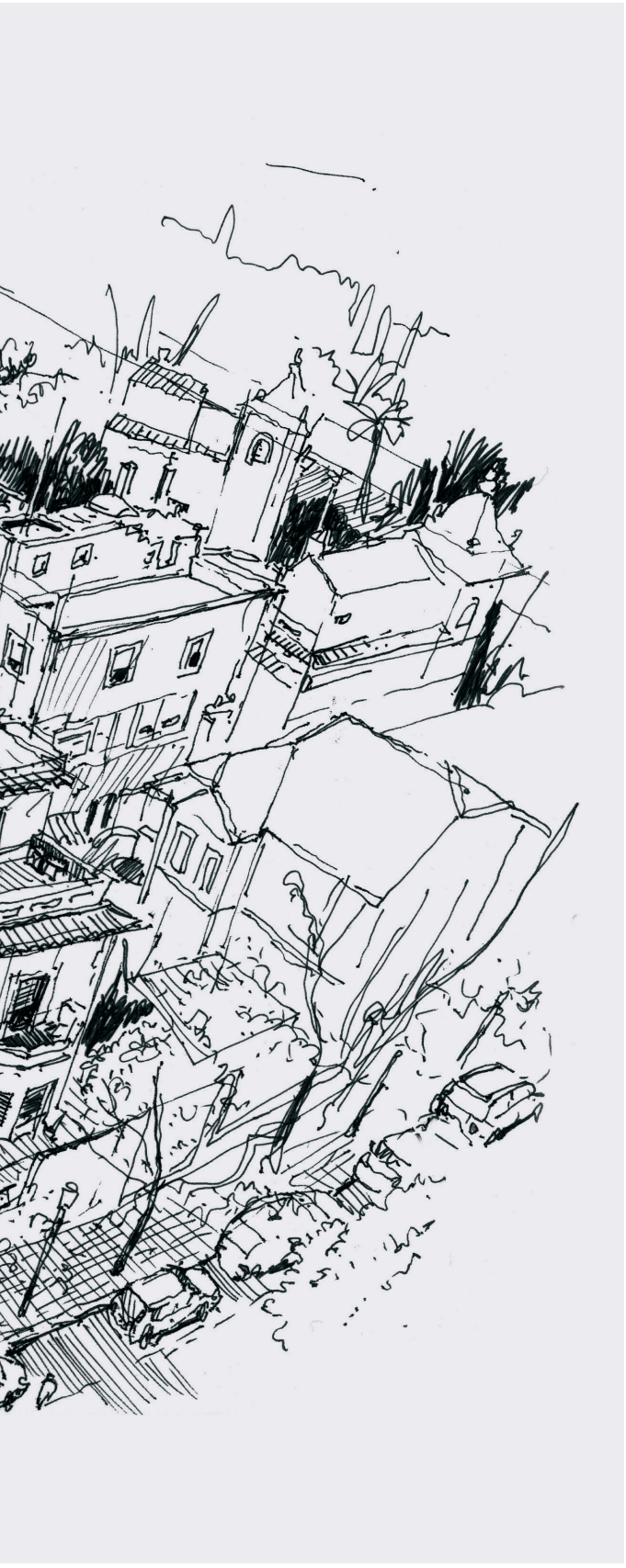
Bottom right: Hatching defines different materials and textures. The cars help to clarify the scene's scale

“This drawing’s perspective was probably the most unusual I’ve ever done”



These pages
The finished sketch. You can see the buildings at the edges are less defined, merely suggested
© Hugo Barros Costa





Plaza del Conde del Real

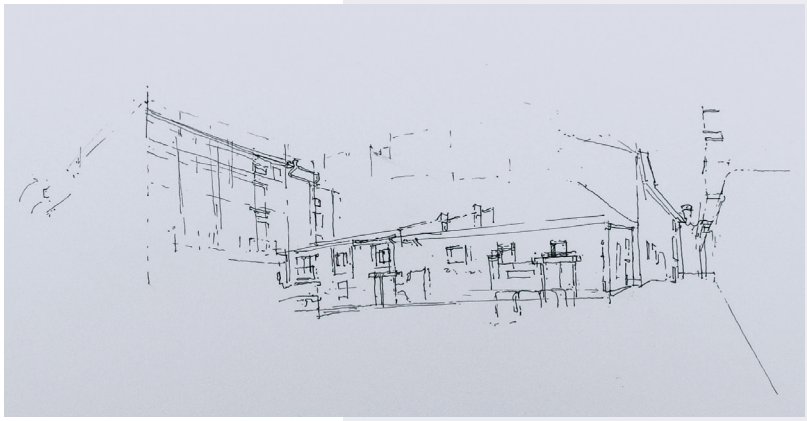
This square, featuring the stables of a Gothic palace (maybe one of the oldest buildings in Valencia), is one of my favorite spots to sketch.

This is the biggest of my sketches for this article. I drew it on heavy Bristol (35.6 × 43.2 cm). The large dimensions and the use of a fine rollerball pen allowed me to draw and detail the whole square. The unabsorbent vellum surface of the paper enabled me to draw even thinner lines than expected!

Here, I shifted my field of vision horizontally (about 180 degrees), keeping the vertical lines of the buildings parallel and combining two different perspectives (each based on one vanishing point). The intersection of both perspectives was resolved with curved lines, as you can see at the bottom of the sketch.

I used a thicker rollerball pen to draw some of the closest elements, and a brush pen to enhance some dark values, which helped me to define a volumetric sense of space.

Randomly, I sketched some pedestrians that crossed the scene, which contributed a sense of scale and dynamism. Usually I try to distribute people in different positions in the foreground, middle ground, and background in order to emphasize depth.



Top near right: These first fine lines define the "skeleton" of the wide horizontal composition

Middle near right: The eye-line connects the vast view, which is defined by two classic one-point perspectives merged together

Bottom near right: A thicker marker and a brush pen improve certain dark values and foreground elements

Right-hand page: The curving lines at the center unify the wide perspective, impossible to photograph through the 24 mm lens of my camera! I finished this drawing after two one-hour sessions

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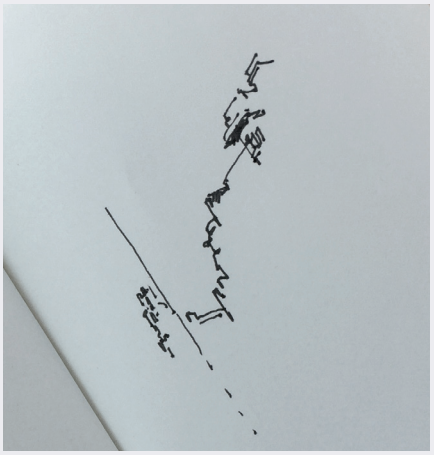
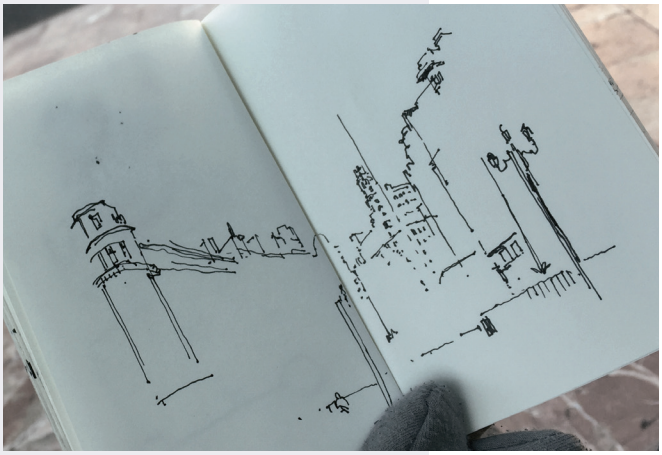
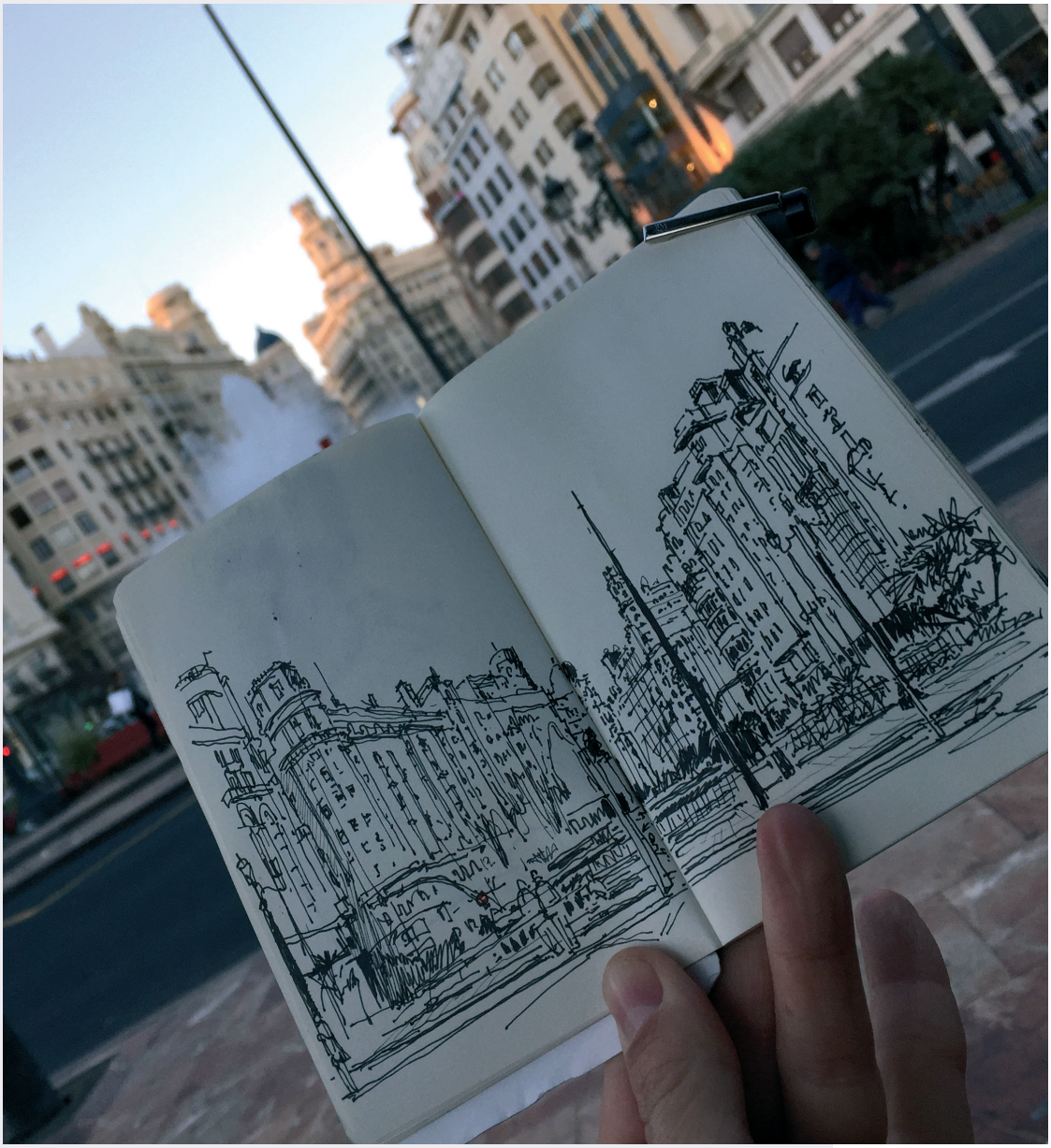
PLAÇA CONDE DEL REAL 14·1·2016 · 15·1·2016 · HUGO · O MEU PRIMEIRO (QUASE) 360º!







Top far left
The first lines established the composition and structure. All the following forms were related back to these in order to ensure coherence in proportions and values

Top near left
I imagined diagonal and horizontal lines to compare foreground and background elements, assuring the right scale and placement

Left
Details such as stories and windows give the buildings scale. I tried to simplify them and draw only a certain number that would suggest the undrawn windows

Right
At home, I added the gray shadow using a Letraset Promarker, defining the foreground street and adding tonal emphases

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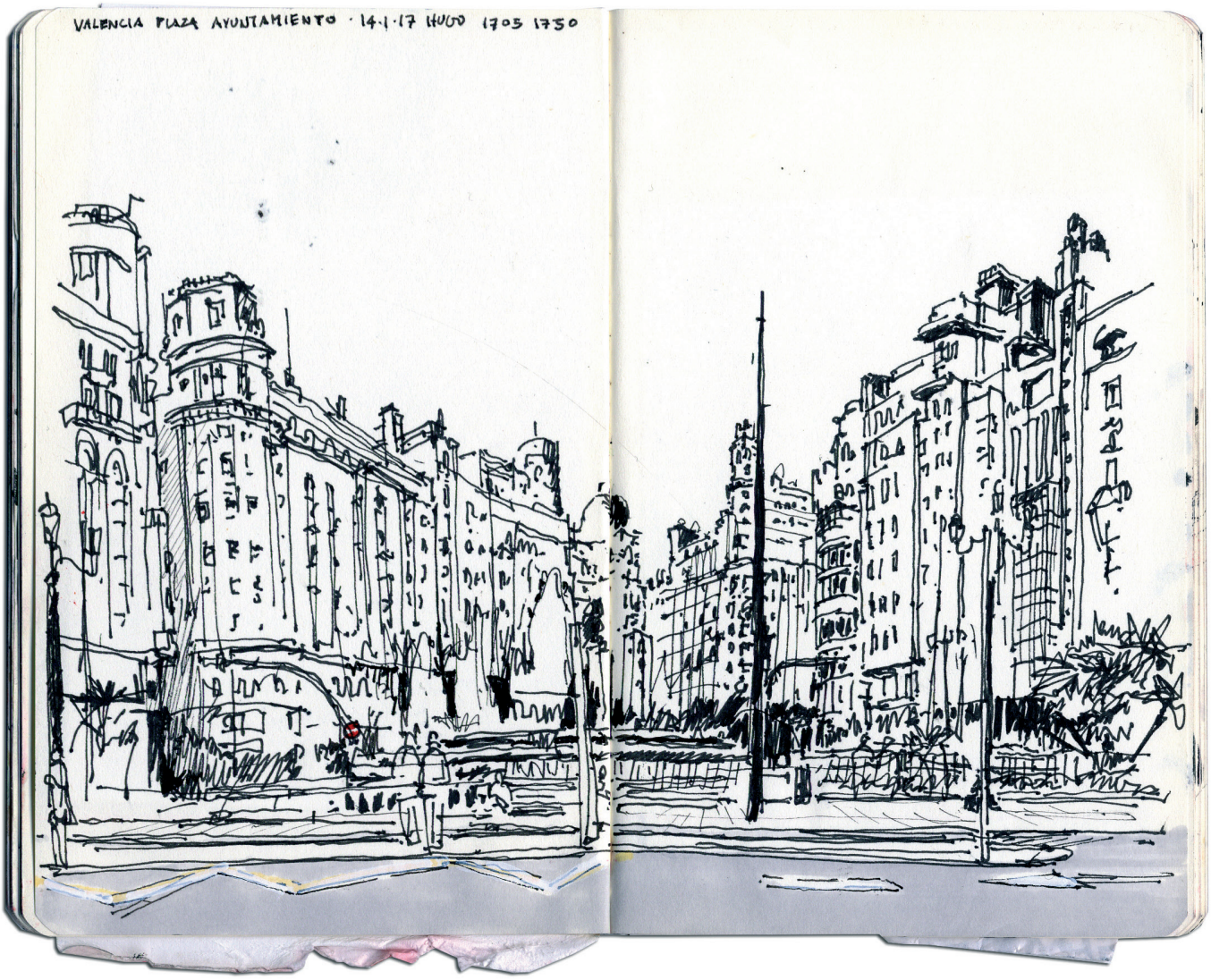


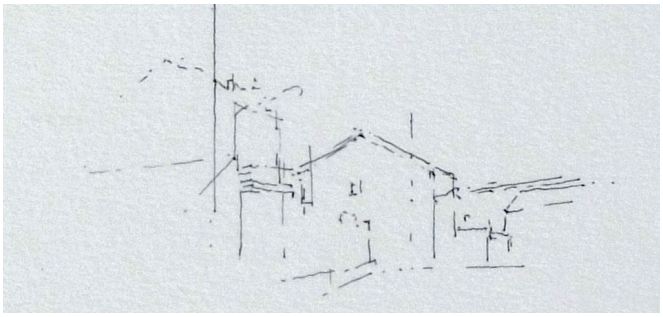
Valencia Town Hall

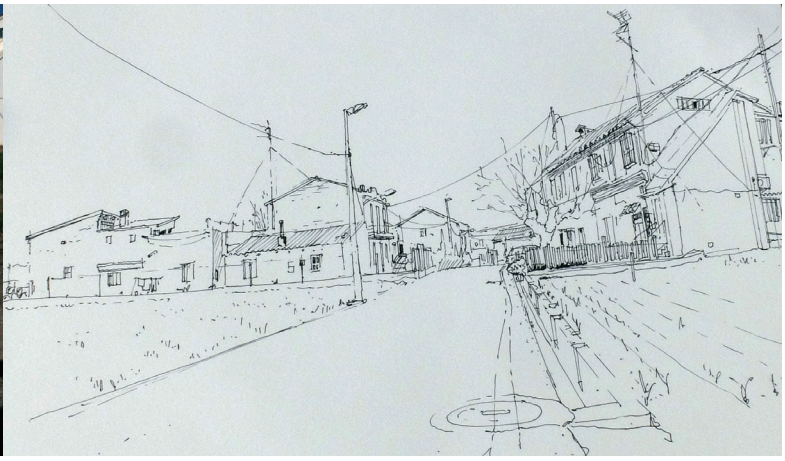
I usually carry three different sketchbooks every day, varying in size and paper stock. Once I realized the huge amount of information I could fit inside a little 14 × 8 cm Moleskine, using a very fine pen, this notebook became a must for me. It's also very discreet, allowing me to carry and use it everywhere (which is why I call it "the wedding sketchbook" – I always have it ready for those kinds of celebrations).

As usual, I started by mentally establishing a virtual composition and structure for the sketch: what I wanted to set within the confines of the sketchbook, what forms would define the edges of this information, how the volumes would relate to each other, empty spaces versus detailed areas, and so on.

Following these considerations, I started drawing the outline that would define the composition and perspective. When drawing the first lines of a scene, I keep in mind the inner geometric structure of the forms, as well as perspective rules, vanishing points, and proportions. I also check the horizontal, vertical, and diagonal spatial relationships between the different buildings, using the pen as a measuring tool or imagining virtual lines across the scene.

In this scene, the power cables over the street helped with composition, as they were randomly distributed in space, helping me to relate the constructions to each other. While filling these out, I also kept in mind to leave areas of white space free and well defined, creating contrast with the darker shapes. After suggesting secondary elements like windows, I defined the darker values and emphasized some foreground elements.





La Huerta

For this scene, I started working from the center of the paper, intentionally leaving a large foreground area at the bottom to give a sense of magnitude. I used a finer rollerball pen than before, as the lines tend to get thicker on this absorbent paper. The pen's waterproof ink would allow me to use watercolor over the drawing afterwards.

These first forms, although very abstract, served to define the composition and scale of the whole sketch; all the following lines were directly or indirectly referenced against them. Though these first strokes played such a decisive role, they were done with a very light touch, allowing for possible (and probable) minor corrections. Then I distributed the next layer of forms, relating them with the previous shapes I'd drawn, emphasizing the elements in the foreground with a thicker pen and more definition.

I actually made this image in two sessions. After finishing the line work, I realized the light had changed from what I was expecting to paint, so I returned the following day to do the painting!

When I start painting, I constantly ponder where to leave white space – areas of the composition that I won't paint. These white areas gradually take shape as the colors are added around them. I try to paint using groups of similar colors; here, I began with the orange hues, selectively adding some more layers of paint afterwards, in order to distinguish the several hues of this color in the scene. Next I emphasized the shadows, adding more vibrant, deep colors.

The final brushstroke was to create the lamp's shadow in the foreground. This diagonal gray line suggests the presence of the lamp, although it is out of the drawing's frame, and also the presence of the warm sun that I felt on my back.

Above top left: I started working from the center of the paper, from the façade with two sloping roofs. I wanted it to be the focal point of the sketch

Above top right: Although I don't draw reference guidelines, all the forms establish several reference points with each other, regarding scale, position, direction, and proportion

Above bottom: After roughly an hour, the line work was done. I drew only the significant values and textures that I wanted to remember when painting. It would be redundant to make shadows and define values at this stage, as I would paint them afterwards

Top right: It was a fantastic winter day - one of those moments that I really enjoy sketching, hoping to preserve it!

Bottom right: All the gear I was carrying that day, including a stool, two watercolor pans, and several pens and brushes

The finished picture

© Hugo Barros Costa

Bloody Mary

Sketching and illustrating with Isabella Mazzanti

Isabella Mazzanti invokes the ghost of Bloody Mary in this article, creating an atmospheric, stylized illustration with graphite powder and pencils.

Left
The drawing tools used for this project

Top right
Early exploratory sketches and gestures

Bottom right
Developing thumbnails to explore the composition

Materials

In this project, I will show you my process for creating an illustration exploring the traditional folktale of Bloody Mary: a ghostly character summoned by speaking into a mirror, part of a divination ritual that is so powerful that its memory survives to this day.

I will be using graphite for this illustration. It's my favorite medium, as I love to play with chiaroscuro effects (a dramatic contrast of light and shadow in drawing and painting). I use graphite pencils of different grades, from H to 5B, and also use graphite powder for bigger surfaces.

If I need to create some particularly dark values, I am not afraid to mix charcoal with pencils. My other tools include a make-up sponge and blending stick for shading with, and different types of erasers for creating various light effects (a putty eraser and a Tombow MONO Zero for details).

Looking for the ghost

The first thing I do when I approach a new illustration is explore the subject. With folk legends such as Bloody Mary, the available source material is often scarce and mostly part of an oral tradition. So I decide to broaden the range of my research to include the role of ghosts in divination rituals during the Victorian age (which would add to the Gothic style I'd like to aim for), and the symbolic meaning of mirrors as mediums to make contact with the afterlife.

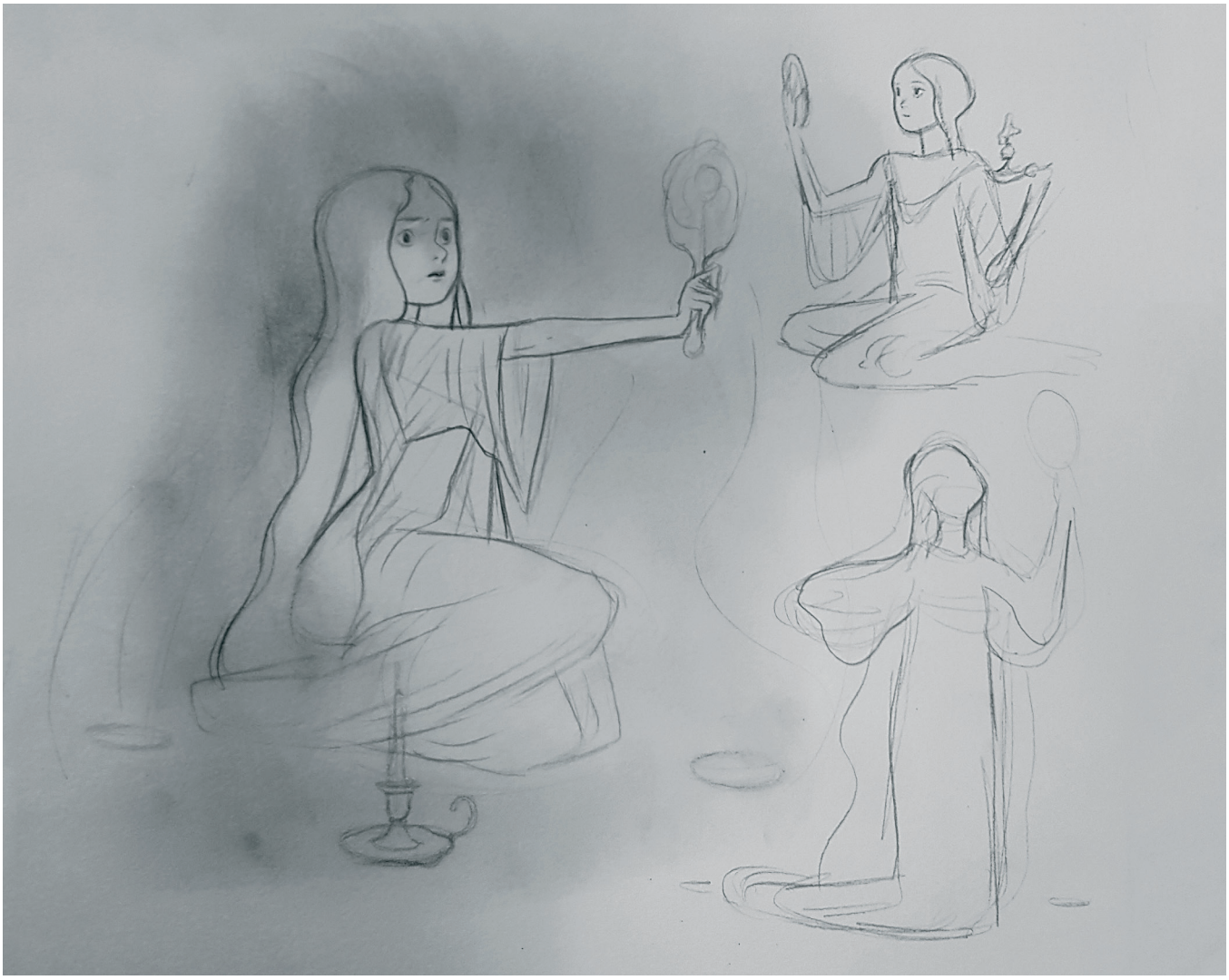
Exploration

Once I have learned more about the subject, I start doodling and sketching. This phase is very important for me, but it's also painful! I spend a lot of time looking for a good idea and atmosphere, trying different solutions and approaches before deciding which concept represents the subject best.

I consider the meaningful verbal and mental associations that arise from the story, and then select the elements that I will put into the illustration later on. The young maid, mirror, and candle (as these are used to summon Bloody Mary), and the ghost herself, are the key ingredients that will go into telling the story.

Making decisions

I start making thumbnails by mixing the limited set of elements that I have chosen, creating different compositions from which to select my final design. I am interested in



Sketch #1

Far left
The final thumbnail selected for the illustration

Near left
Making a larger version of the chosen thumbnail

Top right and bottom near right
Clean-up of the illustration with tracing paper

Bottom far right
Preparing the background with graphite powder

showing a very theatrical gesture: something that recalls the haunting art of the Symbolists and the paintings of Gustave Moreau. I want to give equal importance to both the character and the narrative, so I decide to develop the thumbnail where the image is divided into two main parts: the young maid who stares into the darkness, and the mirror that narrates to the audience what is really happening – the encounter with the presence she has summoned.

From thumbnail to final sketch

I prefer to work on a big surface when I use graphite, as it allows me to focus on all the details and achieve a high level of refinement in the final image. The thumbnail I draw is very small, so I redraw it on a larger piece of paper, using it as a general reference for the composition because I want to maintain the overall shapes and balance of the image. For me, character design is a very important element of an illustration: I need to conceive a character in every detail in order to feel them come alive. I do not want to represent an angelic-looking girl, as many Victorian illustrations about the same subject do; I want her to look beautiful and yet disturbing. In order to achieve this feeling, I add some peculiar features to her: a long neck, widely spaced eyes, pale skin, and tiny hands. Not too much, as I do not want to create a grotesque effect, but just enough to give her a strange and gloomy aura. I also play a lot with proportions, lines, and areas of simple shapes versus areas to which I will add complex rendering or texture.

Clean-up

When the final sketch is complete, I make a cleaner version with tracing paper. This stage may seem excessive because my sketches are usually quite "defined," but I need to preserve a version of the line work that is as clean as possible. When you work with graphite, it is very common to lose the line work, especially if you shade with graphite powder as I do. This method allows me to keep a copy of the drawing in order to redraw it if necessary. I keep this clean version to one side for now.

Preparing the final drawing

An advantage of working with graphite pencils is that you can use any kind of paper as a foundation. I encourage you to try different surfaces in order to attain surprising effects. I personally prefer to use a 300 gsm acid-free, hot press cotton paper because I love the smoothness I can attain with it.

The cotton paper is also quite strong, so even if I make mistakes and have to erase multiple times, it is not easy to damage the surface. When I prepare the final paper, I never touch the surface of the sheet, because the natural skin oils on my fingers can compromise the end result.

I transfer to a light table for this stage of the process because I need to use my large sketch as a reference. After framing my blank paper with masking tape, I proceed to use the graphite powder for defining the background masses. I use a make-up sponge as a tool, but you could also use a sheet of kitchen paper, which does the same job.

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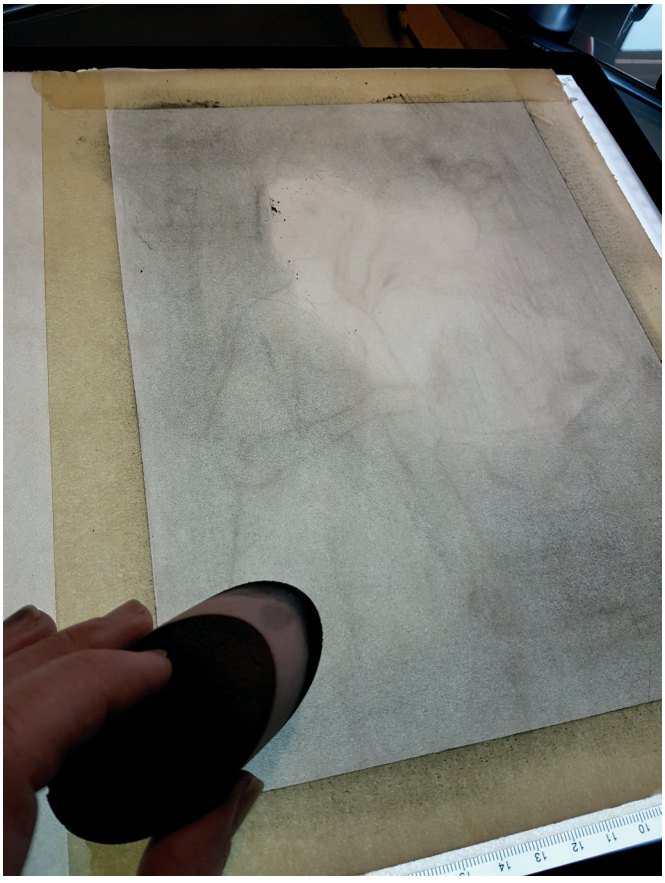


> “If I want to focus the audience on a particular part of the image, I enhance the contrast between light and dark in this area”

Basic shapes

When the preparatory shading is done, I also use the light table to redraw the basic shapes of the original drawing. This is where my cleaned-up version of the drawing is useful, though I also check the original sketches multiple times so I do not lose the freshness of the idea.

Rendering

Now I need to establish the atmosphere, chiaroscuro effect, and range of tonal values that I want to attain in the final image. I try to mentally assign a value to each part of the drawing, in order to block them in; this process of simplification allows you to be more confident about what you are doing.

I use my pencils and blending tools to establish the light source, and the maximum values of light and darkness in the image. If I want to focus the audience on a particular part of the image, I enhance the contrast between the light and dark in this area: in this particular illustration, the points of interest are the girl’s face and the candlelight, so I enhance the chiaroscuro effect present there. If I am unsure about how to present any of the lighting choices, I look for some photo references in my archive.

Left
Basic shapes redrawn with the light table

Right
The illustration in progress

“I recommend using a softer grade if you have a heavy hand”

Refinement

I prefer to work on the whole illustration at the same time, so the risk of overworking an area is reduced. The parts that I leave until the very end are the areas with the lightest values, because the details on these parts must be carefully measured and calibrated.

This is the stage where I unify the whole image and see if everything is how I imagined it. It is also important to allow space for “happy accidents” that can give you some good ideas! In this case, I made a mistake with the eraser that suggested using the candle in the mirror as a deathly metaphor.

When the illustration is almost done, I love to spend some time adding details, especially in the area where I want to focus the audience, such as the young maid’s face and the candle in her hand. I use a hard grade of pencil (F or H), carefully sharpened, but I recommend using a softer grade if you have a heavy hand, because you risk ruining the paper otherwise.

Display

When the illustration is complete, I need to fix the graphite – it is a very perishable medium and fades easily if you do not fix it. I use a fixative spray for this, but be careful and respect the instructions: don’t spray it too close – at least fifteen inches away!

Then I can proceed to scan the drawing without damaging it. I can adjust the values using Adobe Photoshop if needed, and remove any tiny spots and dirt with the Clone Stamp tool. Now I have the final illustration complete, saved in my archive, or available for printing.

Above
Adding the last fine details

Right
The final scan of the illustration
© Isabella Mazzanti

the Gallery

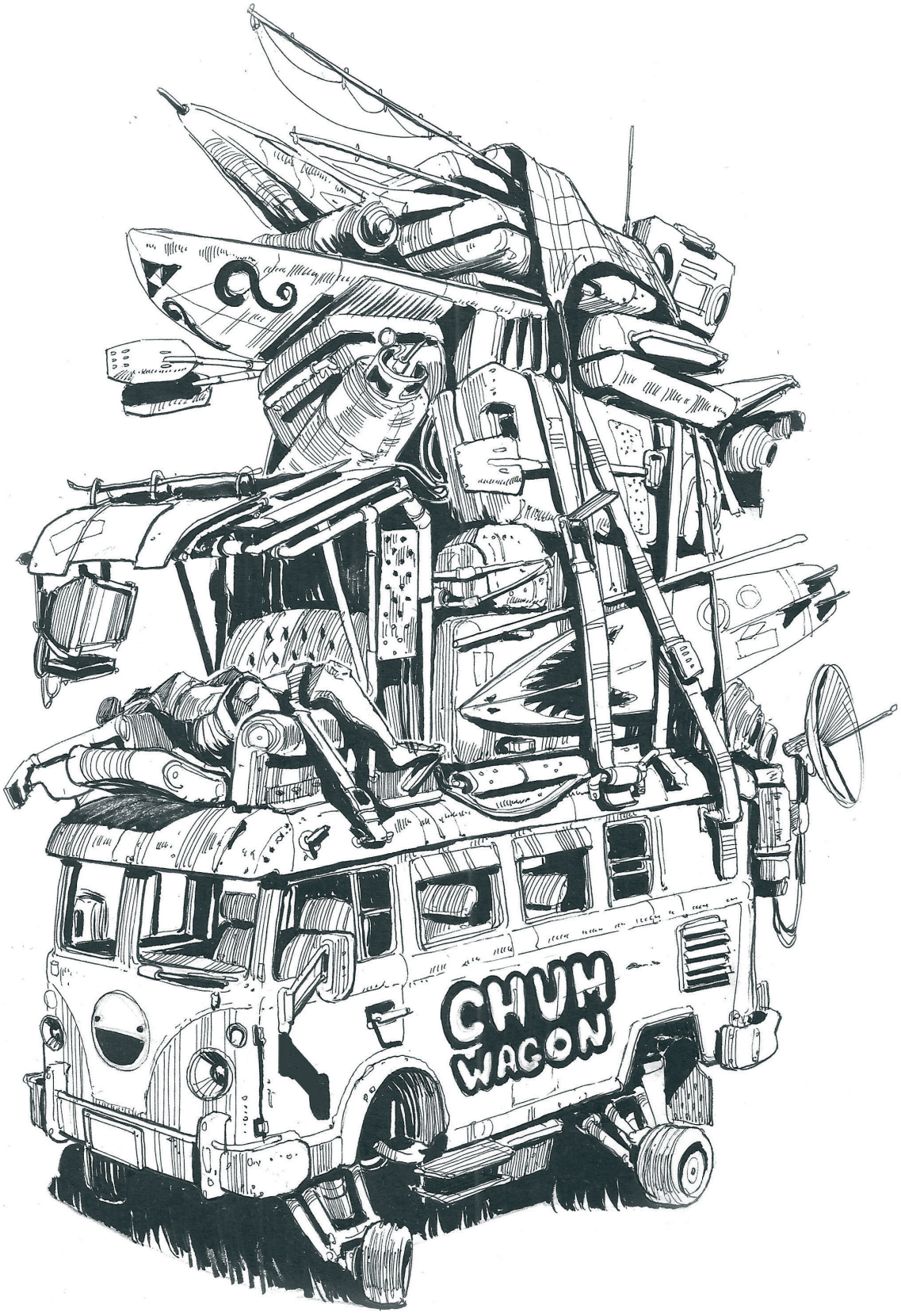
Featured artists:

Gina Nelson
Danilo Andrić
Samuel Lee
Braydan Barrett
Tanta Vorawatanakul
Alejandro García Restrepo
Midhat Kapetanović

Inks VI
© Gina Nelson
Traditional ink
and gold leaf

Waypoint © Danilo Andrić • 2B mechanical pencil, 35 × 50 cm

Landscape Study © Samuel Lee • Charcoal pencil and conté



Vacation © Braydan Barrett • Traditional ink

Owl Family © Tanta Vorawatanakul • 4B pencil

The Singer © Alejandro García Restrepo • Pencil on paper, 21.5 × 15 cm

Old Town Mostar
© Midhat Kapetanović
Faber Castell PITT markers
on pocket-size Moleskine
notebook paper

THE GALLERY CONTRIBUTORS

Gina Nelson is a self-taught artist from South Africa, now based in the UK. She works across various mediums including inks, oil paintings, and digital illustration, and currently leads the art team at a small London gaming company called The Secret Police.

ginanelsonart.com

Danilo Andrić is an illustrator and concept artist from Novi Sad, Serbia. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Novi Sad, and engages with character and environment art with a recent focus on more surreal and symbolic imagery.

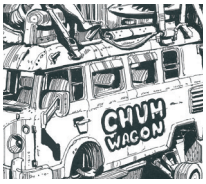
daandric.artstation.com

Samuel Lee is a Singapore-based illustrator currently working for a toy company. He is a Mediacorp Gold Medal winner and recipient of the Mediacorp Award for Outstanding Project Work, whose art has been exhibited at local and international events.

lee-samuel.com

Braydan Barrett is a UK-based freelance concept artist with a passion for fictional hard-surface design. He likes to make whimsical work that bends the concept of reality and logic through humor, irony, and story, using ink as his primary weapon of choice.

braydanbarrett.artstation.com



Tanta Vorawatanakul is a Thai freelance illustrator currently studying for a master's degree at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco. She has issued two illustrated books in Thailand, and mostly goes by the name of Tantav.

behance.net/tantav

Alejandro García Restrepo is an artist and freelance illustrator living in Medellín, Colombia. *The Singer* is part of a series called *Imaginary Anatomy*, in which Alejandro creates mysterious and disturbing figures and situations by combining the characteristics of multiple beings.

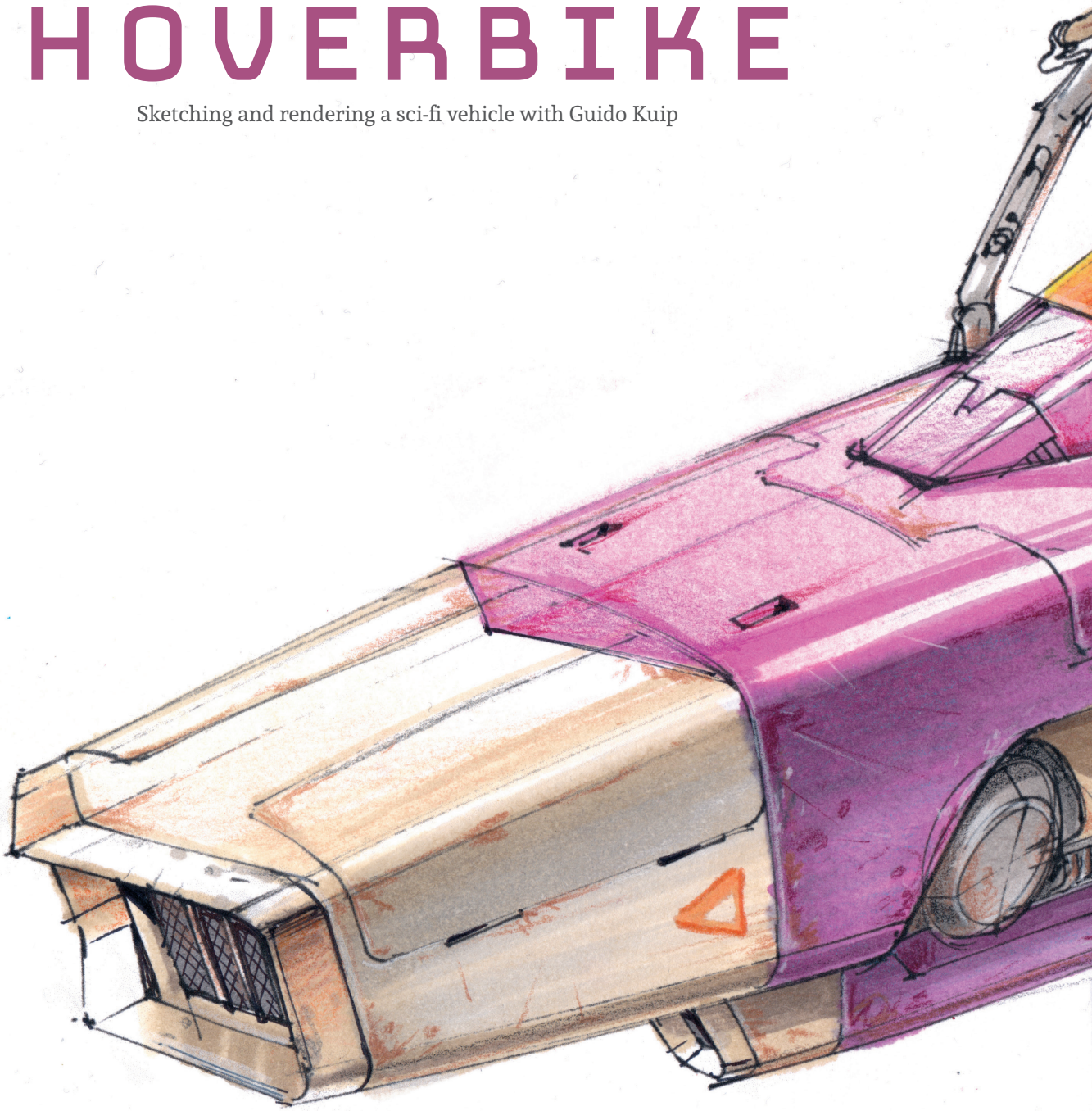
behance.net/Alejandro_Garcia_R

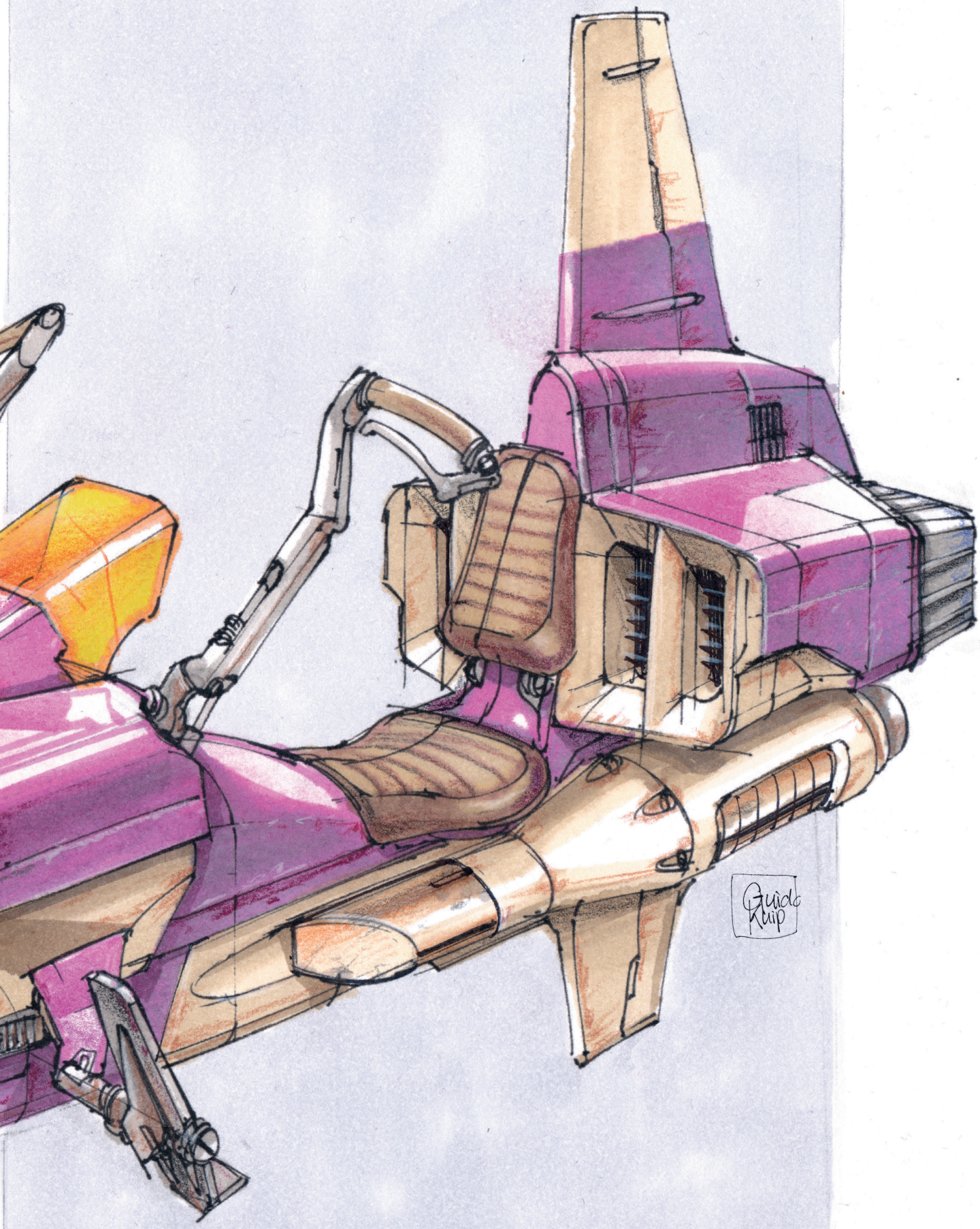
Midhat "Mido" Kapetanović is an architect and designer experienced in creating concept art for the entertainment and advertising industries. His first love is a traditional old-school sketch using any available mediums, such as pencil, charcoal, ink, watercolor, and markers.

mido.artstation.com

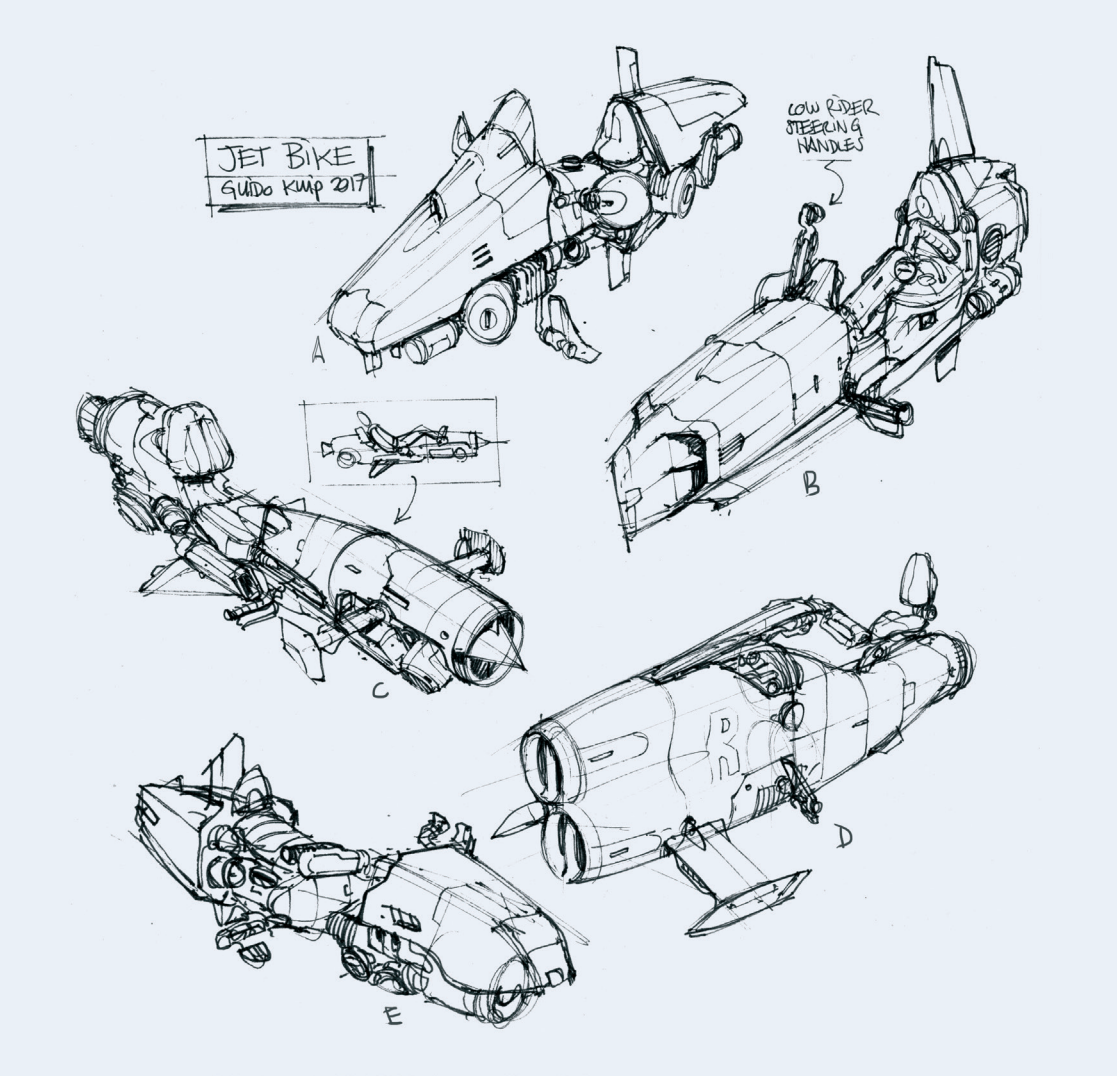
HOVERBIKE

Sketching and rendering a sci-fi vehicle with Guido Kuip





In this article, illustrator and concept artist Guido Kuip shares his process for rendering a sci-fi vehicle, using markers and soft pastels for a traditional industrial design effect.



Left
Early idea exploration

Right
Developing the initial idea a little further

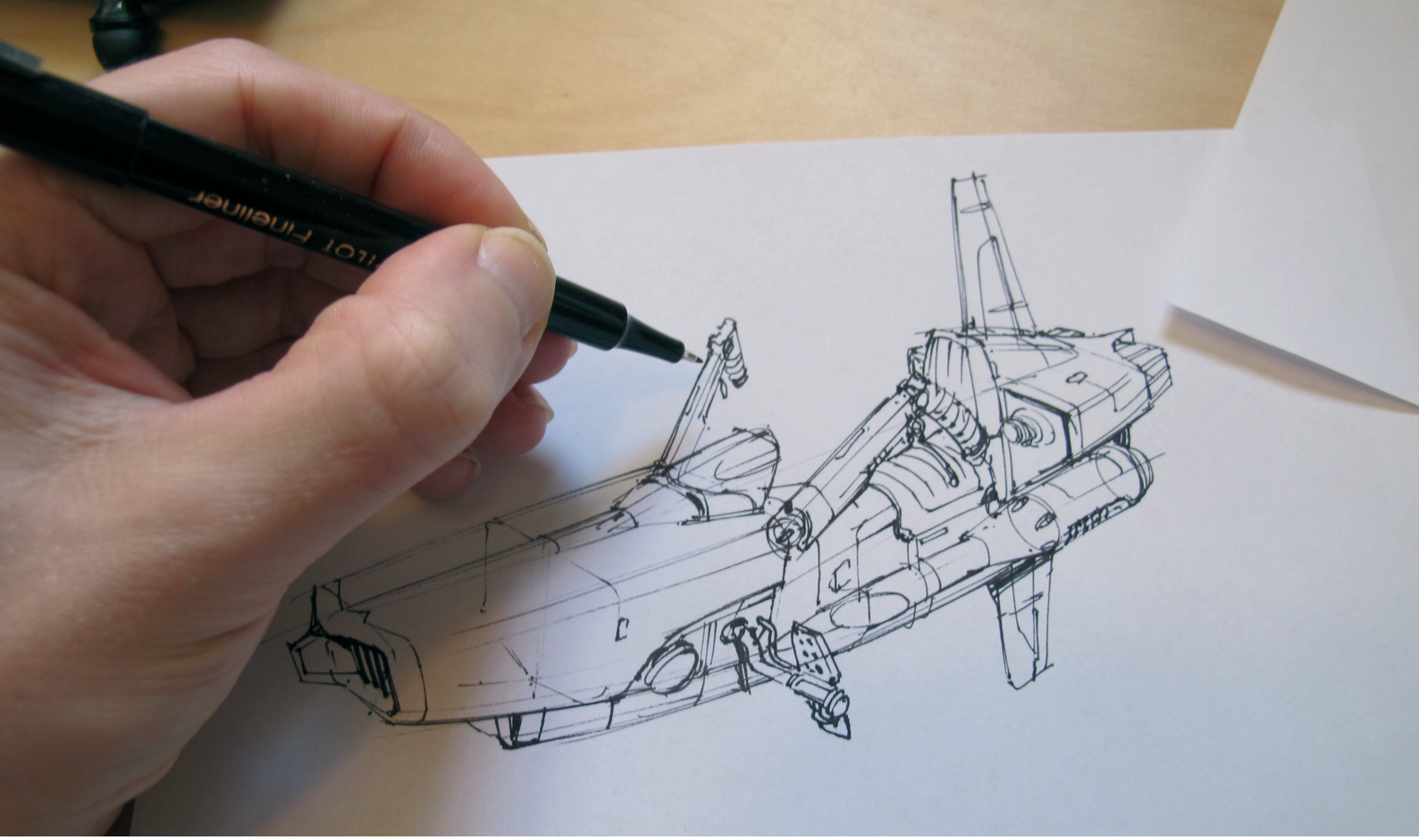
Early ideas

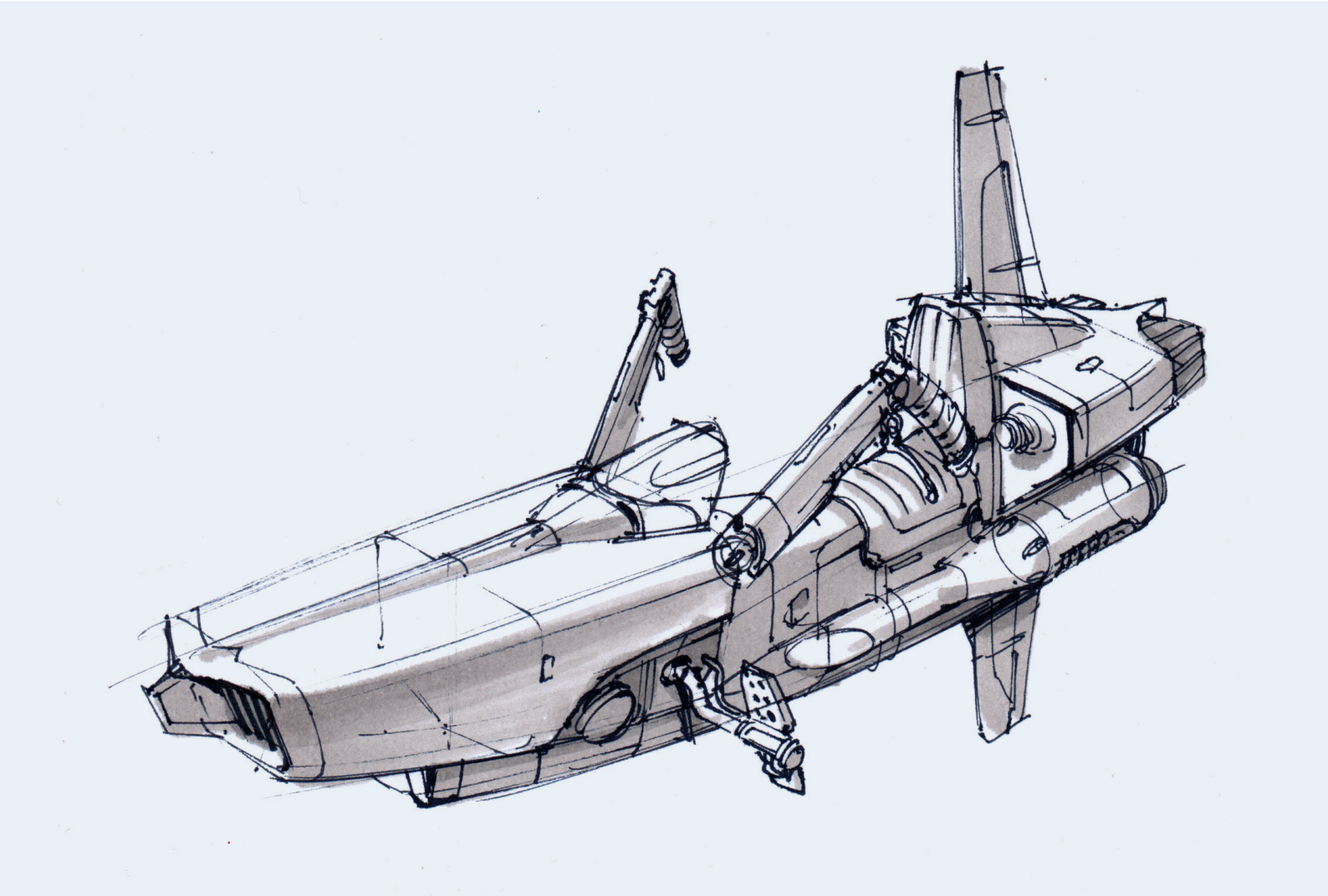
In this tutorial I will tackle the design of a zippy jet bike and show how to quickly render the final drawing with a classic industrial design approach. This is a method designed to swiftly and effectively put ideas on paper with minimal resources and time. I will focus on the use of markers and soft pastels in this tutorial, rather than discussing the use of perspective and drawing freehand – though rulers and ellipse guides certainly have their uses – in the early stages.

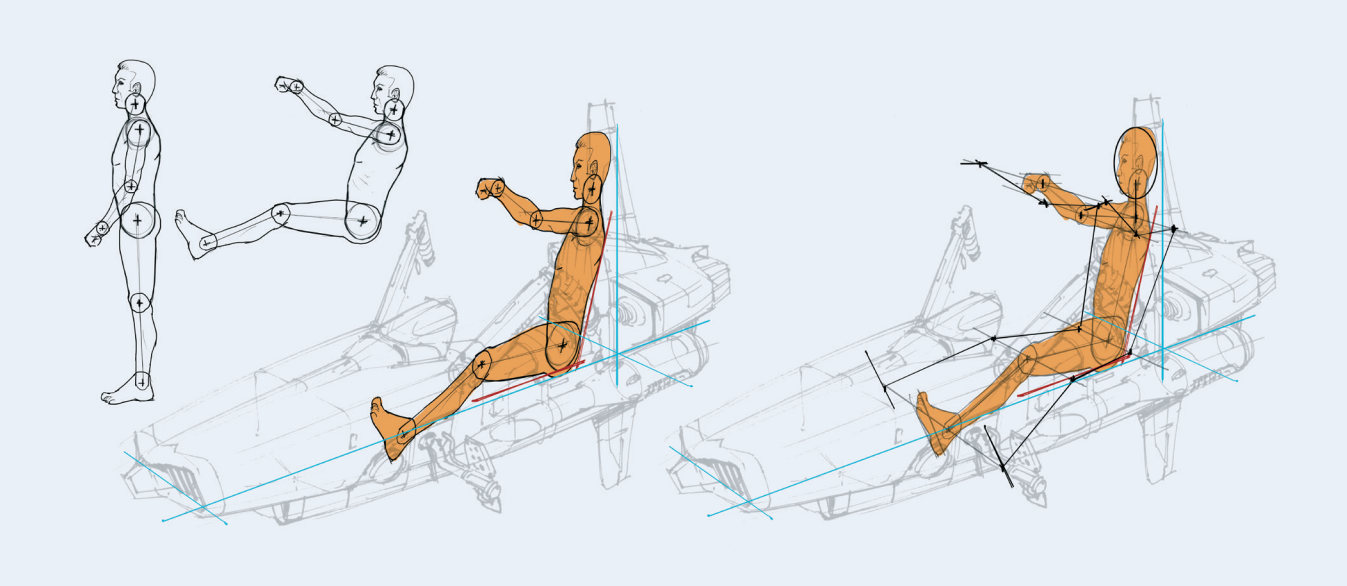
I usually start out with a few loose sketches that I keep fairly small, as all I am looking for at this point is an interesting idea that I can expand upon in a later, more detailed sketch. If I don't end up with something I like, I can either make more sketches or do some more reference research first, but in this case I am interested in developing idea B a little further. I use a Pilot Fineliner here, as the nib shape allows me to get different line weights out of a single pen by changing the angle and pressure as I sketch.

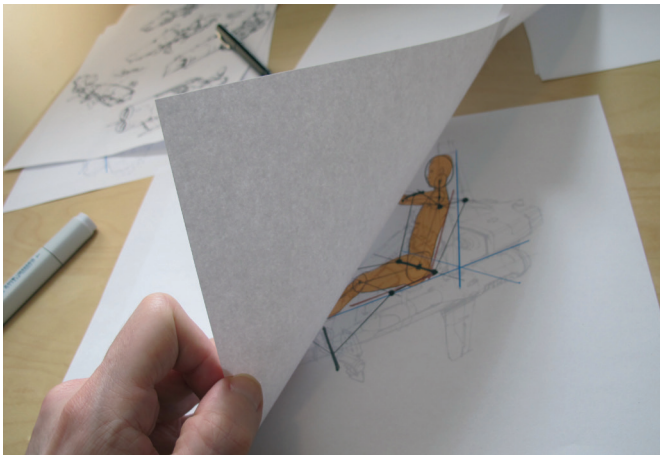
Rough sketch

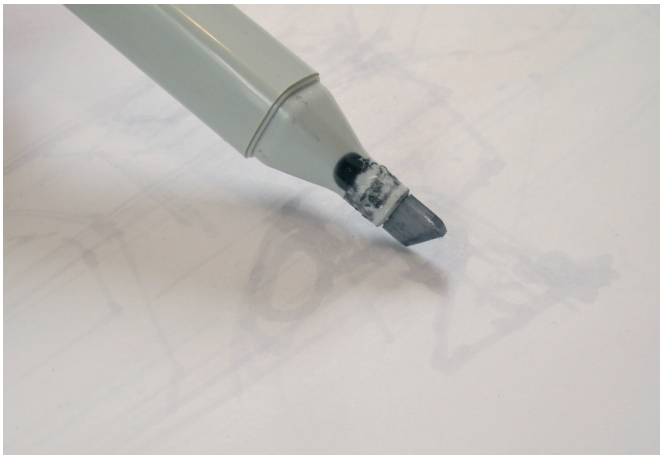
Using the general proportions of the initial sketch, I explore the idea a little further. I like the aspect of the design resembling a muscle car or lowrider, but in order to show off the use of pastels later, I decide to flatten and widen the "hood" a little. I am happy with the general design at this point, but before moving to the final drawing, I need to decide the proper location for the handlebars, saddle, and pedals so that a human would be able to ride it.


Pilot Fineliner









Human scale

To get the proportions right in the final drawing, I want to create an underlayer. There are many ways to tackle this problem but, lacking a lowrider bike to photograph my own reference from, I take a "paper doll" that I made previously and use Adobe Photoshop to pose it and match the perspective of my rough sketch. This enables me to find the rough positions of the hands, feet, and torso.

Underlayer

I print out the underlayer, making sure to clearly mark the important points, and position it under a new sheet of paper on which will be my final drawing of the jet bike. If I needed to transfer a more detailed drawing than this, I would either use a light box or, lacking that, simply a nearby window.

Marker sketch

Using a light gray marker, I lay down the basis for the final drawing. This stage can sometimes be skipped if the underlayer is already sufficient, but in this case I still want to make some changes to the design. Most of the gray marker will vanish once I start to render the image, so I am still free to explore somewhat. Note that by using the chisel-shaped tip of the marker; holding it by the end, at a steep angle, I am able to sketch with very light lines. This technique does wear down the nib more than normal use, so I tend to use older markers for this phase.

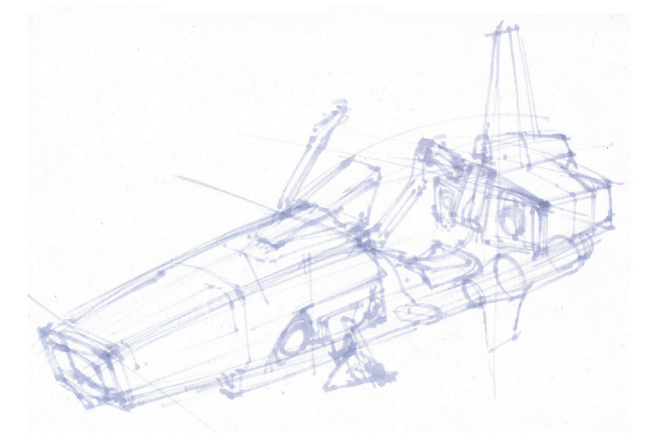
Above top
Using a dummy figure to establish proportions and scale

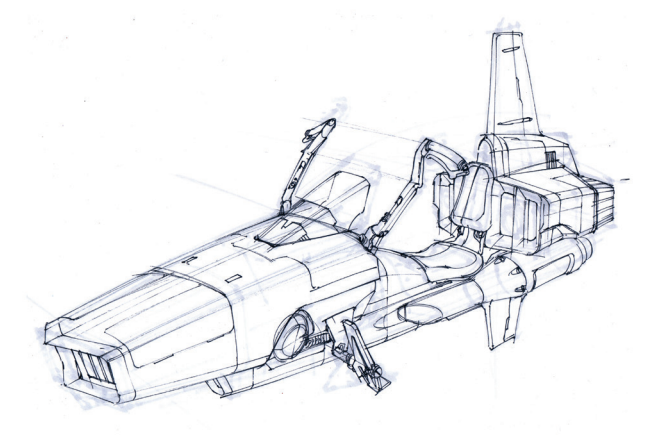
Above bottom
Using the underlayer

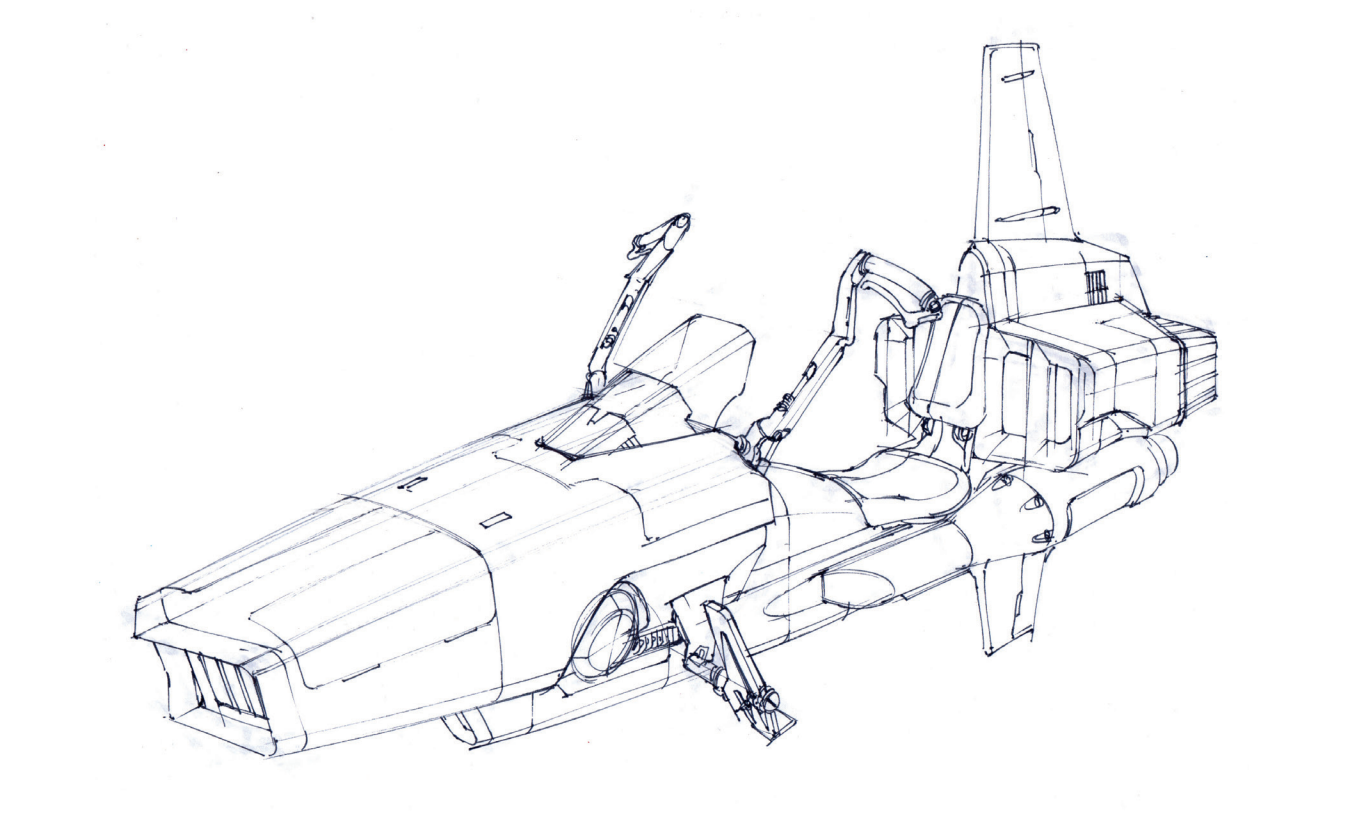
Right top near
Laying down a light base for the final drawing

Right top far and bottom
The finished pen sketch before rendering

“Fineliner ink is in general poorly UV-resistant, fading over time”

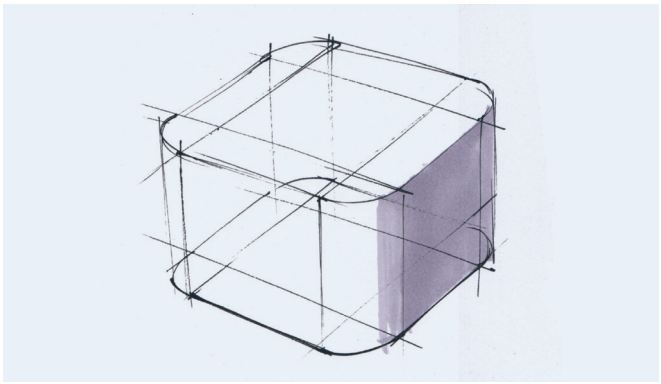
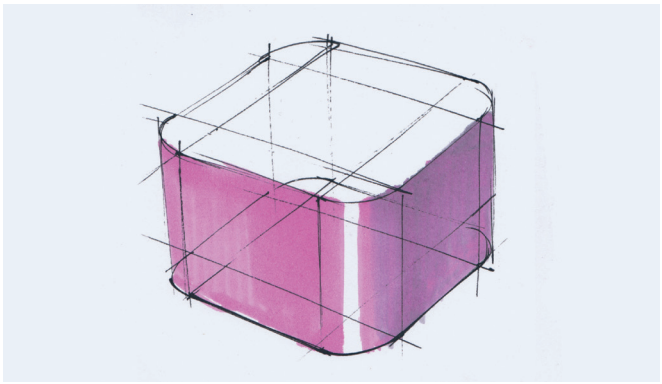


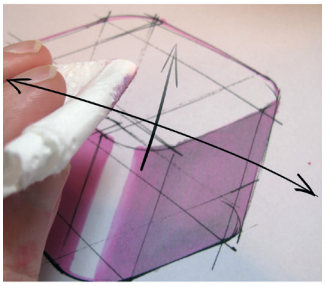
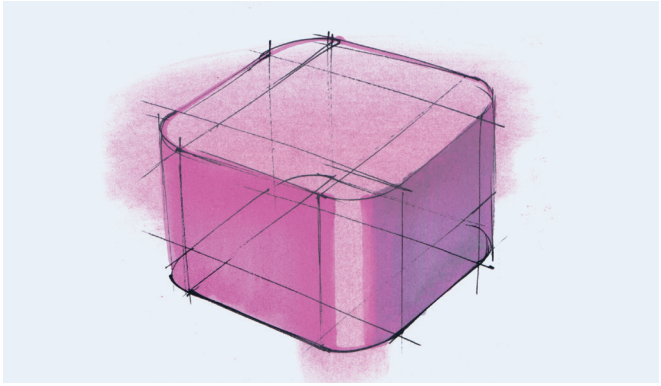
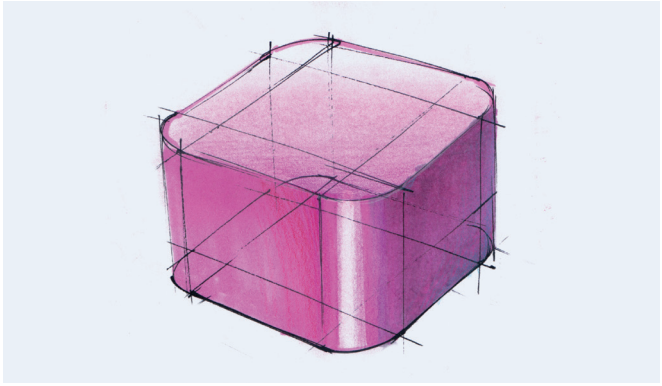




Finished sketch

With the underlayer and gray marker sketch as a base, I can forego a lot of extra construction lines and start creating a clean sketch with the Pilot Fineliner. However, I do make sure to add a center line down the length of the hood, and a parting line across it, to make sure the curved form reads easily. At this point it can be useful to scan the sketch, clean it up in Adobe Photoshop if necessary, and print a copy to render further. Fineliner ink is in general poorly UV-resistant, fading over time, and having a copy of the line art is always useful. Above, you can see the finished pen sketch after some minor clean-up.

Creating shadows

Before we move on to rendering the jet bike, here is a quick example of the four steps I go through when rendering with markers. The first step is shading, and for this I have chosen a light gray with a slight reddish tint.

I am using mostly Chartpak markers, as I bought some secondhand pens for cheap, but in general I would recommend using Copic markers. Apply the marker quickly, wet on wet, to get a smooth and even end result. Keep in mind that the ink from markers can bleed somewhat, so it is always best to shy away from the edges and allow the ink to bleed towards the lines.

Adding color

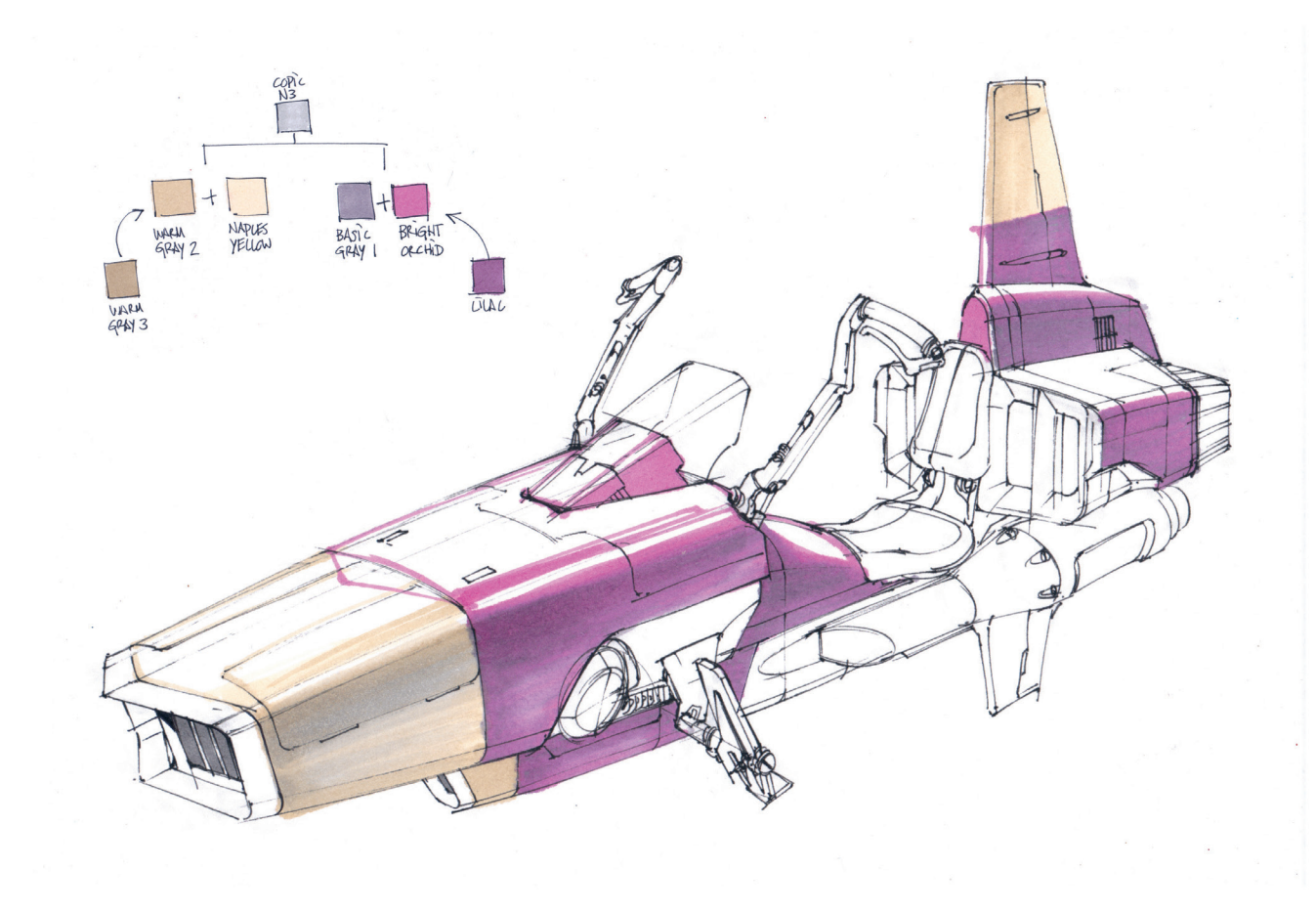
I choose a light reddish-gray marker in the previous step so that it blends well with the second layer of marker. I have chosen a pink color for the hoverbike, called Bright Orchid, so that's what I am using in this example.

Beware, some colors do not mix well with gray tones (blue markers are notoriously bad for this), so it is always a good idea to test them like this before starting on the final render. If your gray shading marker does not blend very well, another option is to apply a second layer of the main color marker once the first layer is dry, which will darken it, or to find another pen with a darker version of the main color (but collecting pens can get expensive quickly).

Pastel shading

I want to create a gradient for the top surface, to simulate a somewhat reflective material, and soft pastels are ideal for this purpose.

I do not have a pastel stick that exactly matches my chosen color, so I have to mix the pigment from a few different pieces. I do this by scraping the stick with a sharp knife onto a separate piece of paper, which I then mix and pick up with the corner of a tissue. I then apply it with zigzag strokes perpendicular to the direction of the gradient, making sure I



Top far left
Applying the gray base shadow

Top near left
Applying the main color over the shading

Middle and bottom far left
Creating a pastel gradient

Bottom near left
Cleaning up the result and refining it with colored pencils

Above
Planning the marker layering and preparing the hoverbike for a soft pastel pass

cover the entire surface in one go. Again, it is a good idea to perform a quick test to see if the color matches before applying it to the final drawing.

The result

The result of this rendering process is often somewhat messy, but if the pastel has been applied lightly, it can be erased quite easily. Much like pencil, there is a limit to the amount of pigment the paper can hold, and rubbing it in too vigorously can create blotchy patches that are hard to erase.

I use an eraser to clean up the excess pastel marks, and make sure to brighten the highlight on the rounded edge as well. As a final touch, I also accentuate some areas with a colored pencil, mostly to enhance the contrast between the light and dark side of the object.

Keep in mind that while marker ink is dry to the touch almost instantly, it can take about a day to dry completely, and any pencil added on top in the meantime can sometimes fade into it.

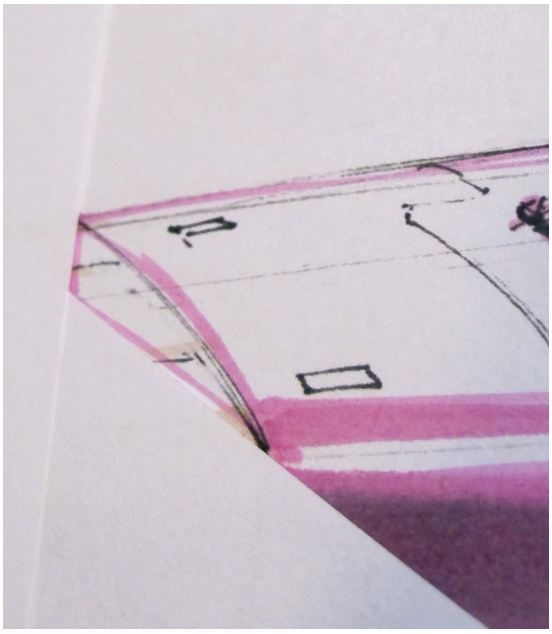
Covering any pencil or pastel with more marker also tends to seal the pigment in, making it impossible to erase afterwards.

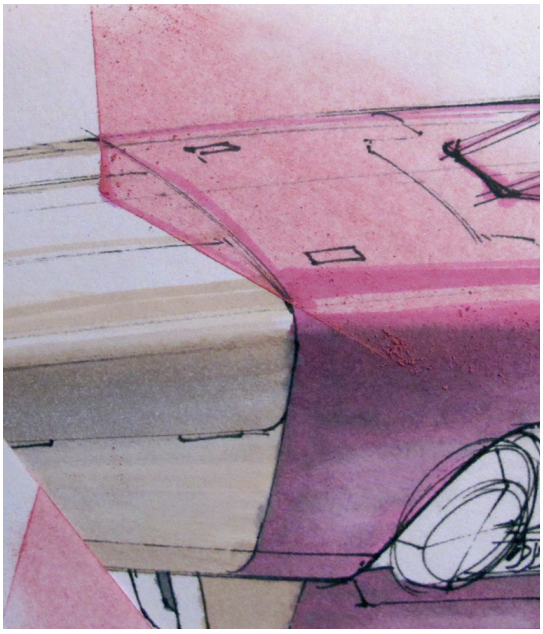
Coloring the bike

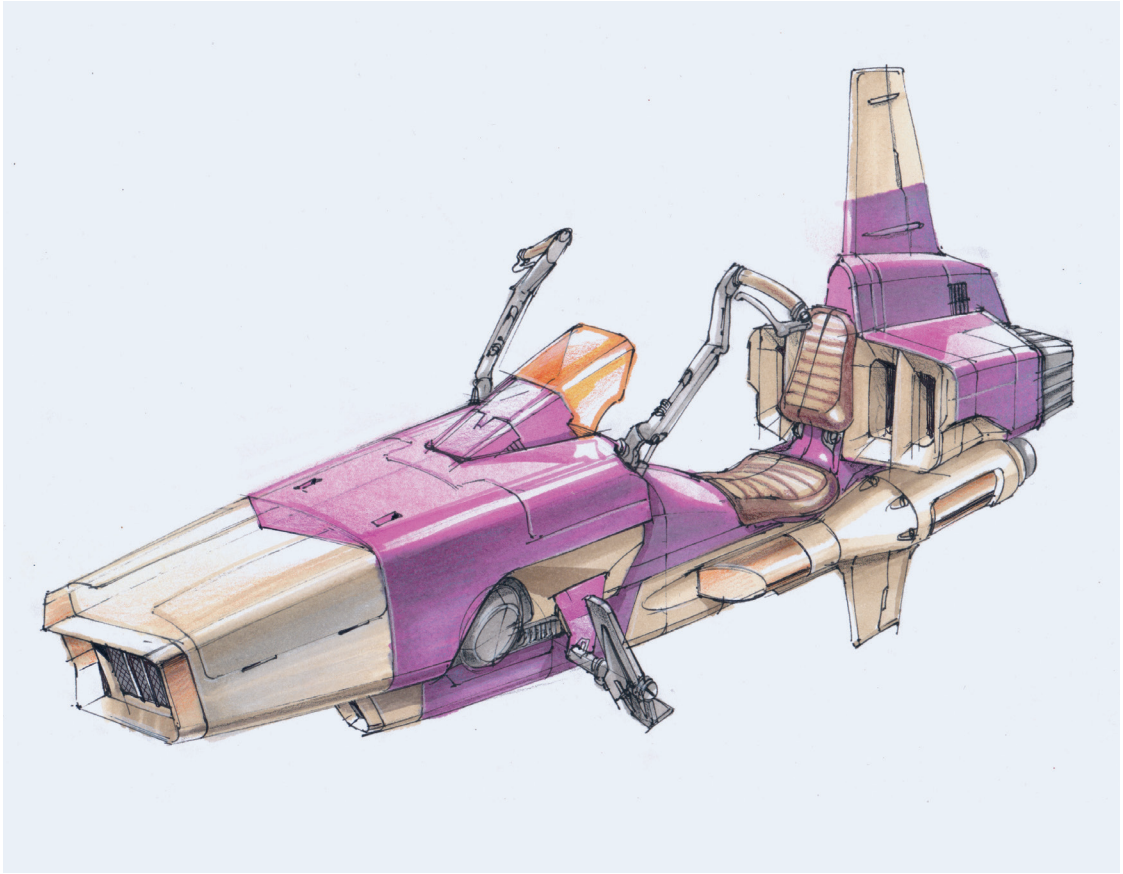
Using the steps just described, I proceed to apply some shading and color to the jet bike. I go for a two-tone color palette, focusing for now on the areas where I will be applying a layer of soft pastels.

Note that I use a Copic N3 to blend the heavily aged white- and pink-shaded sides together a little, and a darker hue for both to accentuate shadowed areas.

“Spend a few extra minutes to add some details and weathering”



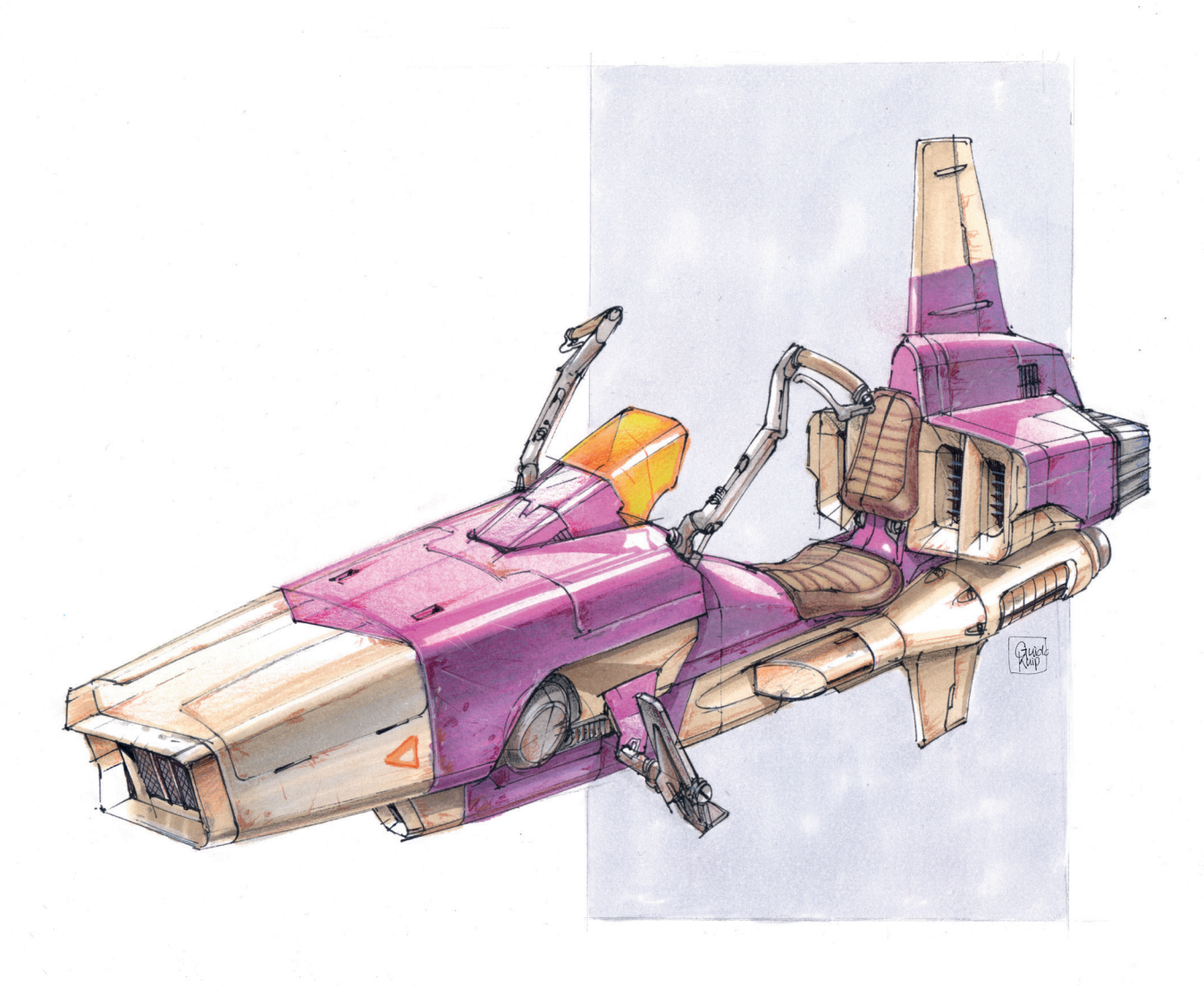




Top left
Using a quick mask for the pastel pass

Bottom left
Finishing with markers and a white pencil

Right
The final image, with a simple background



Adding pastel

I want the front end of the jet bike to be an aged white color, but I will be applying pink to the adjacent area. Rather than relying on an eraser to get rid of the excess pastel, I quickly mask the area I want to keep white by covering it with sheets of paper. Since I am shading a curved surface, rather than having the gradient run upwards, I apply it towards the right in the direction of the curve. After removing the paper, the excess pastel can be carefully cleaned off.

Finished colors

Having also applied pastel gradients to the rear part and the off-white areas, I finish the marker part of the rendering using the same techniques as before.

I use some white pencil to bring out parting lines and raised areas, and some black pencil to deepen some of the shadowed areas. Note the reflections of the windscreen and rear tail fin in the top surface of the hood and engine bay, done with the same Bright Orchid marker and then pushed back slightly with a white pencil.

At this point I could call the drawing finished and move on to the next concept or idea, but I like to spend a few more minutes adding some details and weathering.

The final image

To bring some extra life to the design, I add some weathering and rust patches with colored pencil, and darken some of the shadows by going over them with the same marker for a second (or third) layer to create more depth.

One way to quickly show your bike design is meant to hover is to add a shadow on the ground below, but there is not enough space on this paper, so I opt for a simple, airy background behind the design instead. By extending it below the ground plane of the jet bike, I can achieve a similar effect. And with that, the drawing is finished.

Born to draw

An interview with Sylwia Bomba

A pencil sketch
using a contour
drawing technique

Sylwia Bomba is a versatile concept artist with a love for traditional tools and skills. We speak to Sylwia about her inspirations in life, personal history with drawing, and words of advice for art students.

Q· Hello Sylwia, thanks for speaking to GRAPHITE! Could you introduce yourself to our readers with a bit about who you are and what you do?

A· Thank you for having me! I'm a concept artist, a drawing instructor, and a traveler. Currently I am working as a senior artist on a Marvel game for Neko Productions. I also teach anatomy to artists at CD Projekt RED and AnimSchool. I could spend plenty of words telling you who I am, but I hope my artwork will tell you even more!

Q· Did you always want to be an artist? When did you begin to pursue art as a career?

A· I started to draw as a little kid, before I had even started school. I loved to watch my dad sketching and creating astounding pieces of art. The way he moved his pencil hypnotized me irremediably. I felt like I was born to draw.

My dad saw my determination and decided to support me with all his heart. He became my first drawing teacher – the most precise, rigorous and patient one possible. He taught me that having too much self-satisfaction in your art can kill your ambition and turn it into a blind pride.

He didn't want my artwork to be limited by too much vanity. He used to ask me for more and more all the time. This is how my adventure with art began. I am thankful that my parents believed in me before I could even prove my ability, and I am still driven to please them.

Above
Some of my favorite tools

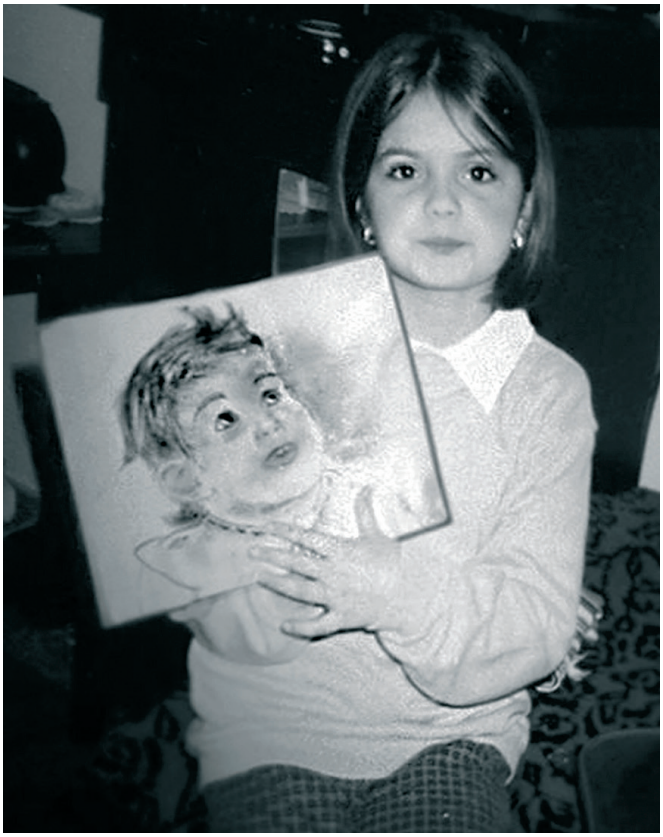
Top near right
2.5-year-old me with pencils

Top far right
9-year-old me with a pencil portrait I drew

Bottom near right
12-year-old me drawing portraits in my old studio

Bottom far right
Myself at work

All images © Sylwia Bomba

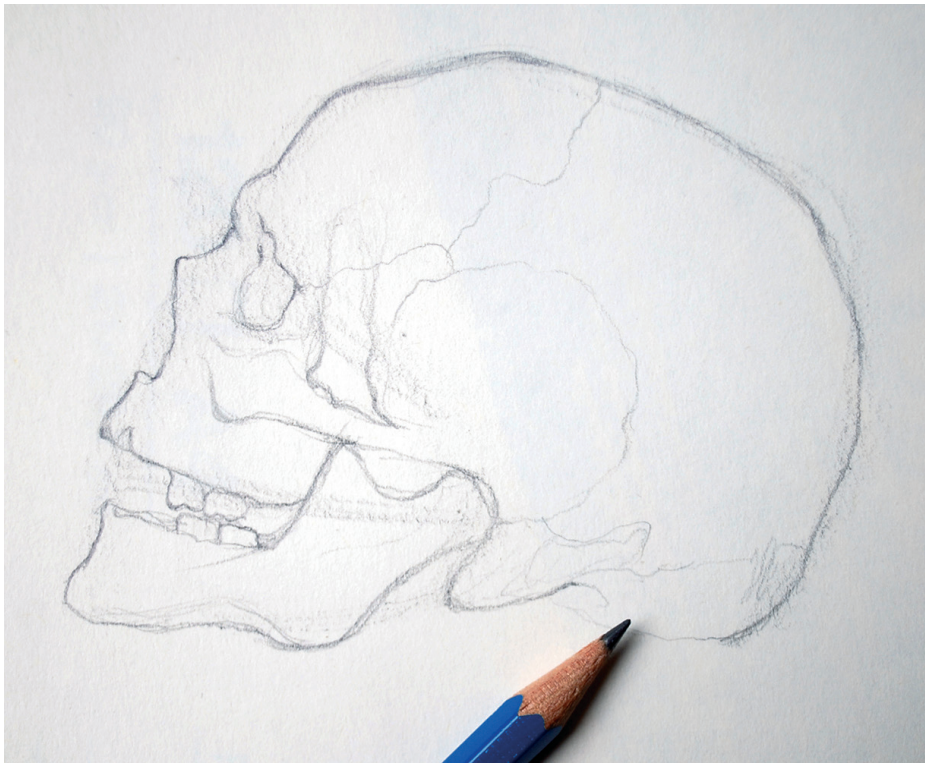


Q· Who or what inspires you?

A· I'm inspired by many factors. In my opinion, inspiration is not only a product of circumstances but also of our choices. The quieter I become, the more I can hear and feel. Listening to relaxing music or being amid nature inspires me a lot. Painting is not about just being "good," but being *real*. It's about finding the inspiration behind our fears and joys. I try to feed my inspiration with all emotions. Reading biographies about my favorite artists (like Caravaggio, Bouguereau, and Rembrandt) allows me to dig deeper into my soul and wake up my imagination. I am also inspired by the people who surround me. For example, the hard work of my talented friend Liron Topaz encourages me to work with more passion and dedication. It's amazing how much he influences my artistic life. I will always be thankful for it.

Q· What are your favorite tools or materials to work with?

A· I love challenging myself constantly. Using oil colors, especially on pieces of wood, is my favorite technique. Painting on a thirty-year-old piece of oak is like touching a little part of history. It's the most incredible and unique feeling. I like experimenting with different woods and discovering old masters' materials: for example, da Vinci used to work on oak, Rembrandt painted on mahogany, and Cranach often used beech wood.

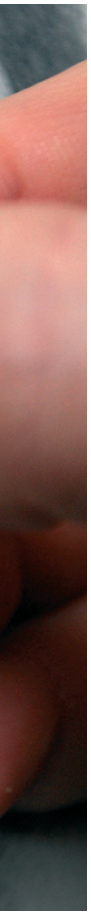


Top near right
I use a HB pencil to sketch the basic shapes of the skull

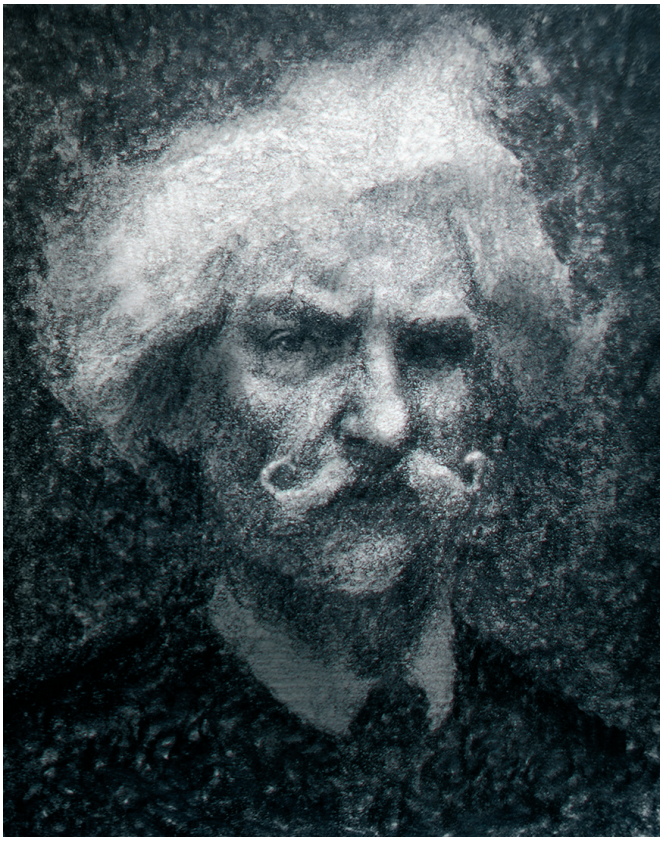
Top far right
Using a 4B pencil, I add a dark background and start painting basic tones

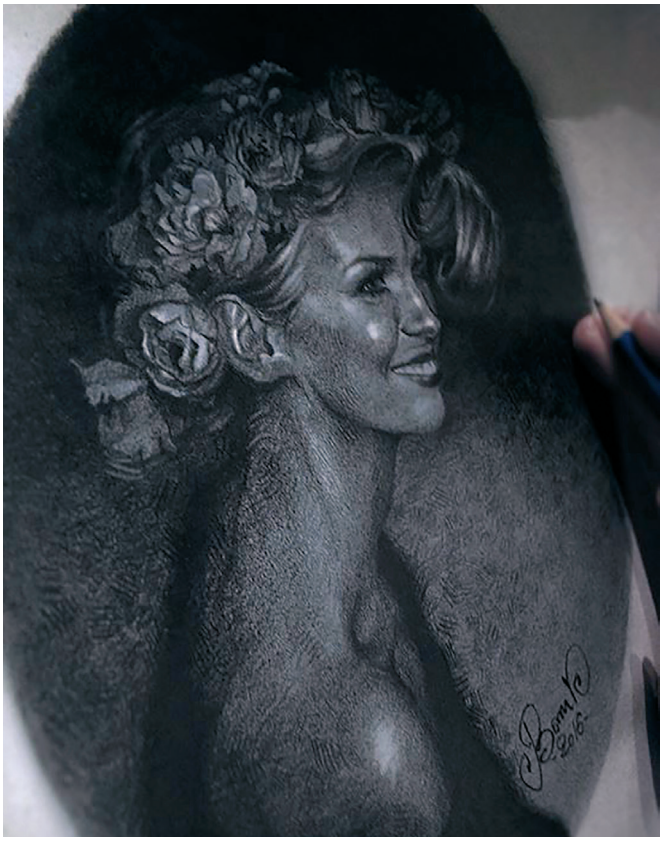
Bottom near right
I added highlights using a kneaded eraser

Bottom far right
The finished drawing



“It’s the joy of discovery that makes it worth the effort”





Q· What themes and subjects do you find yourself visiting often in your work?

A· I love painting portraits and focusing on facial expressions. These are the most common subjects in my art. To me, the human face is a commanding and at times complicated source of information. It is a vital part of understanding life and a coronation of the beauty of a human being. I love reading hidden stories behind different expressions; this is the most difficult but at the same time the most glorious touch an artist can give. Every expression is rooted fundamentally in the personality and temperament of the painter. It gives me a chance to discover who I really am. I also find it interesting to paint the relations between humans and animals. Each animal, insect, or flower has a different meaning in art. I admire the hidden meaning behind those subjects.

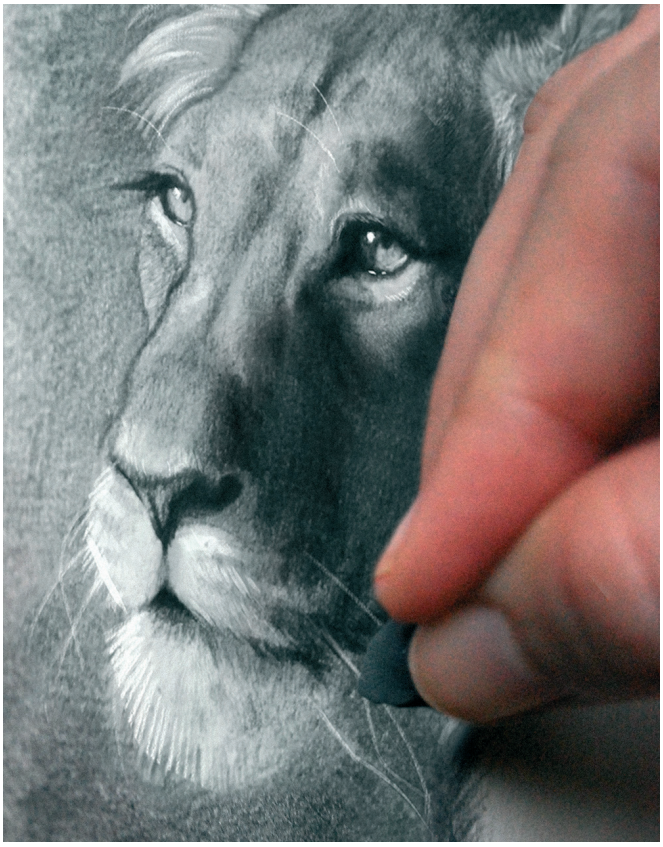
Q· You are very skilled with both digital and many traditional mediums. What advice would you offer to artists who want to diversify their skills and try something new?

A· Thank you very much! Being versatile helps an artist’s vision to grow faster. Art is a journey of pure discovery – we should not hesitate to push ourselves beyond the walls of our mind and our comfort zone. It’s the joy of discovery that makes it worth the effort. It shows your true passion for art. Showing versatility in different mediums is also highly appreciated by many studios, and understanding traditional arts helps us to be more efficient in the digital arts.

Above left
Small portrait of an old man using the scumbling technique

Above right
Portrait of a woman

Right
Portrait of a little boy



“Seeking popularity may win the sprint, but a true love for art wins marathons”

Top far left
Using an HB pencil, I sketch the basic shapes

Top near left
Again, I use a 4B pencil to add a background and darker tones

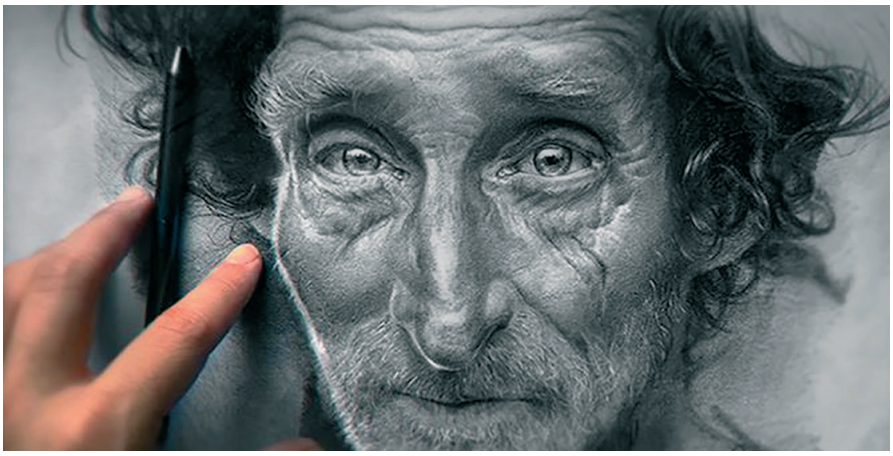
Bottom far left
I continue to add more details and fur with the 4B pencil

Bottom near left
I add highlights with a kneaded eraser

Right
The finished drawing

Q· How do you think digital media and the internet have changed things for students and new artists today?

A· The internet allows students to share their works with the whole world and get a fast response from others. We can easily download tutorials and e-books, or follow our idols. We don’t necessarily need to go to a foreign school or leave our country to work in studios that are located too far away from us. This is the beauty of the internet. Unfortunately it has darker sides as well. Many people nowadays look for shortcuts to be popular on social media without any effort. It kills the real cause of creating. Young artists become more competitive to impress others and less true to themselves. In my opinion, seeking popularity may win the sprint, but a true love for art wins marathons.



> "You don't need to attend the best schools. You can fulfill your potential with hard work, perseverance, love, and the truth"

Q· What are some valuable lessons you have learned, both as a tutor and a student?

A· In this journey you need to follow your true emotions, show your true face, and be prepared for someone not liking what you do. Difficulties shape our existence and inform us; some changes may be painful but they are necessary for success. The truth is the right and only path. If you try to realize your dreams with a false version of yourself, your future won't be real. Don't let that happen.

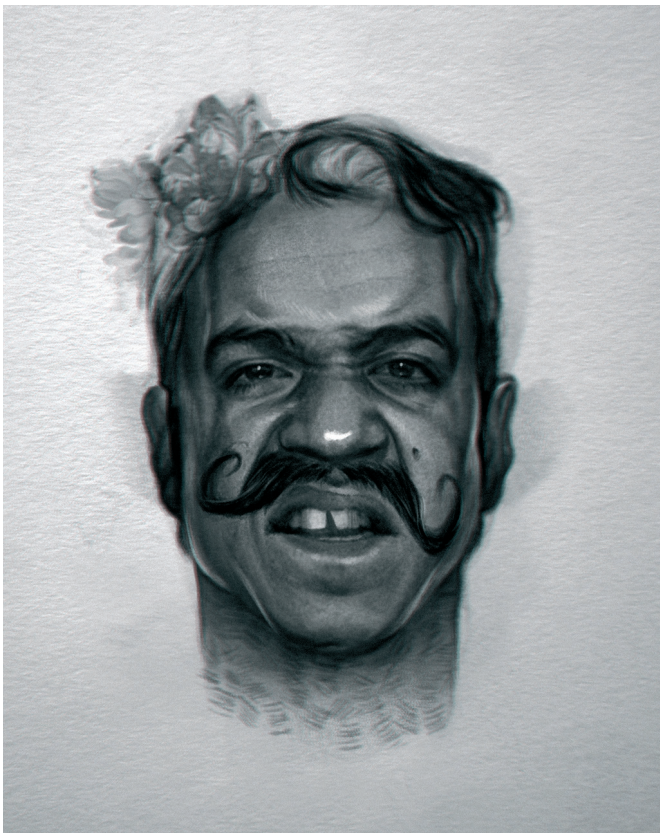
I also learned that being determined can make the seemingly impossible more plausible. With determination, you attain a better version of yourself, while the opposite promotes self-satisfaction which says you're good enough now to take a rest. I have seen many good students destroy their potential with pride. Do not be afraid of failure – it's a test that separates the hard workers from the dreamers. You don't need to attend the best schools. You can fulfill your potential with hard work, perseverance, love, and the truth.

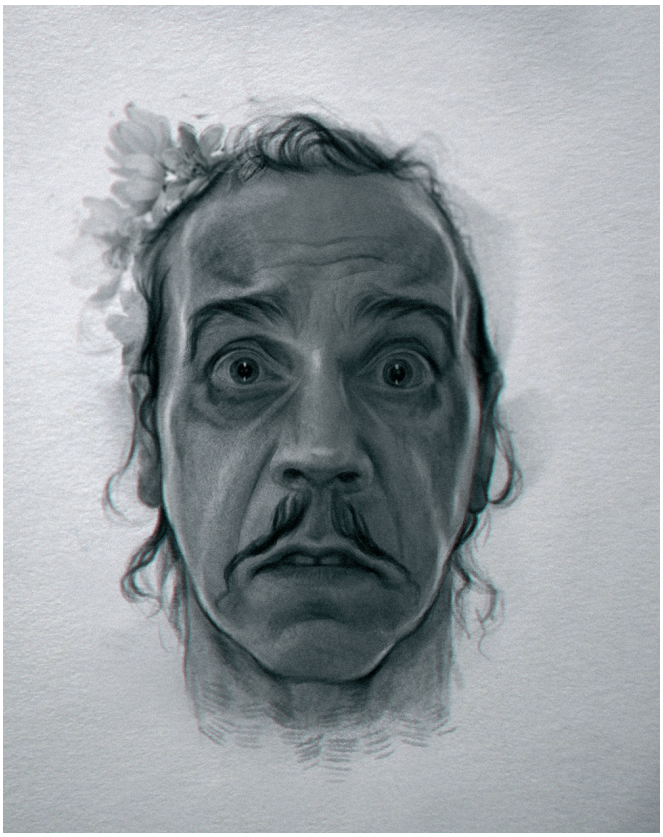
Q· How do you spend your free time?

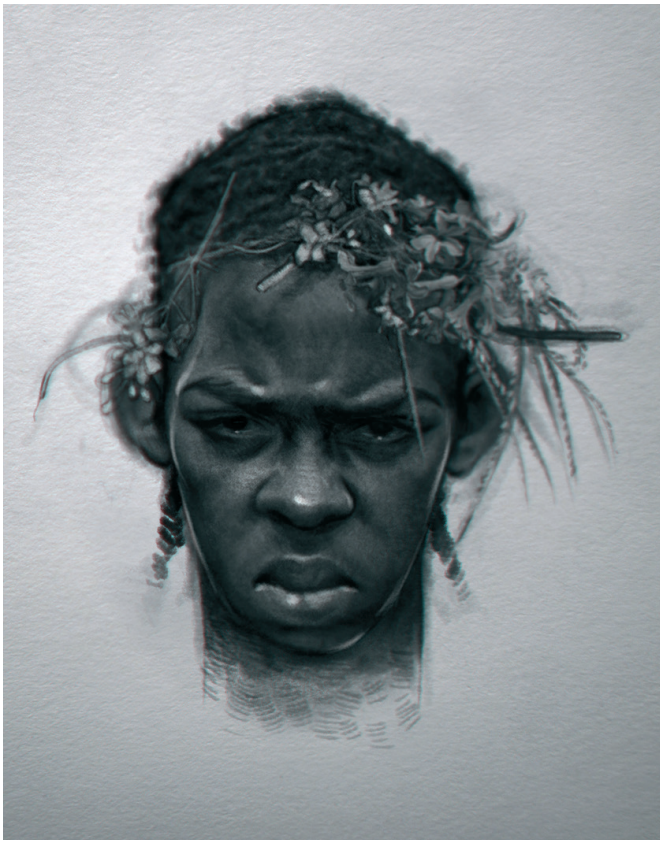
A· I like to dedicate my free time to art too. After work I love to paint with oils and sculpt in 3D or with clay. I recently began designing a little cartoon house, creating it at a tiny scale. I started from thumbnails, then made some exploration sketches to define the style of the windows, door, and walls. Now I'm collecting little pieces of wood to sculpt small decorations with. It's so much fun! There are so many unknown mysteries I would love to discover during my life. I just feed my curiosity with whatever I can. I always try to have an open mind and take each day as a new challenge.

Left
Portrait of an old man. Pencil on paper

Right
Portraits created for the book *The Artist's Guide to the Anatomy of the Human Head*







INK

Sketching concepts in ink with Richard Anderson

Ink is challenging to master, but perfect for exploring dynamic shapes and spontaneous ideas. In this article, illustrator and concept artist Richard Anderson shares his favorite techniques for pen, brush, and ink wash.

I am an artist living in London, and I have been working in games, films, publications, and advertising for over ten years. I started my journey as an artist by moving to Seattle to study animation, where I began to focus closely on traditional drawing and foundation skills.

I started going to life drawing classes at least twenty hours a week, experimenting with different techniques and mediums. Seattle was a good place to meet like-minded artists who inspired and influenced me in some of what I will be showing you today.

I will be going over some different techniques and processes using one of my favorite mediums: ink washes. Ink washes offer an exciting way to draw and create values.

I prepare and organize my inks by mixing different proportions of India ink and water in several containers. I just use old coffee jars! I label and number these jars as the values change from lightest to darkest. Here I will be using watercolor brushes and shades of 30-40% gray (more water than ink), 65% gray, and 90-100% gray (the darkest). Feel free to experiment with mixing your own inks and use whatever shades seem fitting.

Ink wash thumbnails

I want to start with a technique for creating characters which I find to be useful and fun. I like to start with a large page so I can explore a variety of shapes and compare them all at the end. I will be using watercolor paper, a medium-sized round brush, and my 30-40% ink jar; I like to use a light ink wash at the start, as the low contrast on the paper helps your brain to "see" all sorts of shapes.

When thumbnailing, I begin with a rough idea of what character I am creating; in this case, a musketeer-type character. Then I give myself rules to follow.

For example: I use eight brushstrokes for the first line of thumbnails, then six strokes on the second line, then three or four strokes on the third line. This helps me to move quickly and not get caught up. It's all about getting those stagnated images and ideas out of my head, and developing new ones.

When this first layer has dried, I use my 90-100% ink wash and a small, precise brush to start drawing the details I "see" in the abstract brushstrokes I have created. Here I think about sizes, silhouettes, and individuality.

After all the thumbnails have been detailed and finished, I can now see them all next to each other on one page, making it easier for me to pick out the strongest character designs to develop or revisit in future projects.

“It’s all about getting those stagnated images and ideas out of my head”

Left
My workspace and easel, and some of the tools used for this project

Above
Here you can see I have set up three rows of thumbnails using minimal strokes

Near right
This helps me to warm up and get images out of my head before I move on to getting new ideas down

Far right
I use a limited number of strokes to find unique shapes and finish quickly

These pages

The finished page, showing a range of characters and shapes to compare to each other. All the small thumbnails help to narrow down which characters stand out and are worth developing further © Richard Anderson

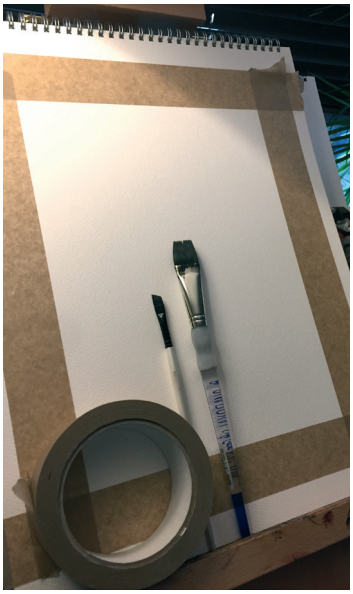
ARTIST'S TIPS

Light to dark

When working with ink, whether markers, brushes, or ink washes, one rule that I find very helpful is to work from the lightest to darkest tones. I do not always follow it, but if you are just starting out with ink, I highly recommend it.

Get creative!

When I was starting to get more serious about my craft, I was often too impatient and lazy to study and research techniques properly, and in some ways this helped me to develop my ideas and style. I didn't want to research and find out how other artists worked! All I wanted to do was jump in, get my hands dirty, and start playing with different things to see how they responded. This approach was not time-efficient, but it helped me to discover a look or style that, in a way, was what the searching was all about. So get creative, experiment, get out of your comfort zone, make bad drawings. Not everything you make needs to be shown online or put on the wall, and hopefully it will all lead you to discover something of your own.



Using different brush angles

Now I will show you a different technique, in which I use masking tape to frame my "canvas." I use this approach quite frequently, as it helps me to stay within the frame and provides a clean border for the finished illustration.

I will also be using my darkest ink, a ¼" Daler Rowney angle shader brush, and a ¾" Royal SG700 flat brush. The angle shader brush I use is my favorite; it provides a quick way to make thick and thin strokes, along with interesting textures when the brush gets drier and the stiff bristles begin to separate.

This technique requires you to have a confident stroke, which only comes with practice. Using the point and edge of the brush, I start by describing the character's head first, using thick and thin lines; the head helps me to establish the scale of everything else in the scene.

As you would think, if I mess up, there is no going back! But it's important to remember that it's totally okay to make mistakes. You should make mistakes and try new things. It will help you improve drastically as an artist.

I use scrap paper to take a little ink off my brush, which gives more texture and control to my strokes. As I start to finalize my sketch, I use this hatching method (see above) to add additional texture, shape, and form to my final image.

Far top left
Choosing brushes and framing my canvas with masking tape for a clean edge

Middle top left
I like to start a character sketch by indicating their facial expression and scale of the head

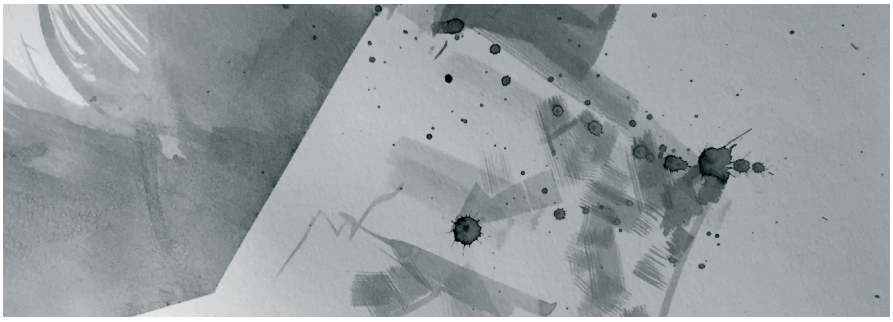
Near left
I fill out the character and describe shapes by angling my brush to create thick and thin lines

Far bottom left
Use different angles of your brush to achieve textures and patterns in your ink brush drawings

Right
Before removing the masking tape, I use it as a guide to draw a single thin line to frame the character

© Richard Anderson

"This technique requires you to have a confident stroke, which only comes with practice"



Ink wash and masking tape

I start a sketch like this with my 30-40% ink and Royal SG 4000-2 brush. This is a smaller round brush that has a slight stiffness and fine tip that helps me get the details I want to achieve. I begin by sketching out the basic forms, folds, and shadows.

Then I use the 65% gray to further some of the details and focal points of the drawing. I let the first pass of ink dry a bit before working over the top again. This is where I want the most fine, detailed strokes. Applying the darkest tones at this mid-point of the sketch is not always appropriate, but I'm confident enough in this drawing that I start using the 90-100% ink to finalize and bring out more details and shadows.

Masking is the next step; using regular masking tape works fine. This is a great way to get clean, hard lines where you want the lightest parts of your image to show. Here I want to make a bold, clean shape for the character's cape/cowl. I also block in small, torn pieces of tape to describe the shape of his right boot.

Using my 65% gray ink wash and ¾" flat brush, I make strokes along the edge of the masking tape. I let them dry quickly, then move on to more shapes that I want to bring out. It's almost like drawing with the tape, thinking of broad, light shapes. Once everything is dry, I remove the masking tape and start to apply the final touches; I flick the head of the brush to get a spatter of ink wash as a texture, add a few more defining strokes, and call it finished.

Far top left
I like to start by using my lightest ink wash to sketch in my character using two different shades

Middle top left
I start to use pieces of masking tape to define shapes and create hard edges that will contrast with my brushstrokes

Near left
I go back over the sketch with a larger brush that adds contrast to the positive and negative shapes

Far bottom left
Banging or flicking my wet brush makes splatters that add texture and a grime to the drawing

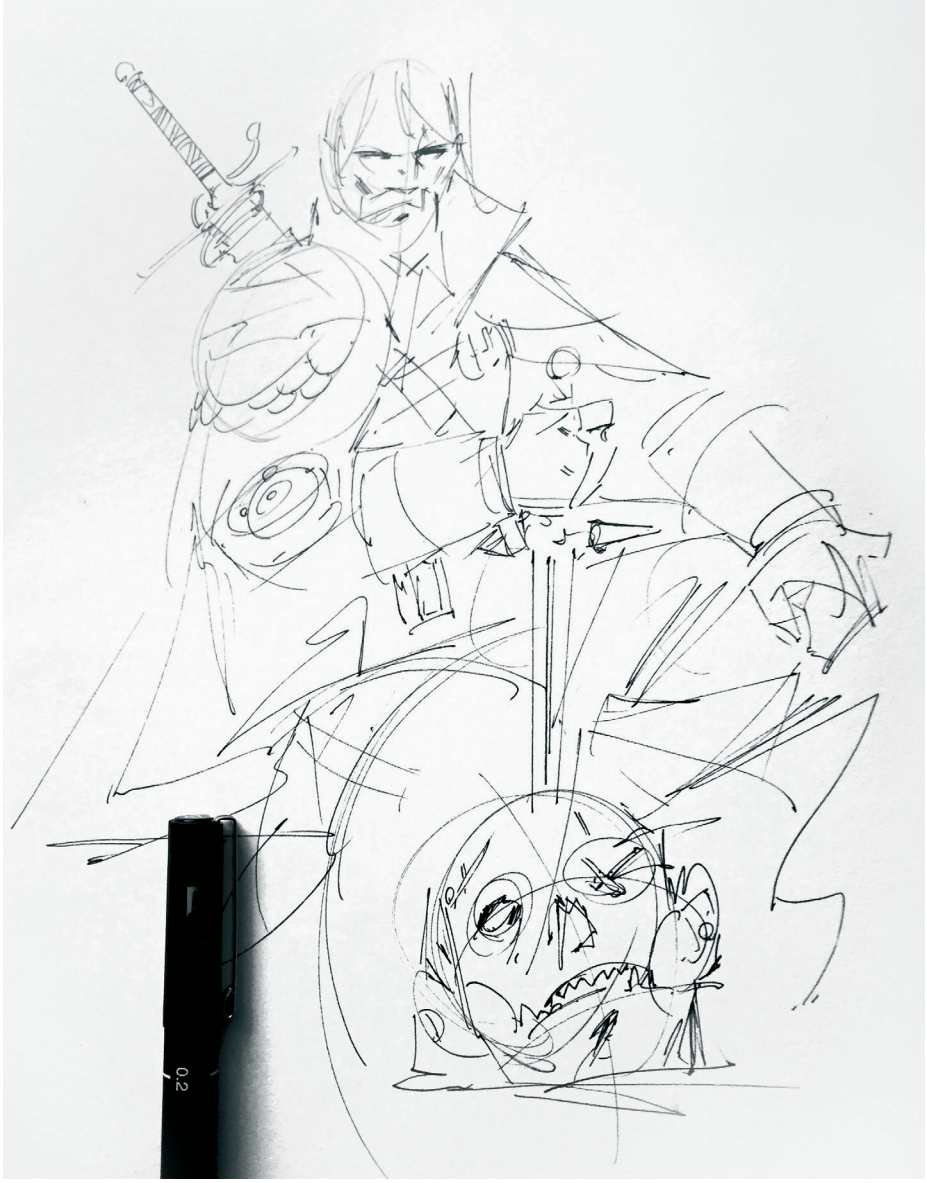
Right
I remove all the masking tape, wait for the ink to dry, then add a background and border by using a masking tape frame as we covered in the previous technique
© Richard Anderson

Fineliner and ink wash

This last technique is one that I enjoy and am often drawn to. There is something so lively and fresh about sketching with just a pen. Starting with a 0.2 mm waterproof black fineliner, I fill out most of my sketch.

Sketching with a pen takes practice, but it is a good way to develop confident line work. Once I finish the basic loose sketch, I move on to blocking in shapes and shadows with my 30-40% ink wash. Much like the first technique, I let the initial sketch guide me but not control me. The brush has a life of its own, adding a distinct look on top of the sketch.

Once the light ink wash is dry, I move on to the deeper shadows and materials, using my 90%-100% ink wash, until I achieve the desired finish.



Top near right
I start with a 0.2 mm fineliner to make a loose, lively sketch

Bottom near right
I start to block in shapes using my lightest ink wash, establishing clothing and forms

Bottom middle right
I finalize more of the drawing with my 90-100% ink wash

Far right
Before removing the masking tape, I use the lighter ink wash to establish a loose background for the character

© Richard Anderson

AMBUSHED!

A narrative illustration project with Eduardo Vieira | Story by Adam J. Smith

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"After a day spent trekking through dark forests and fighting off giant spiders, it was down-time for the adventurers. They set camp next to the hot springs of Eltish Vale and stretched their limbs, placing helmets on stakes and shrugging armor from shoulders. The elf watched on disapprovingly as the dwarves bounded into the lake, shedding layers, while the halflings unburdened the cart of its ale cask. The wizard used his staff to create a campfire, and in its glow a hog roast slowly turned. And in the darkness of the trees a creature lurked, firelight flashing dark intent in its eyes."

The Elfish Vale
'17

Join character designer and illustrator Eduardo Vieira as he creates a narrative fantasy scene in a fun, dynamic style, using a range of sketching and inking techniques.

Left
My weapons of choice: paper, pencils, ballpoints, gel and ink pens, brush pens, and markers

Right
Get a feel for what you will do. Research and give yourself time for preliminary sketches

Materials

With some flash fiction as my starting point, I am going to break down my work process: how I approach an illustration, my tools and how and why I use them, what matters in my decisions, and how I combine everything to create a final piece that complements the text, inviting viewers to travel through this tale.

I believe that every toolset carries a bit of history within it. It shows the paths chosen by the artist, and what results they expect from their work. I have always had a fondness for line work with touches of color; I perceive my work more as colored drawings than paintings, so I have built my toolset around this main idea, as you can see above.

I always carry a sketchbook in which to experiment with new tools and techniques, familiarizing myself with their strengths and weaknesses, so I know how to use them to produce better and faster work.

I think every artist should do this. I encourage you to experiment often, in order to build a toolset that is suited to your specific needs.

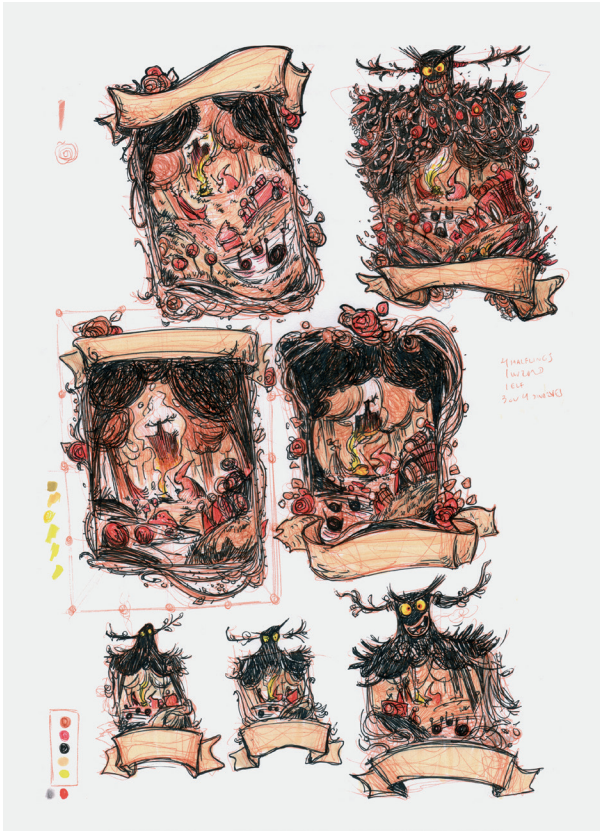
Planning

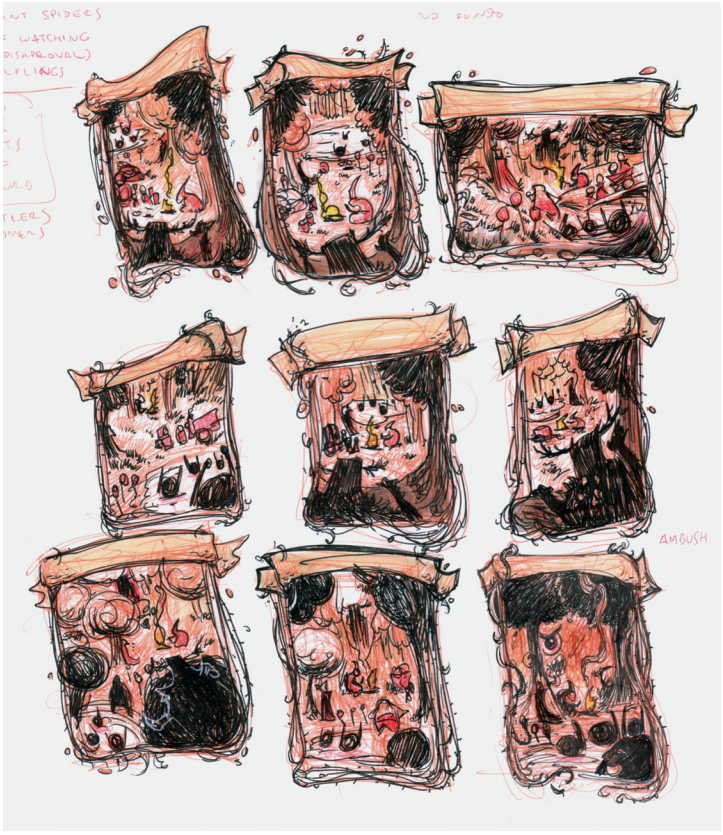
When starting a new illustration, the first thing I do is make sure I understand the image that will be depicted. I read the text, imagining the scene and considering which are the important things about it, and trying to understand what is taking place.

Take notes of your ideas and make small research doodles; try to understand the scene as a whole and all the elements building it. Here I am working from a fantasy story, depicting an eclectic group of bounty-hunting adventurers in the middle of a forest, about to cross paths with a mysterious creature.

The moment I want to try and capture is that "calm before the storm": something bad is about to happen, two or three minutes from now. My aim here is to make a scene that shows a relaxing moment, at the same time keeping the viewer's attention locked by the imminent tension.

In my early thumbnails, you can see some options with the mysterious creature in the foreground plane, hiding behind the trees, with the adventurers in the background. I also try to interpret the scene from the viewpoint of the adventurers, having them in the foreground and the creature in the background. I create options from these two



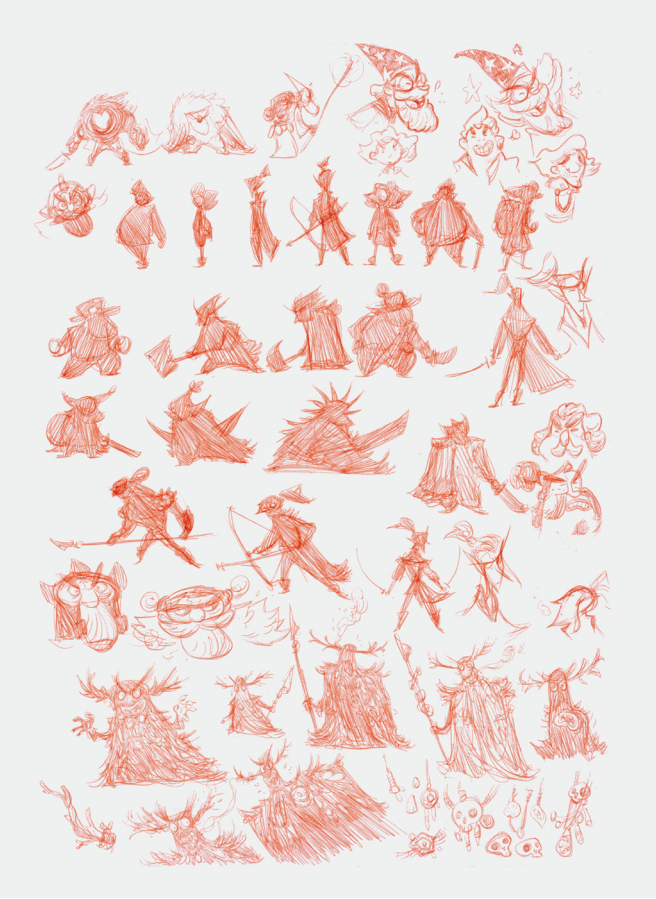


base ideas, as you can see above. I decide to focus on a thumbnail showing the scene from the adventurers' angle, with the "camera" next to them.

The other option would create a certain emotional distance between the group and the viewer, as the camera would be right behind the creature, and this emotional departure is something I do not want. For the colors, I have chosen a palette that is pleasing and warm, giving an autumnal feeling which goes well with a forest scene.

Thumbnails

The longest and most difficult stage of an illustration, for me, is always the beginning: researching and organizing. Since everything is in an open state, anything can happen. On one hand, this is poetically painful – it's always an uncomfortable measure of yourself and your abilities as an artist – but on the other hand, it is also incredibly fun, because you can test ideas freely without worrying too much. Nothing is final here! I usually sketch lots of thumbnails, as it is my way of exploring ideas and designs. I don't worry too much about the time I spend at this stage, or how many drawings I have to make, as long as I solve all the necessary questions and find solutions to any doubts I have. This illustration will show quite a complex scene, so it warrants a greater amount of planning.



Character sketches

I also undertake some separate character research. I sketch thumbnails, silhouettes, poses, and parts of the bigger picture, and also try to draw some of the necessary elements of the scene. Above you can see my sketches of the adventurers and some of their accessories. Spending time on this exploration stage helps me to understand the task as a whole, ensuring that I can control the process from beginning to end without losing my way.

Transferring the thumbnail

Now I will transfer my chosen thumbnail to a larger sheet of paper, keeping the characteristics that made me choose it over the others: strong and simple shapes, overall composition, spatial relationships, and so on. When I transfer drawings using a light box, I find that my work can become stiff, due to the fact that I'm "redoing" the lines. There's no way to capture the same energy as that first sketch. In this case, I decide to make the transfer freehand, drawing a grid around the thumbnail, and another grid on the blank sheet. This allows me to retain the thumbnail's composition and proportions while still having some freedom and spontaneity with the final sketch, which is something that I care very much about.

Refining the sketch

Here I use an orange ballpoint pen to refine my lines over the pencil sketch. This allows me to make a tighter sketch right before the inking stage, defining all the necessary details and cleaning up the base pencil lines with a kneaded eraser, without worrying too much about losing some essential lines in the final sketch. The orange hue of the pen also starts to establish the warm palette I want in the final illustration, and leaves a beautiful texture that will show through after the drawing is inked.

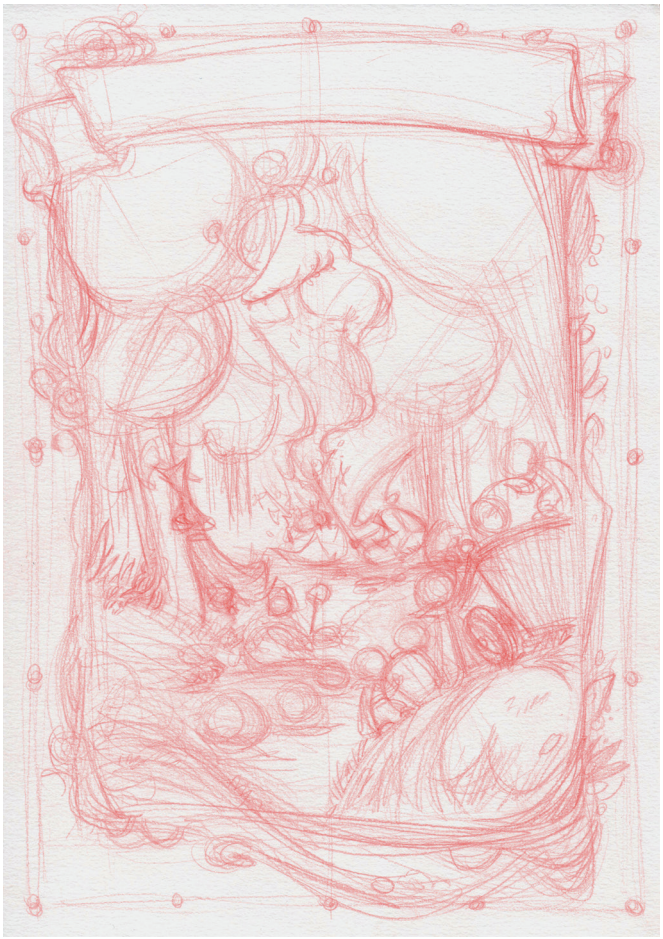
Ink with care

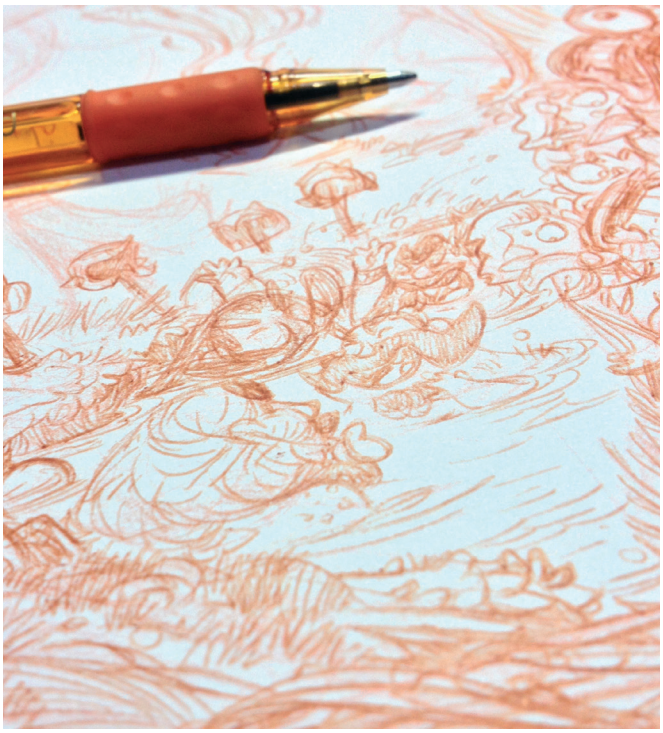
Inking can be a merciless process which does not allow for second thoughts or hesitation. It is best to have a very clear sketch before inking. This does not necessarily need to be a tightly drawn sketch, but "clear" in the sense that it leaves you no doubt of what you're going to ink specifically. Avoid confusing and pointless lines which can cause you to make mistakes while inking.

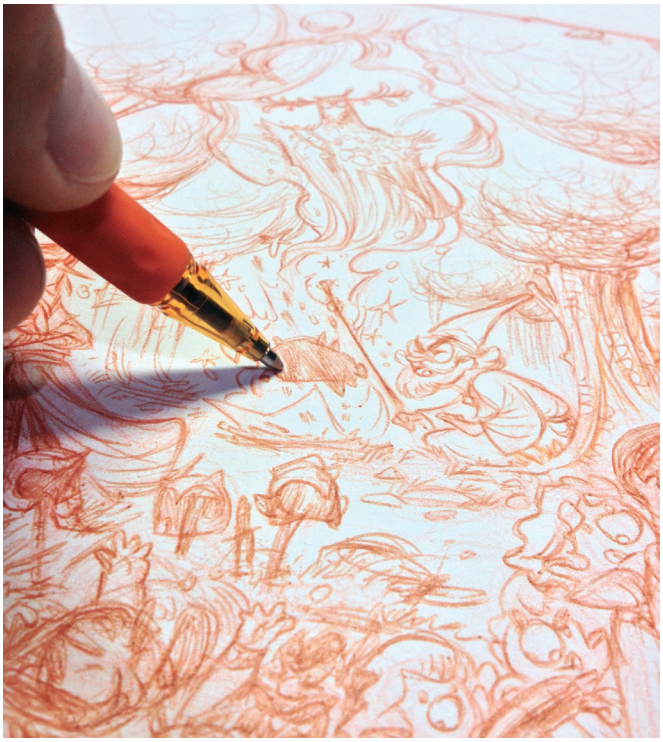
Above
Researching characters and elements of the scene

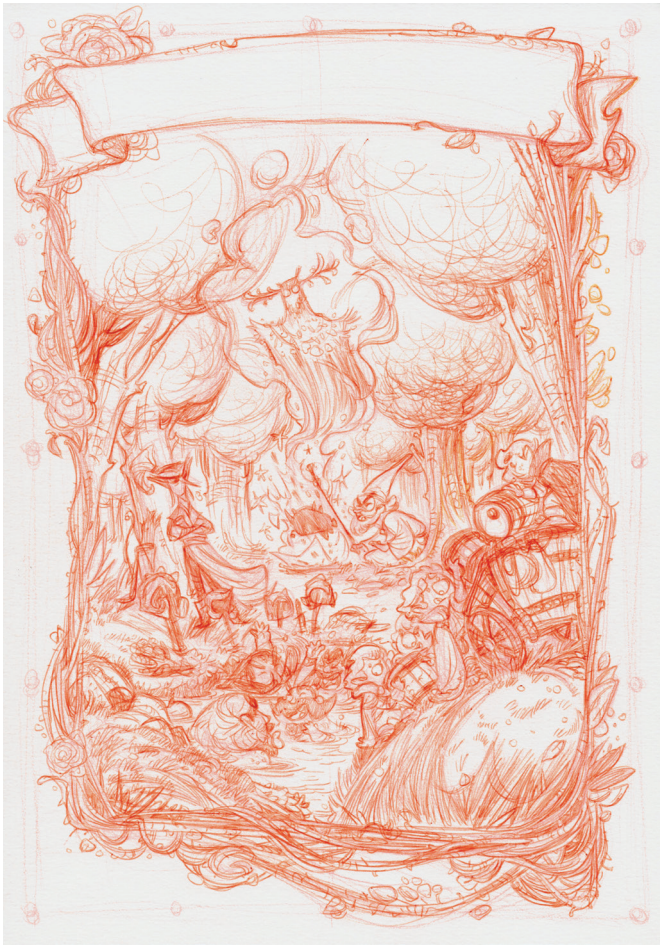
Top near right
Transferring the thumbnail to larger paper using a grid

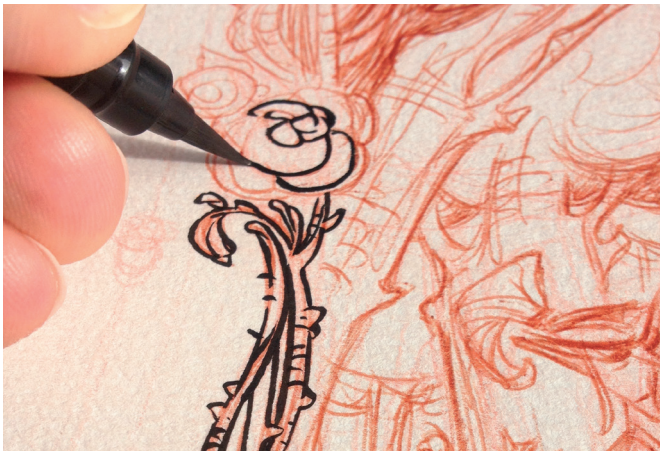
Top far and bottom right
Using an orange ballpoint pen to define the sketch

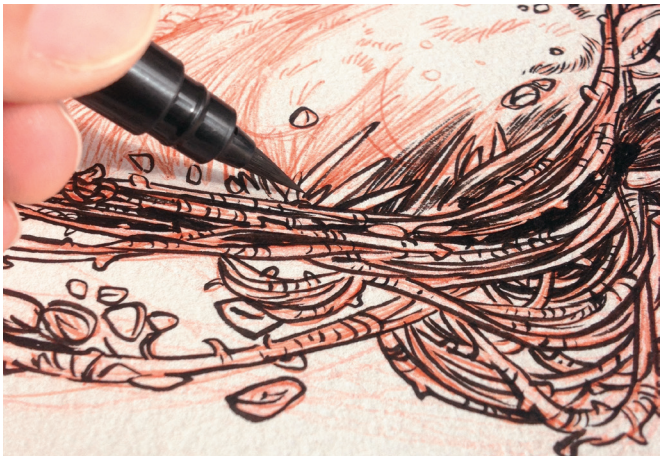


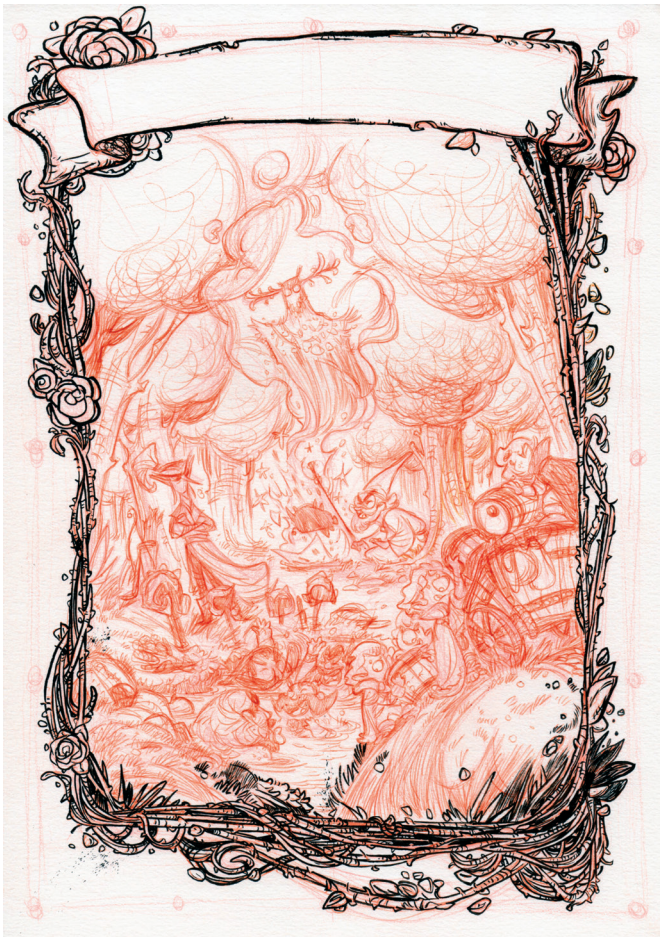












The frame

Using a brush pen, I start to ink the frame. This is one of the key points of the illustration, consisting of flowers, leaves, thorns, and branches – all forest elements. It works as a metaphorical representation of the quietness (flowers and leaves) and danger (thorns and branches) that are intertwined at that exact moment, wrapping around the whole scene.

Above the frame is a scroll that will contain the name of the story's setting. I think the frame creates the feeling of an old book illustration, reminding me of the black-and-white illustrated books of fables and tales I used to have in my parents' home. I love how the inking turns out here.

My inking process

I usually start inking things from the outside to the inside, and from the foreground to the background. This allows me to think about depth, the division of the scene, line weights, and the amount of detailing. This is important if you work with brush pens or brushes, which are capable of a vast range of line weights.

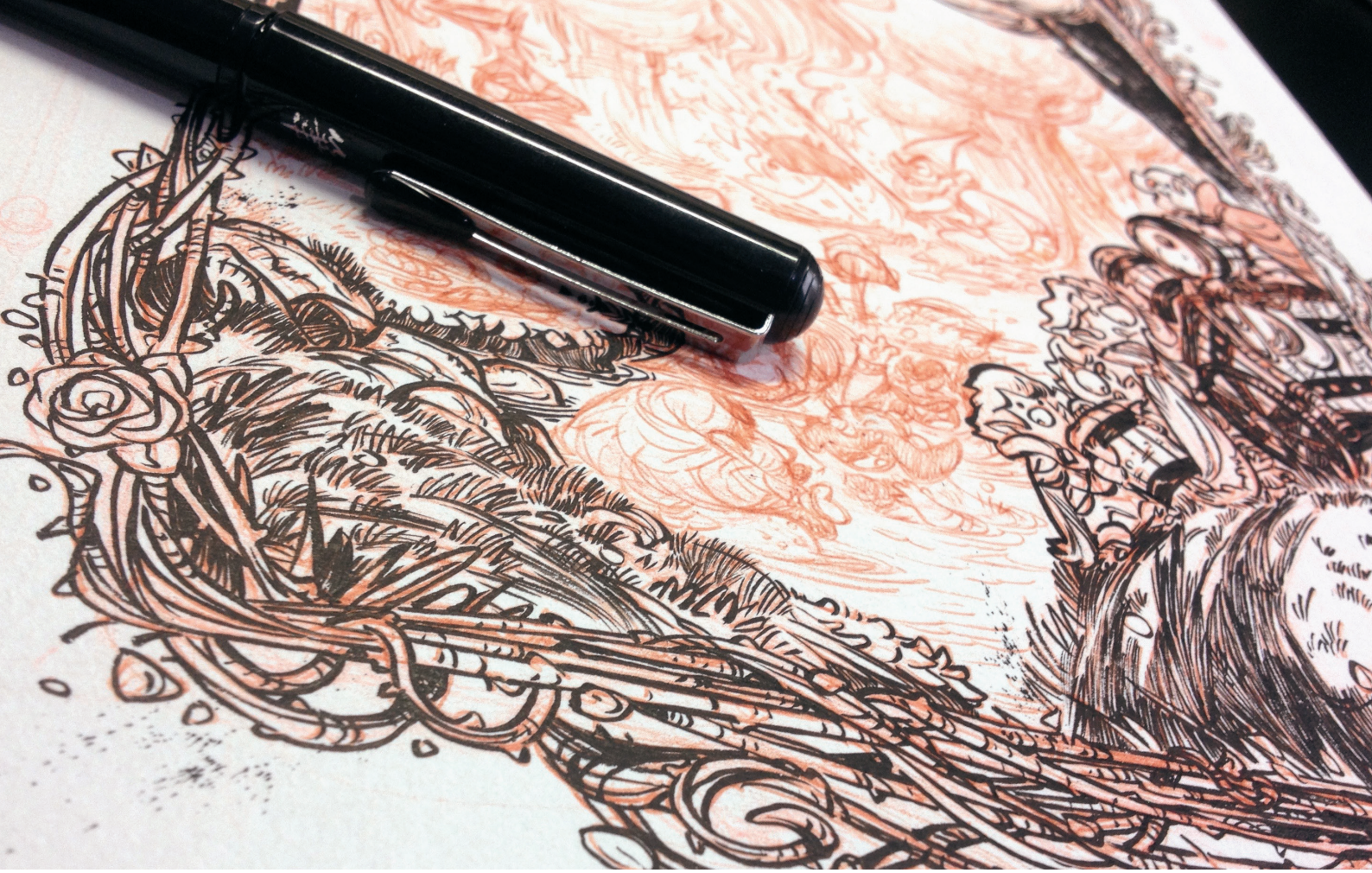
There can be a lot of going back and forth at the end of the process to make revisions and line adjustments – which is completely normal – but if you plan your inking with these ideas in mind, you will have far less trouble in the end.

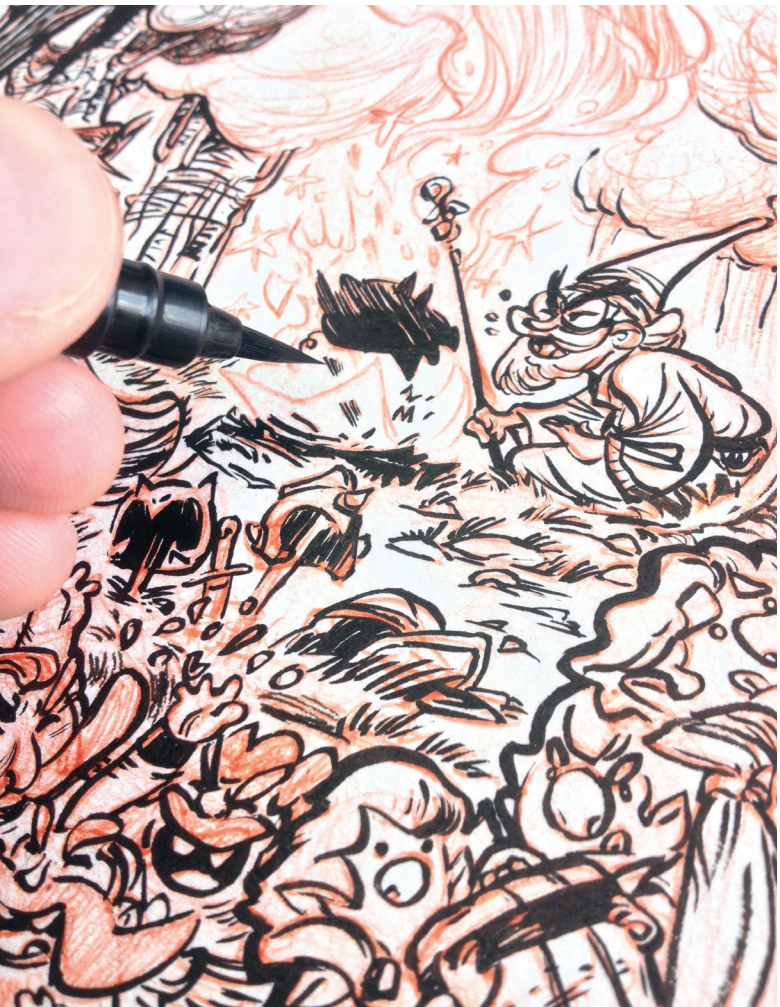
For this particular drawing, I start inking the scene that is closest to the viewer, which is the halflings unloading the ale casks. Then I move across to the lakeside in the bottom-left corner, and then on to the big foreground trees sitting at the top of the image, right below the scroll.

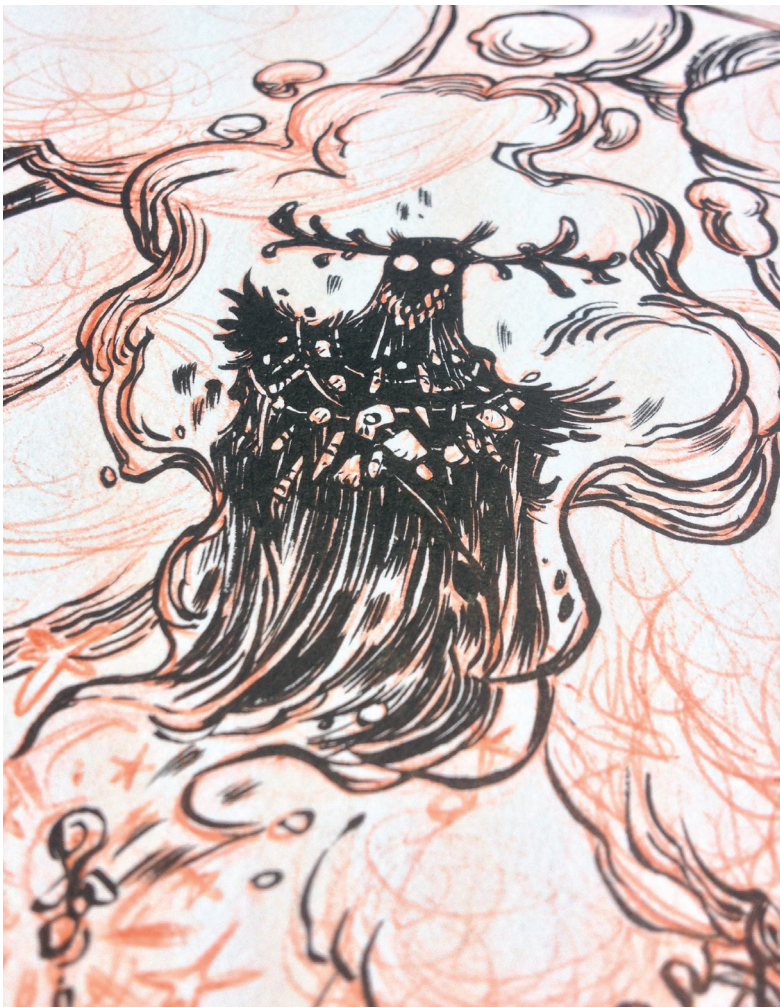
After finishing the foreground, I move on to the middle- and background planes, where I use thinner lines and a lower amount of detail. The more distant planes have a simplified aspect, like shallow depth of field in a photograph; obviously, photographs do not have line contours like a drawing, but this is an abstraction of the same concept.

Above
Inking the frame first

Right
Inking the image from foreground to background







Adding looser lines

So far I've made lot of calculated, cleanly inked lines – but now it's time to let the pen wander without worrying too much! After a considerable amount of inking with the brush pen, your hand is likely stiff from the tension of that specific task. When this happens to me, I take a short break or quick warm-up session, making random lines with a pen or pencil on a separate sheet of paper to release the tension. But in this image, I can use this "warm-up" to my favor by applying it to the drawing itself. I use a brush pen and fineliner to scribble in the treetops, which gives them depth and also highlights the creature hidden in the smoke coming from the hog roast. Making the surrounding trees darker helps to bring the smoke forward visually.

One of the beautiful aspects of drawing is constantly balancing things to give the image life. While my ink lines are given an organic feel by the brush pen, they are still very structured, and these wiggly lines are a perfect counterpoint with a different life and energy to them. When you give a lively, textured quality to an image like this, it feels as if the whole scene vibrates.

Adding base tones

Now I will start to work on the image's base tones. First I use a gel pen to create some vivid orange lines around the shadowy creature,

emanating towards the wizard's staff which is conjuring a spell. This helps to establish the area as the focal point of the piece. Then I start to add some more loose, scribbly lines over the whole image, using two orange ballpoint pens.

I could do all of this "underpainting" with grays, but that can end up looking dull. My aim here is to define the basic color placement, white areas, and contrasts that will give the whole image volume and make it start to "pop."

Refining the colors

I change to a red ballpoint pen, but continue working the same way on the image, using random, squiggly lines. I work on emphasizing some elements distributed around the image, making them stand out: some leaves, flowers, and petals on the frame; the hair, beards, and freckles on the dwarves; the elf, wizard, and halflings' clothes. Spreading these specific details over the image helps to give it rhythm, and to define all the points of interest.

These pages
After inking the lines, I start to build up tones using orange ballpoint pens, with a gel pen and red ballpoint for details

Shading with markers

Using a mix of brush pen markers (in yellow, pale yellow, orange, and brown tones), I start to work over the ballpoint base colors, giving more contrast to the image. I focus especially on the foreground plane to separate it more, increasing the definition of specific points, like the halflings' casks and cart, the tree trunks, and clothing details.

I also add tone to some areas that are lacking energy. Pale yellow is a great color for this: it is a light, non-aggressive color, not requiring me to make compensations elsewhere in the image to balance it out, but enough to show through and give more depth to the image. It also works well as a blending or unifying color when applied over other hues, which is why I prefer to use it after making my ballpoint scribbles, rather than using it first as a base.

Highlights and details

I am coming towards the end of the illustration, with everything complete in terms of inking and color. Now I want to add the juicy details that will make the image look even better. With a sharp white pen, I start to render little details like grass, contours, and highlights, making them pop out.

The white highlights can stand out brightly against the rest of the illustration, sometimes too much; after waiting for the ink to dry, I carefully apply one of the orange pens over the white marks to soften them. This brings the tone closer to the rest of the illustration's palette, creating volume without looking too stark and exaggerated.

Typography

The last remaining thing to add is the title. "The Eltish Vale" is the setting mentioned in the short text that inspired the illustration, so I will add this to the frame's scroll. I research online for examples of fantasy alphabets and calligraphy, and call on the help of my girlfriend to write out the title with her beautiful handwriting. This way, I know exactly how I will apply the title to the scroll. I sketch out the words in pencil first, marking the start, middle, and end of the title, then ink it with a red brush pen.

Final thoughts

After several hours of hard work, study, and planning, it all comes down to this! One of the greatest things about working traditionally is that, in the end, you have a tangible piece of art as the result of your labor. It can be intimidating if you are not familiar with the tools, but it is so much fun.

Learning something new usually demands a lot of energy, effort, and practice, and it was no different for me learning brush pens and ballpoints. I first started out using felt tip brush pens, as their harder tips were easier to use. At the time, my line work was hesitant, my hand shook, and the tension while inking was clearly visible in my drawings. When I tried a synthetic brush pen for the first time, it was even worse! I decided to spend a whole year inking only with that pen, until I felt absolutely comfortable with it. The ballpoint pen was introduced into my toolset as a pen for very quick sketches, with a strong, dynamic line; due to its non-erasable nature, it helped me immensely in gaining confidence with my line work, as every line is a final sentence. Carrying a sketchbook everywhere I go is a good habit that has made me grow so much as an artist, helping me to familiarize myself with all of these tools and materials.

I have said it a few times during this process, but it can never be said enough: become familiar with your tools! Learning to use these pens paid off, and my line work is far more confident today.

Above
Using markers to layer up colors and build more contrast

Top right
Small details make a big difference

Bottom right
The Eltish Vale
© Eduardo Vieira

The Eltish Vale

The Eltish Vale

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Check out more from
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Sketching from the Imagination

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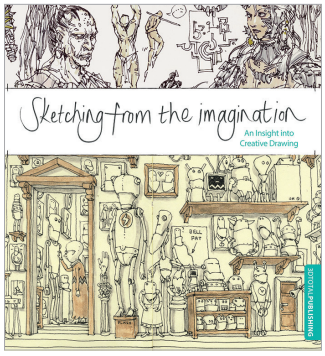

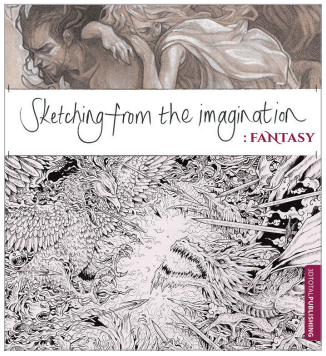

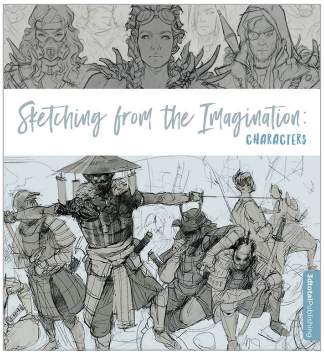

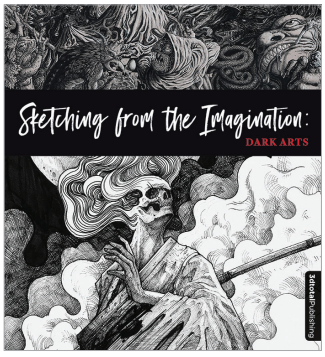

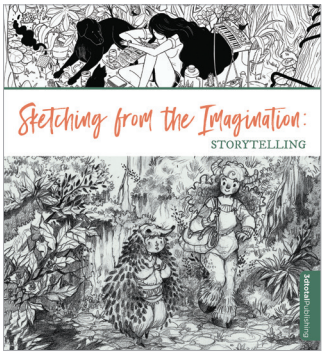

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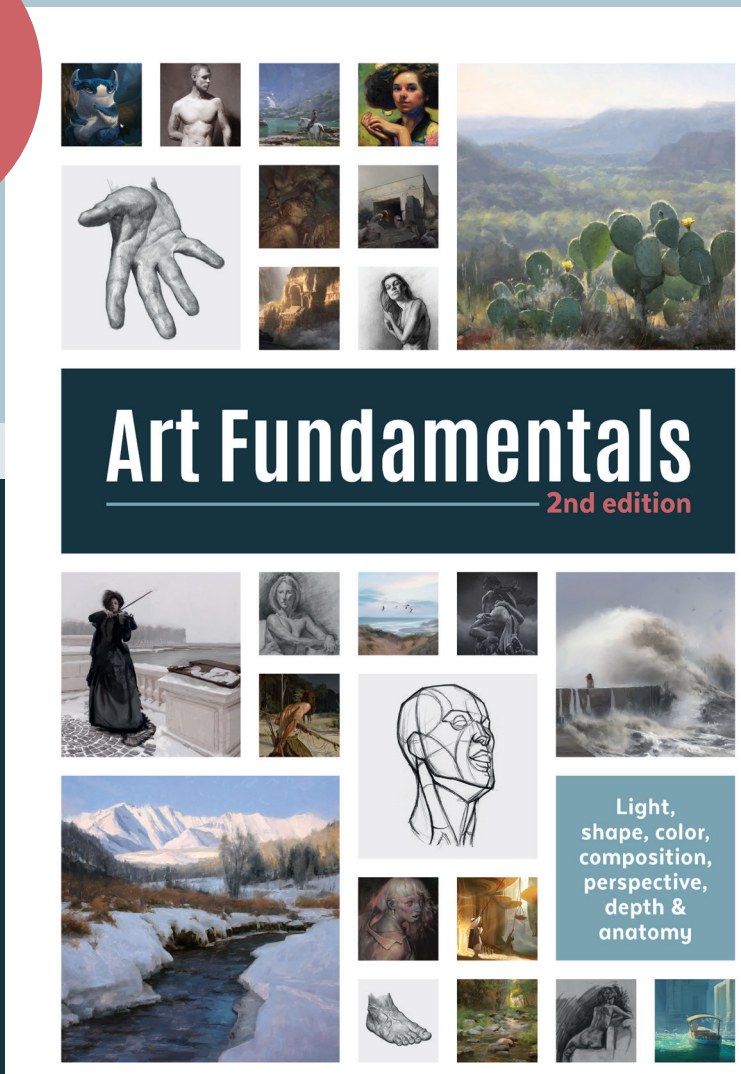

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