GRAPHITE

CONCEPT DRAWING | ILLUSTRATION | URBAN SKETCHING

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Image © Marisa Lewis

EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to the fifth issue and second "year" of GRAPHITE magazine!

If you have followed us from the beginning or subscribed during our first four quarters, we hope you enjoy this issue as much as you did the others. If you're a new reader, we hope you enjoy the style and structure of the magazine which we've worked hard to refine over our first year.

Either way, your readership is precious to us and, as always, we've gathered a wide selection of artwork, themes, and techniques that should offer something for everybody. In this issue you'll find urban sketching, fantasy, sci-fi, and a dash of horror, created with pen, pencil, and watercolor.

Thank you for your support and interest, whether you've got one issue or five, whether you read all the articles or just like looking at the pictures. Here's to another year of great artwork.

See you next time!

Marisa Lewis
Editor

WHAT'S INSIDE

04 | Between the shadows
An interview with Stan Manoukian

14 | Bomber squad 03
Designing and drawing a retro-inspired aircraft with Sheng Lam

26 | Medusa the Gorgon
Sketching and illustrating with Denis Pakowacz

38 | Forest Behemoth
Sketching and painting a creature concept with Emily Hare

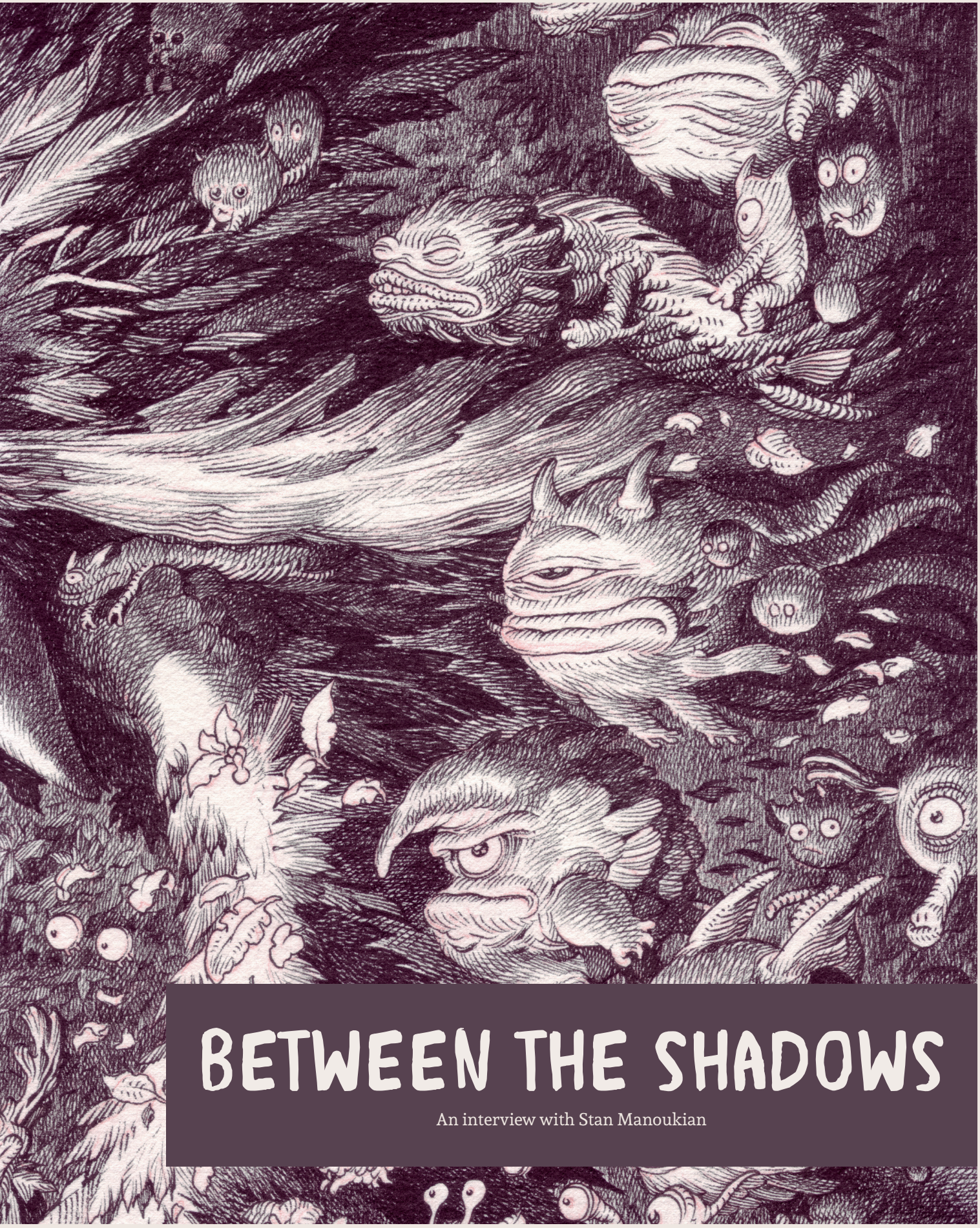
50 | The Gallery
A selection of inspiring drawings

60 | The Witchfinder
An interview with James Lipnickas

70 | My home away from home
Sketching on location with Melanie Reim

80 | A look at nature
Sketching techniques with Riccardo Pagni

90 | Wings
A narrative illustration project with Eliza Ivanova



BETWEEN THE SHADOWS

An interview with Stan Manoukian

Stan Manoukian is a comic artist and illustrator known for his remarkably detailed drawings of outlandish creatures. In this interview, we learn more about the man behind the monsters.

Q· Thanks for speaking to us, Stan. Could you introduce yourself with a bit about you and your background?

A· I was born in 1969 in Paris. My father is a professional painter and antiquarian, and my mother worked in a textile design studio. I grew up surrounded by books, antiques, and art stuff that my parents brought home. At fifteen years of age, I joined an art school to improve my skill at drawing and find a job in an artistic field. After graduation I became a freelancer in various fields: advertising, illustration, film, and sculpture for Disney licenses. I've worked mostly as a comic book artist in France. I have now been working in these areas for almost thirty years.

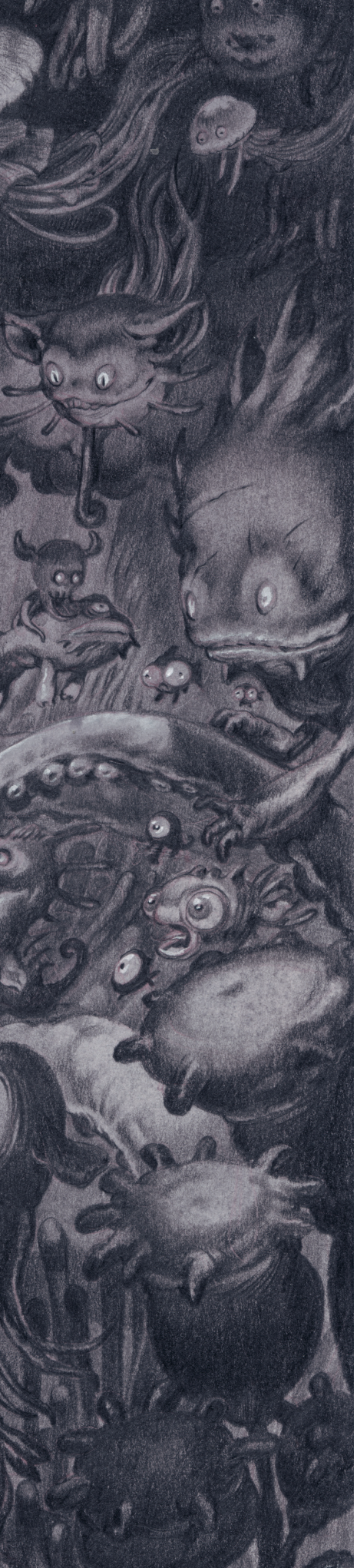
Q· When did you realize you wanted to pursue art as a career?

A· I never imagined pursuing anything other than an artistic career. I was born with a pencil in my hand, like many children, and I always saw my parents drawing. When I had to look for a school to continue my education, it was obvious to me that I should take an artistic route.

Above
Who's There? - For this drawing I wanted to tell a story off-screen. The viewer can imagine what's made my creatures react like this. I have my own explanation that I will not reveal!

Right
Autumn - This drawing is one of a four-part series on the seasons, exhibited at Haven Gallery in New York. Black pen, 11" × 16"

All images © Stan Manoukian



“I had over a thousand little creatures in my universe”

Q· Who or what inspires you the most?

A· I spend hours on the internet, especially on Pinterest, which in my opinion is the best website to document and discover the work of others. I also like to use Tumblr. I especially seek out the work of classical artists from around the world; I list and classify them, looking at their techniques and their way of composing drawings.

I love retro art: old monster movie posters from the 1950s and 1960s, pulp covers, comic books, old engravings, and encyclopedias. I also look at what is being done in the present, from the low-brow movement to contemporary painting, sculpture, and street art. Everything inspires me!

Q· Could you tell us more about your creatures and monsters? Are they for specific worlds or projects you are working on?

A· For ten years I have developed a project around my creatures. It began when I needed to escape from my various commissions, allowing me some daily introspection without constraining what I really had inside me. I started by drawing a creature each day and posting it on my blog to create a daily interaction with the public. The drawings started in black and white, then moved into color, and I released a book of them at the end of that first year.

Three years later, arriving at the end of this exercise, I had over a thousand little creatures in my universe. I wanted to move on, be more ambitious, experiment with more techniques, make more complex drawings, and build this world into something more coherent. My research and designs became more sophisticated, requiring more time to draw. My universe has been enriched enormously during the last ten years. I didn’t know where I was going to end up when I drew my first creatures – it was only an exercise! But since then, it’s as if I have assembled all the elements of a puzzle I had in my head.

My work focuses solely on nature. My creatures have no objects that could come from a human world, like a hat, a bottle, or a house. They are in harmony with nature; they *are* nature. I try to remove the materialistic side of humanity, making emotion and interaction the main point of my drawings. Very often my creatures are a mixture of plants and flesh: hybrids that represent the vitality and importance of nature. When drawing their expressions, I try to express emotions to the viewer, to make the creatures as human as possible.

I have also spent a few months trying to develop stories. I self-published a book, *Meelo’s Big Adventure*, in which I tried to find a narrative style that went well with my universe. I do not want to tell stories in a comic book fashion, but rather like old illustrated books. I have worked on so many cartoons and comics in the past that I want to get away from doing more!

I also work with Séverine Gauthier, a writer who makes very funny and creative poems about monsters every week. We post this shared project, *A Monster A Week*, on Facebook. It is very enriching to work with someone else, and Séverine brings me out of my usual habits. We would like this project to come out in book form.

Left - *In the Octopus Garden in the Shade* - This drawing was made for an exhibition at a gallery in Detroit. The idea was to illustrate a song title or lyrics. I chose the famous Beatles song, *Octopus’s Garden*

Q· You work with a few different mediums and tools, but which are your favorites? Are there any specific tools or materials that you commonly use?

A· It depends on the moment. I love to work in a large format with ink, in my "engraving" style, but changing technique keeps me from becoming tired of it. I sometimes spend several hundred hours on certain works, so trying something different allows me to refresh my mind. But at the moment, my overall favorites are ink, graphite, and charcoal.

Q· Could you tell us more about your process? Many of your drawings look so complex – how do you plan and execute an image?

A· I always start with a series of small sketches where I try to define any ideas that come to mind. The small size keeps me from dwelling too much on the details and instead focusing on the composition, center of interest, light, and trying different ideas. At this stage I only work on the designs of the main characters.

Next I make small drawings of the characters as reference that will help me when I begin the final large-scale drawing. Once I have chosen between my sketches, I scan and enlarge the size of the original composition, then print and transfer it back onto paper using a light table. I do this with a red pencil, very lightly, because I will not be erasing it. At this point the details become clearer, and I start to add more characters, plants, and some definition to the background and environment. I may also change the design of some creatures at this stage.

Then I start inking or creating the final drawing with graphite or another tool. This is the longest step. I look at where to place areas of shadow and light to enhance the drawing's atmosphere. I sometimes look at pictures of plants or other reference materials on the internet for inspiration. Inking takes a long time – several hundred hours! The process for a smaller drawing is much faster, but the steps are essentially the same.

Above left

Beast - My inspiration for this drawing was the Beast in the French movie *La Belle et la Bête* ("*Beauty and the Beast*") by Jean Cocteau and René Clément

Above right

Spring - Another drawing from my four-part series based on the seasons, exhibited at Haven Gallery in New York. Charcoal, 11" × 16"

Right

Midnight Meeting - I drew this for a group show at Spoke Art Gallery in San Francisco. Black pen, 11" × 16"

Q· Do you have any advice for artists hoping to improve their skills with ink?

A· This is a hard question for me to answer! I think there's nothing better than practicing for hours, for years, so that your own hand becomes an extension of your mind. It frees you from just thinking about your technique. Test everything: tools, papers, and how to lay down the shadows and lights to make a shape come alive. Each artist will discover a tool with which they are more comfortable, and that is why it's so important to experiment.

Q· What is the most valuable lesson you've learned in your career?

A· To have patience, and persevere. Absolutely nothing can replace hard work and time. Having talent without these two parameters is useless.

Q· How do you spend your free time (if you have any)?

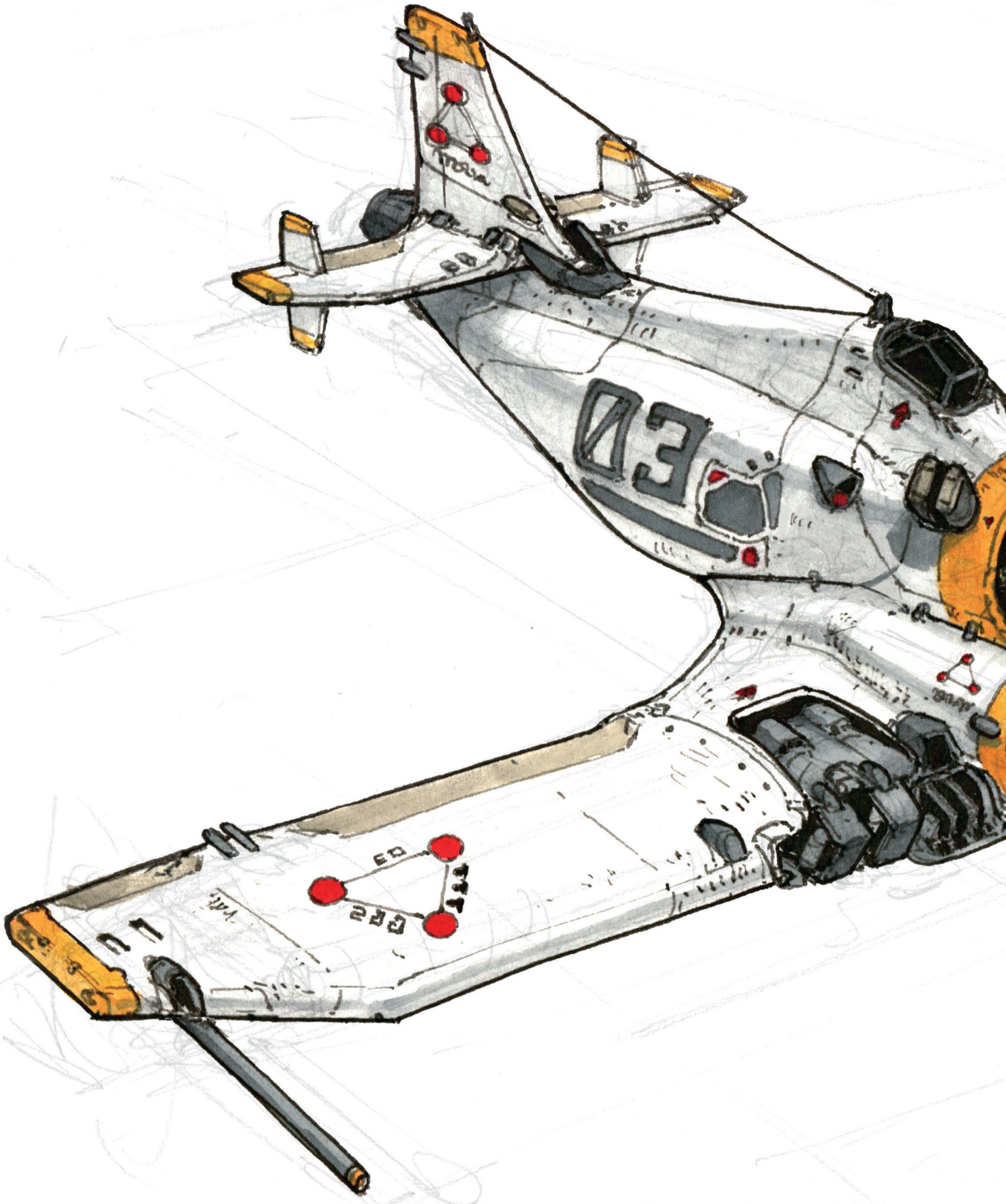
A· I spend time with my family, watch television, and go to see art shows – but I have very little free time beyond that!

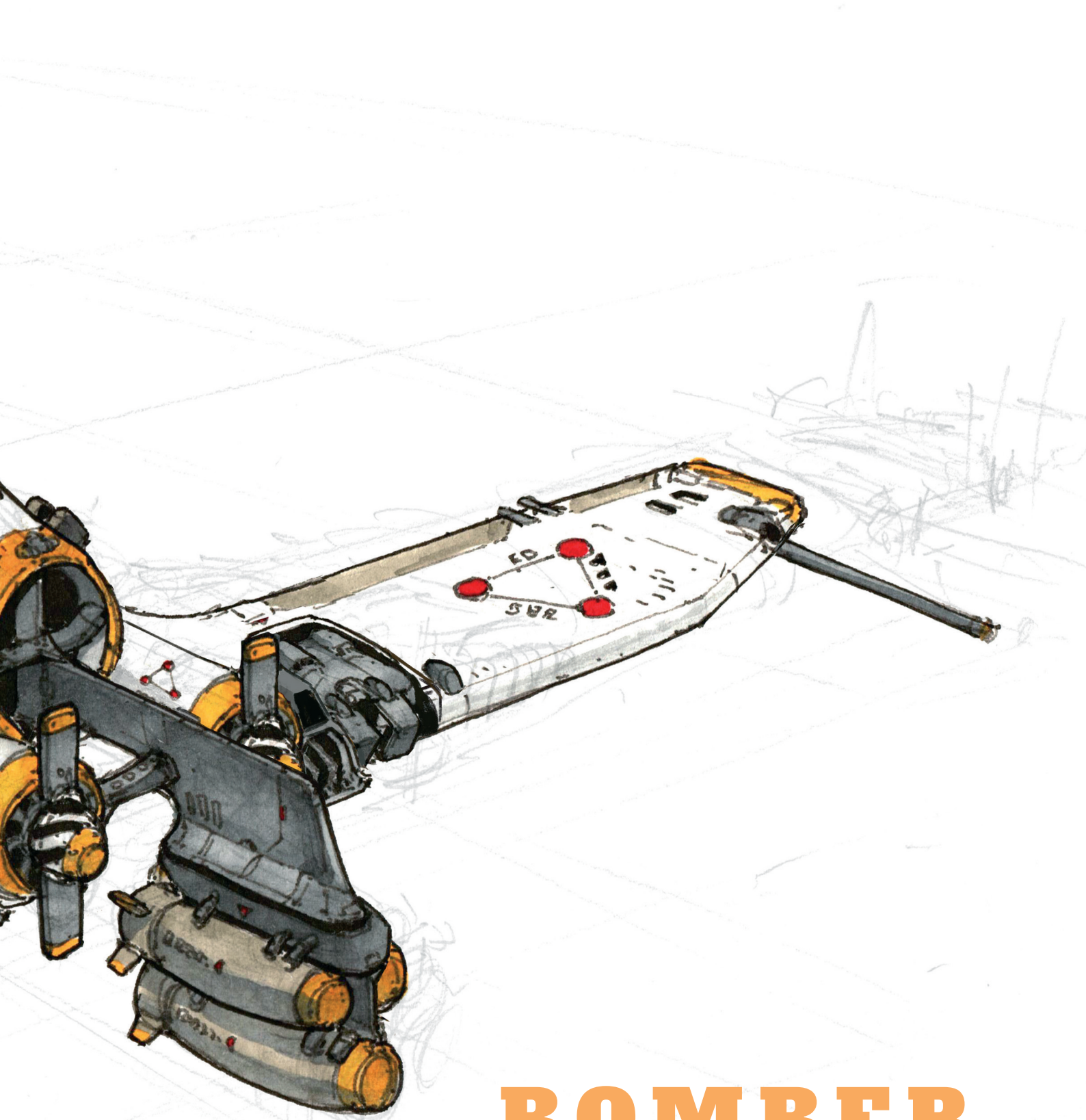
Above

Lemur Zombified by Worms - I began drawing a series of creatures "zombified" by worms. This was the first. Graphite, 9" × 11"

Right

The Joker - This drawing was made for a group show in Paris. Black pen, 16" × 20"

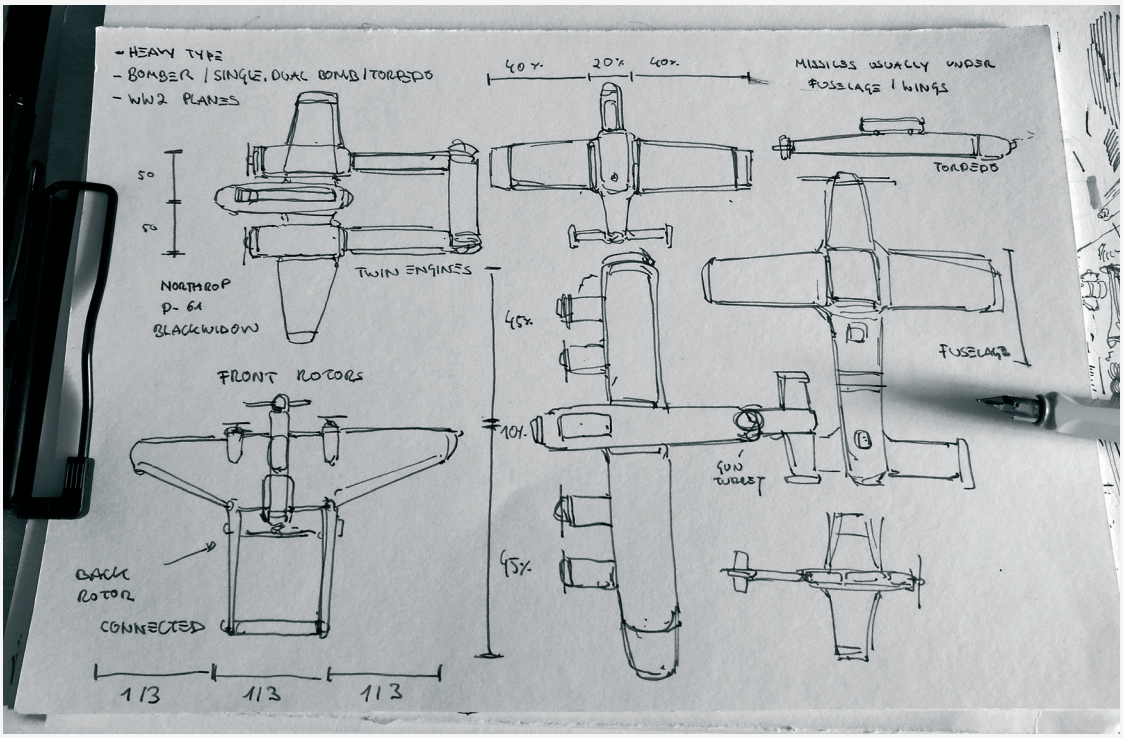




BOMBER SQUAD 03

Designing and drawing a retro-inspired aircraft with Sheng Lam

Hard-surface designer and concept artist Sheng Lam shares his process for sketching an aircraft in pen and pencil and rendering it with markers.



Left
Drawing subject studies and distilling their core proportions into basic shapes can help as a warm-up exercise and inspiration for the thumbnail phase

Top right
Figuring out the design by focusing on major forms and proportions is one of the most important early stages of the process

Bottom right
Creating a loose pencil underdrawing by blocking out rough shapes on a basic perspective grid

Studies

In this tutorial I will walk you through my process for designing and sketching a retro-inspired airplane using different types of traditional media, such as pencils, brush pens, fountain pens, and markers. I will cover the design principles and choices that influence the final piece, and techniques for generating quick thumbnails and translating them into a final three-quarter view with clean line work and material rendering.

I want to design an aircraft inspired by World War II bomber planes. The first step is researching the subject matter and gathering reference images that I can study and use for my design.

For this project I am mainly drawing with a LAMY Safari fountain pen with an extra fine (“EF”) nib, filled with black Higgins Calligraphy Ink. I like to draw on thicker paper that has a grainy feel to it, so I take a stack of ten to fifteen sheets and put them on a clipboard.

The studies you see here are based on reference materials I found online. The purpose of these studies is not to draw “nice” sketches, but to focus on extracting the core proportions of the planes and the placement of key aircraft elements such as the cockpit, rotors, and gun turrets. Becoming familiar with the base proportions will help a lot during the thumbnailing phase.

Thumbnails

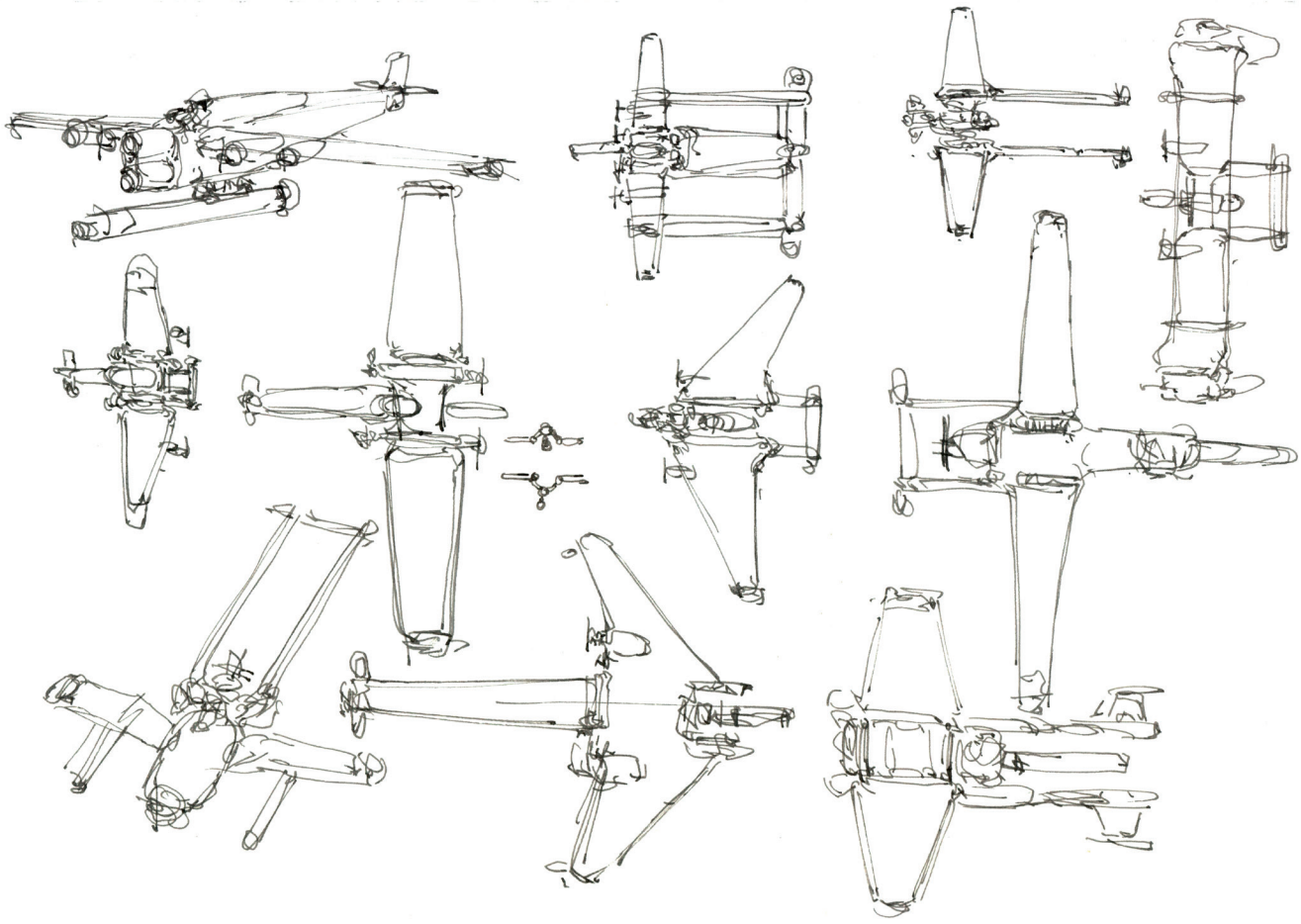
I start creating thumbnail sketches in a top-down view, which allows me to focus purely on the proportions and the arrangement of large, medium, and small shapes, without having to worry about other aspects such as the perspective.

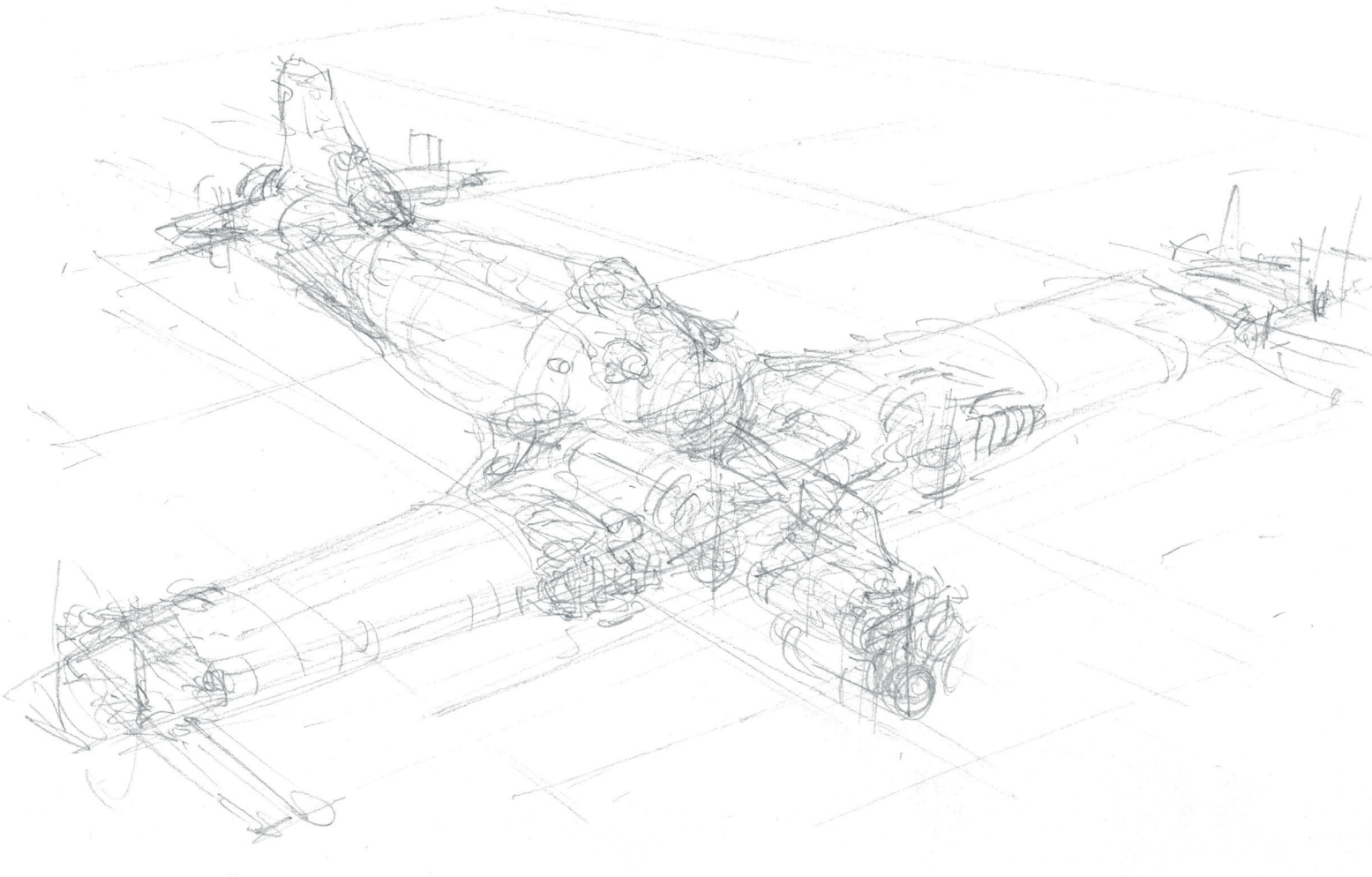
This stage is crucial, as the aim is to lock down all the major design elements as much as possible. One of my teachers used this great analogy when he talked about design: having a solid foundation and good proportions is like the base of a cake. No matter how much stuff you sprinkle on top of it, the cake won’t be good without a strong foundation.

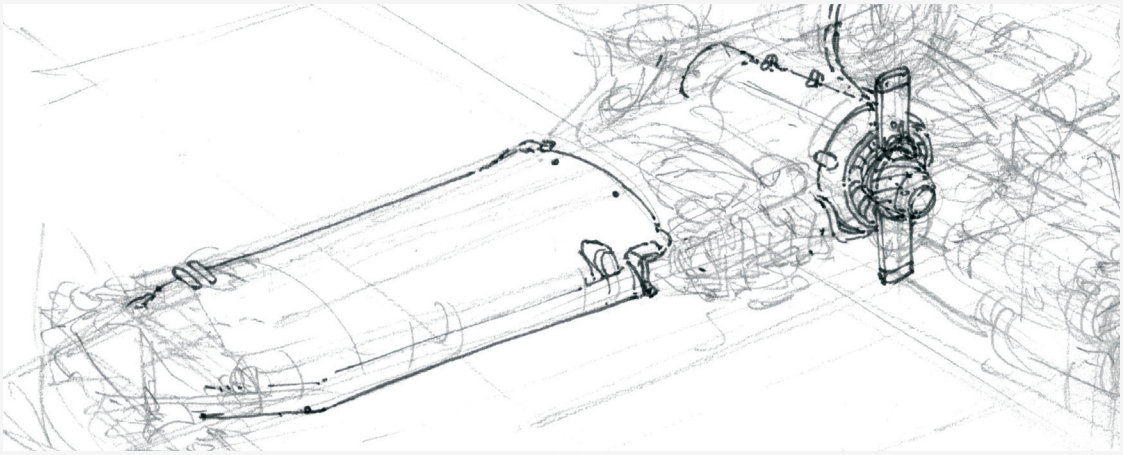
Base sketch

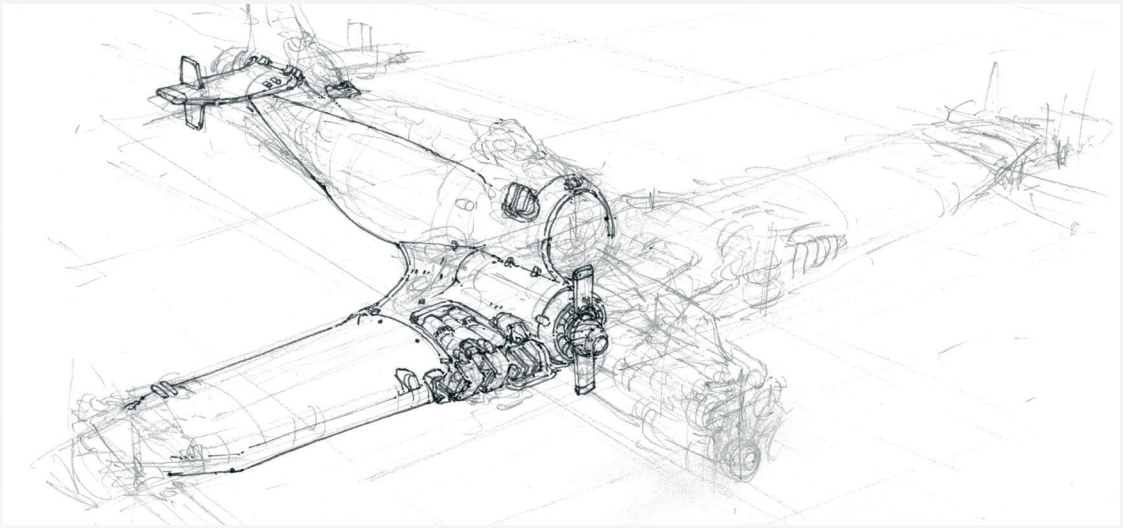
Instead of choosing one thumbnail and committing to it, I keep my options open between the strongest elements. I treat these designs as assets, where combining different parts from each can lead to a stronger design.

I use a pencil to draw a very basic perspective grid and start blocking in geometric shapes. Once that has been done, I start building more complex forms by thinking about the transitions between the forms and their relationships to each other. Keeping this underdrawing rough and loose can help you find shapes that you might never have thought of.









Starting to ink

At this point I am happy with the underdrawing because it gives me a rough impression of how the final outcome will look. I start inking directly over the pencil sketch, still using my LAMY Safari fountain pen; make sure you are using an ink that will not bleed when applying markers later. Here I start working on the elements that are closest to the viewer, such as the right wing and propeller of the plane.

Building up elements

Working from left to right, I slowly build up different parts of the plane. I fill some parts with details, such as the engine. The part of the wing next to the engine is significantly less busy, making it an area of rest for the viewer's eye. Having this type of balance between areas of detail can create focal points and add more interest to your designs. After I am satisfied with the motor, I start working on the main body of the aircraft. Keeping the studies in mind and aiming for a retro feel, I apply rounder forms to the fuselage.

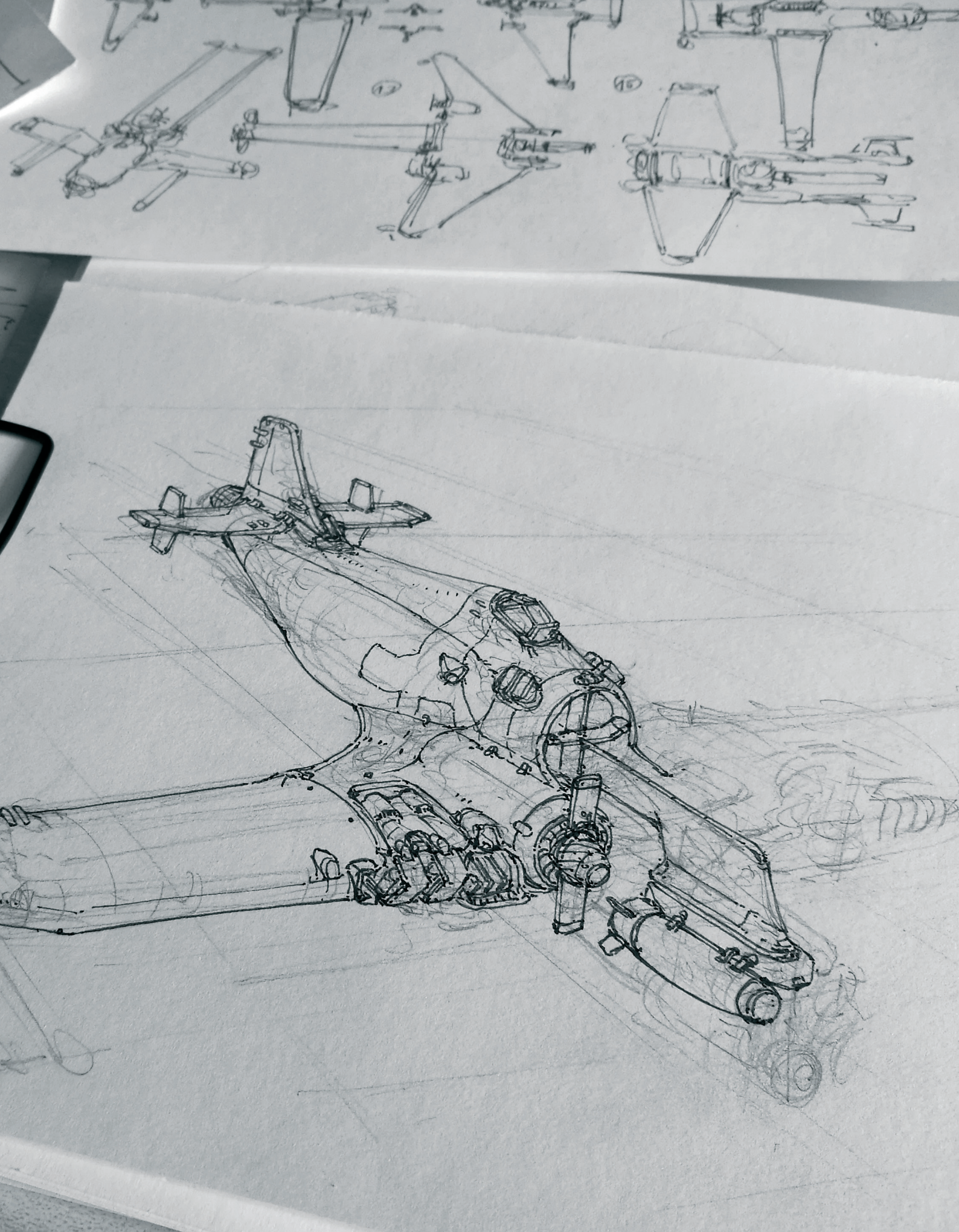
Shape and scale

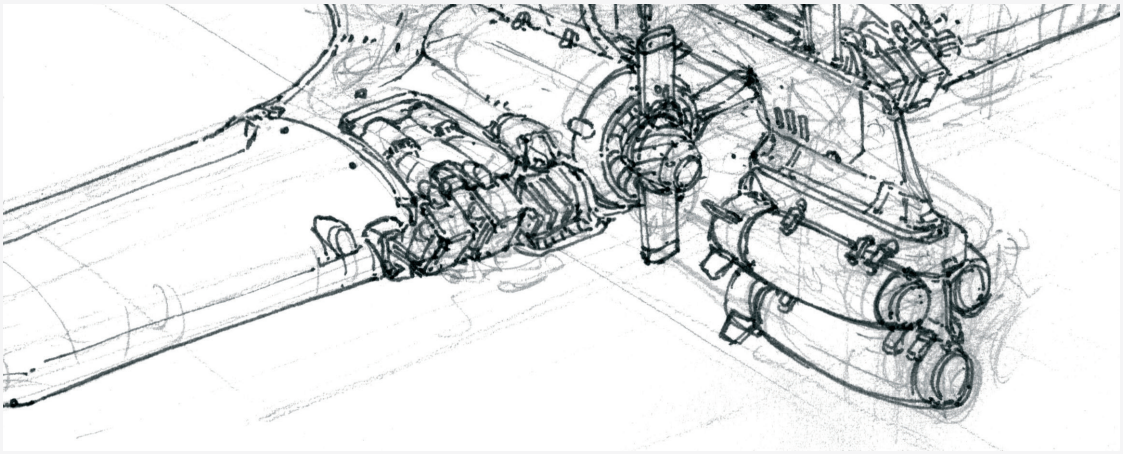
After finishing the plane's body, I start working on the front. As I draw, I try to keep the relationship between large, medium, and small shapes in mind. Placing small shapes in a large area can create contrast between those elements and make your design compelling. To add a sense of scale, I play with the size of relatable elements. For example, I have made the cockpit smaller, so that the rest of the design feels bigger overall, because we can relate to the size of a person sitting inside.

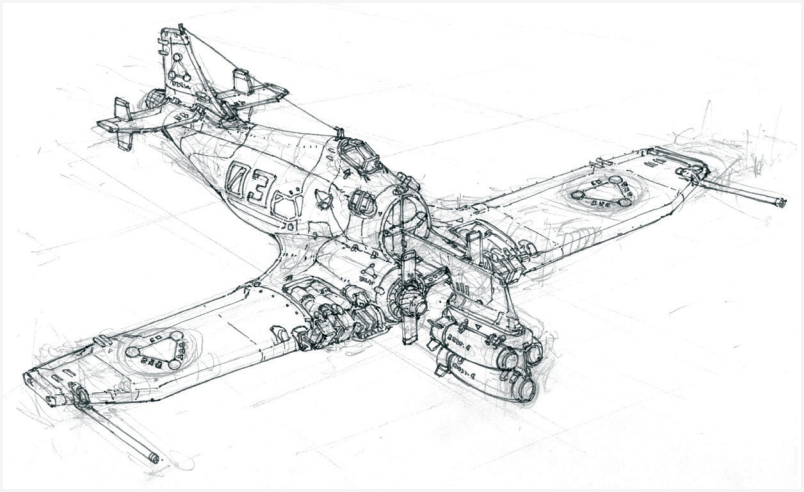
Above top
Once a satisfactory underdrawing has been achieved, the next step is starting the inking process

Above bottom
Systematically adding more elements, such as an engine, and beginning to work on the main body of the plane

Right
Finishing the fuselage of the aircraft and working on the front of the vehicle







Top left
Figuring out a suitable solution for the hardpoint mount carrying the bombs, and blocking in the other side of the wing

Far left and bottom left
Finalizing the design while adding smaller details such as decals and joins to complete the line work phase

Top right
Using a thicker pen to add line weight to the aircraft gives more depth and can help achieve a more finished look in the drawing

Bottom right
Identifying heavily shadowed areas and filling them in with solid black

Problem-solving

Sometimes it's necessary to find solutions and incorporate new ideas in the middle of the process. For example, I realize there is very little room for the rotors to spin without interfering with the bombs, so I make the missiles shorter than initially planned, so that the arm carrying them can be made thinner.

Design is about problem-solving. Your design may not be perfect, but drawing in any permanent medium is unforgiving, and it's natural to make mistakes. There is always room to learn from them, so if you make a mistake, make the best of it and move on.

Adding details

In this stage I add all the small details. Implementing decals is a good way to add backstory to your design. I place the number "03" as a graphic on the side, because the plane is designed to carry three bombs, and add a triangular logo that is also influenced by the recurring shapes and ideas in the vehicle's design.

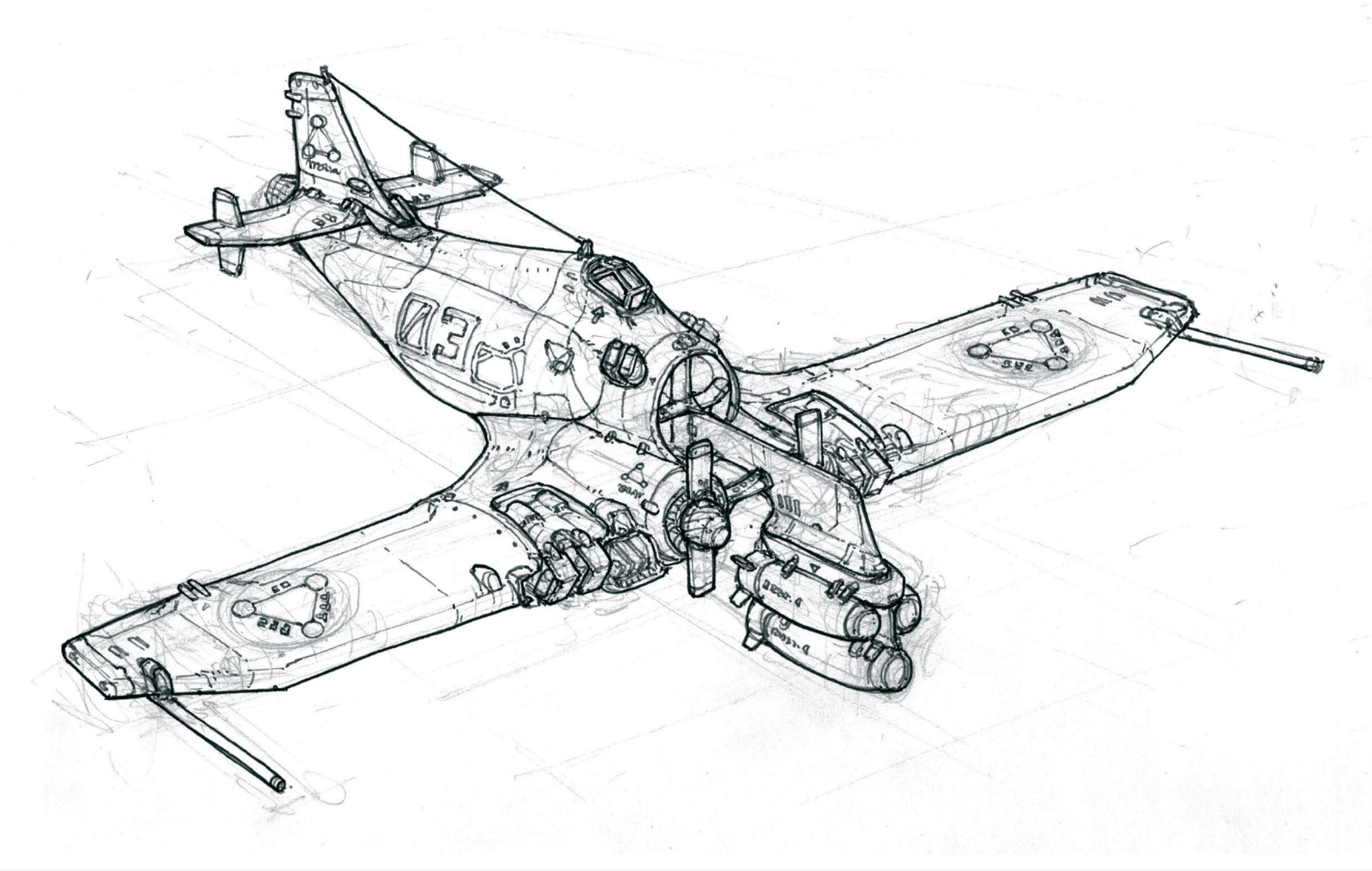
Paying attention to little things like this helps to make a concept feel more cohesive. To finish the line work, I add some joins and lines to reinforce the various forms in the drawing and communicate the volumes and contours clearly.

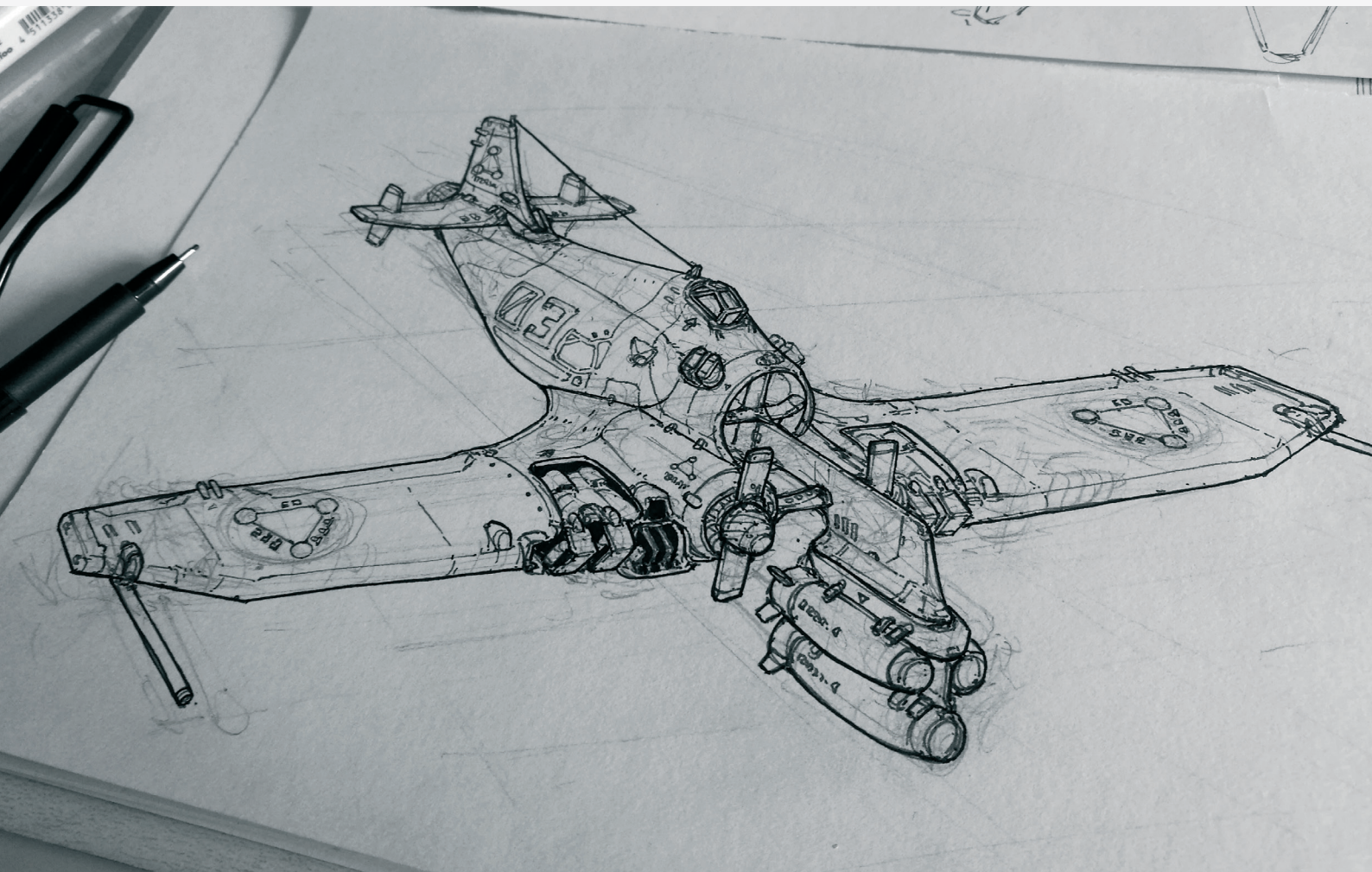
Line weights

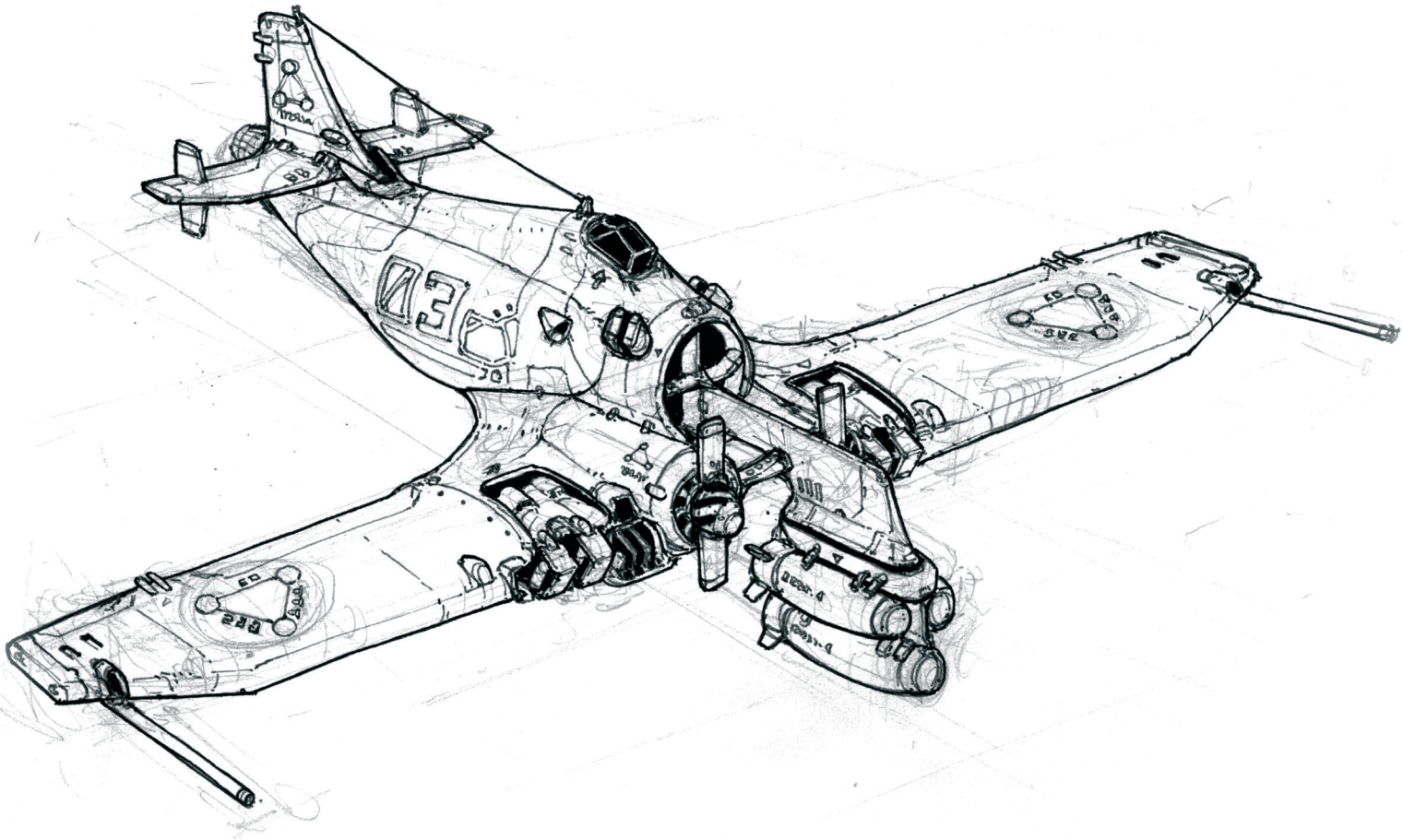
Now that I have finished the design of the plane, I start applying some extra treatment to the line weights using a thicker felt-tip pen. Here are some rules that I follow when thinking about line weight. Generally speaking, I apply a thicker line to everything that is closer to the viewer (creating emphasis) and all the lines that are facing "down" (underneath the wing and bombs, implying shadow). I also apply extra weight where objects overlap each other, to keep them distinct. Having a good sense of line weight can give a lot of depth to your drawing.

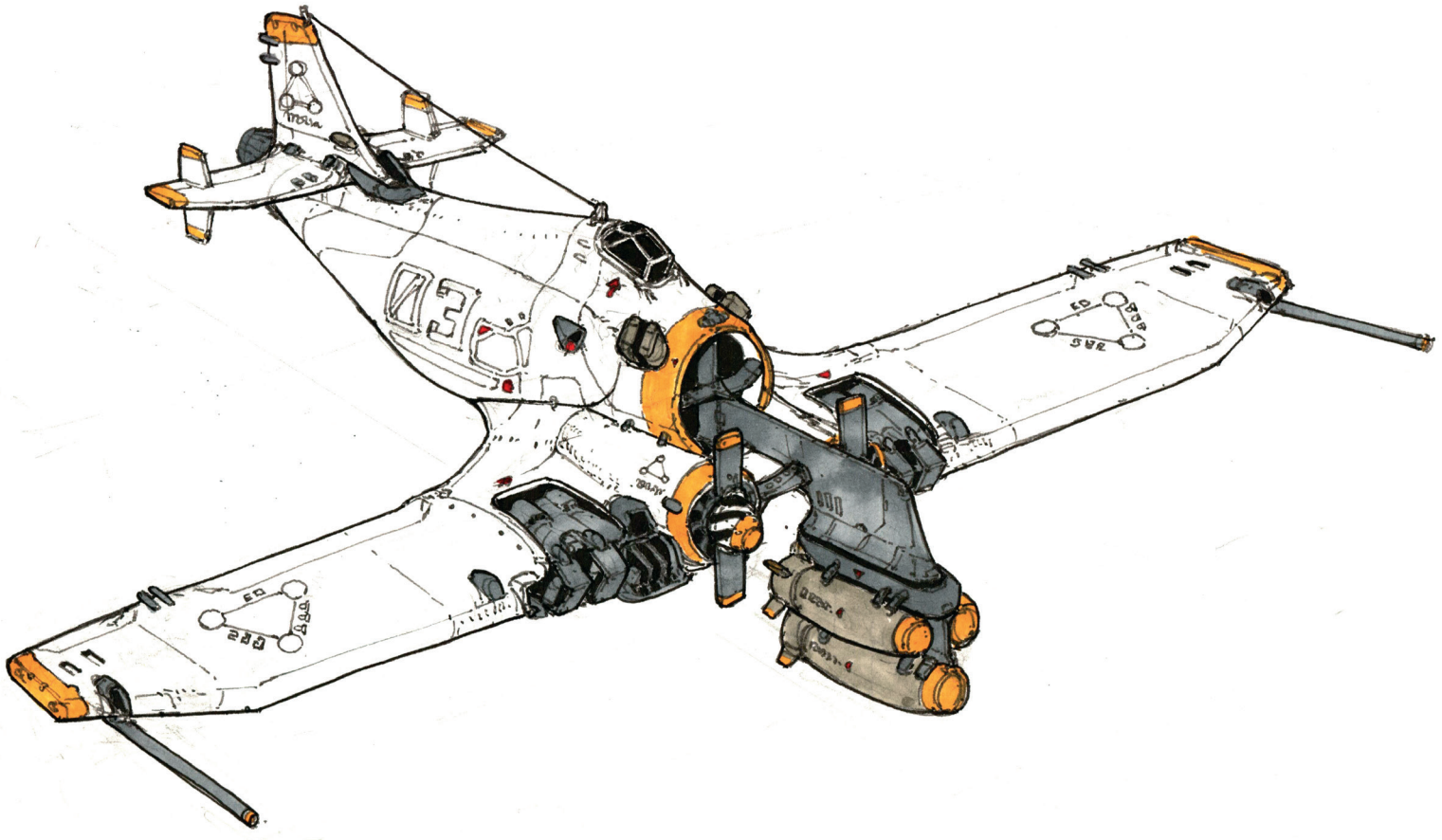
Adding shadows

The line art is now ready for the first pass of shading. Objects that are deeply recessed or close together will have an "ambient occlusion" effect, meaning that light cannot reach into these spaces, resulting in a subtle shadow. I start filling these areas with solid black using a Pentel Pocket Brush Pen to create more of a graphic look. This pen is a reliable and versatile tool that can create very fine lines, but also allows me to block in large areas with black.

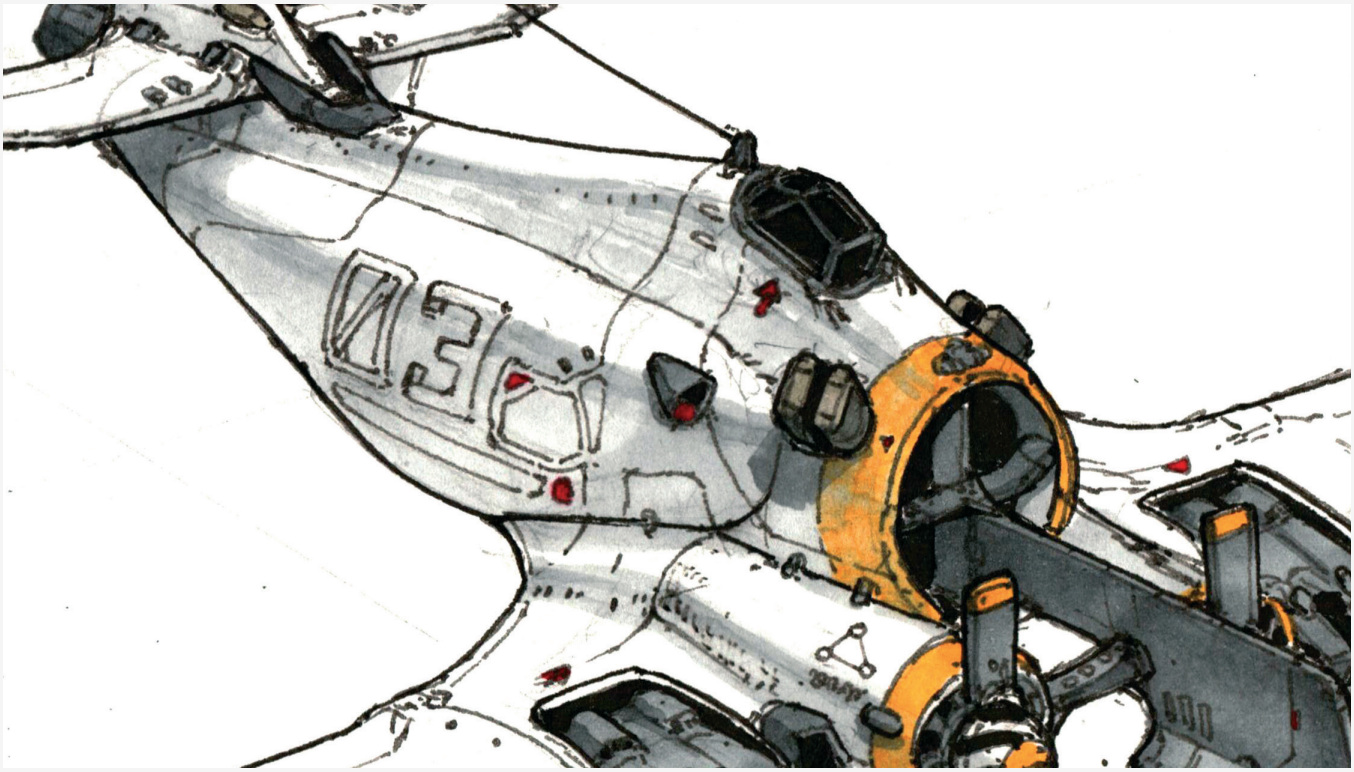








“Creating shadows will give the drawing more volume”



Top left
Continuing to block in the shadows to create areas of high density and detail

Bottom left
Thinking about different types of materials can add believability to your designs

Above
Defining a simple light source and creating shadows will help to communicate the forms in the design

Finishing the shadows

I keep looking over the drawing to find spots that require shadow. The engines provide a good opportunity for this, because they are made out of numerous smaller parts and create areas with a lot of detail. This phase creates a lot of contrast, which is helpful for defining the design’s focal points.

Base colors

After filling in the shadows, I am ready to start applying markers to the line drawing. I use Copic markers, but other types of similar marker will work too. I start by considering the different surfaces and materials of the plane, and how to distinguish them.

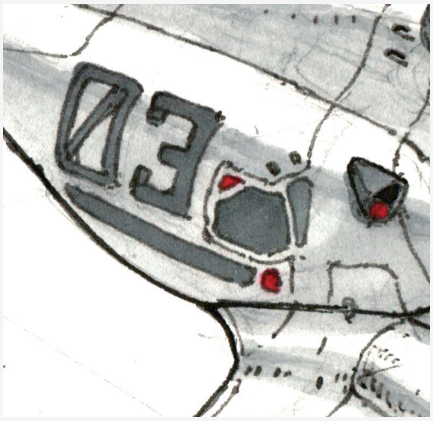
While the main body is white, I ensure everything that is mechanical and not part of the main outer body is darker (N4, a neutral gray) in order to add contrast.

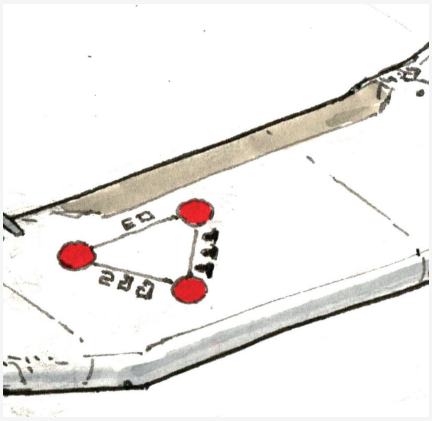
For the bombs I use W4 (a warm gray) to add more variation. I add some accent colors using a Y17 Copic (yellow) and a red Sharpie marker in certain areas to make the design more appealing.

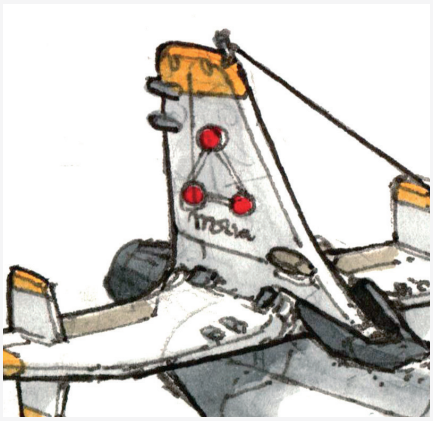
Simple lighting

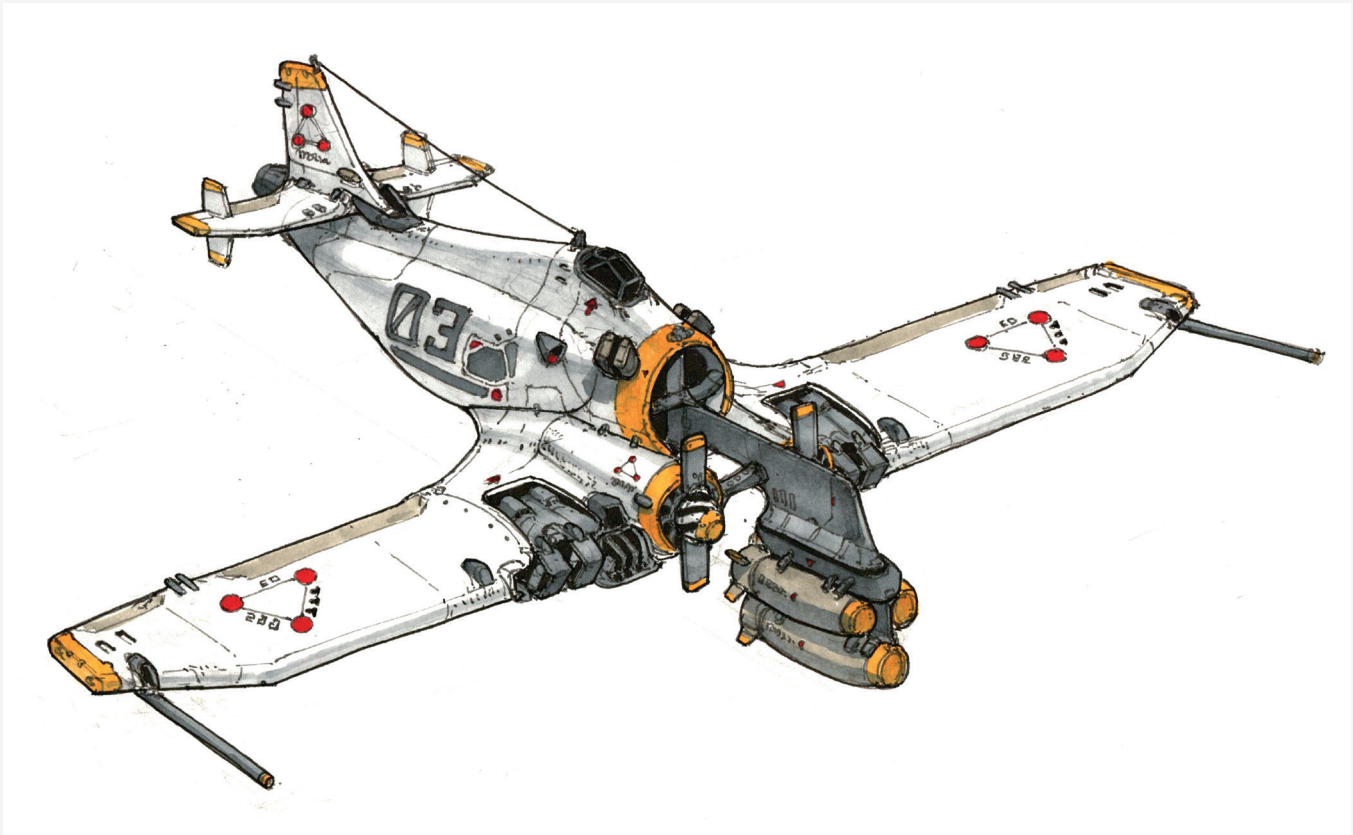
Once I have finished assigning the basic colors, I start thinking about the lighting strategies I will use. Determining a light source and creating shadows will give the drawing more volume and help to communicate the forms better.

I decide to go with top-down lighting, which is a very straightforward way to light props and vehicles. For the main body I use N2 and N3 Copic markers (neutral grays) to color in the core shadows on some of the rounder shapes. I then use an N5 marker to block in the shadows for the darker materials.









Details and decals

Here I keep working with markers, making the final adjustments. The "03" decal is filled with an N4 (neutral gray) marker to create contrast and make it pop against the white body. I apply a W4 (warm gray) marker to the back of the wing, creating visual separation between the flaps and the wing structure.

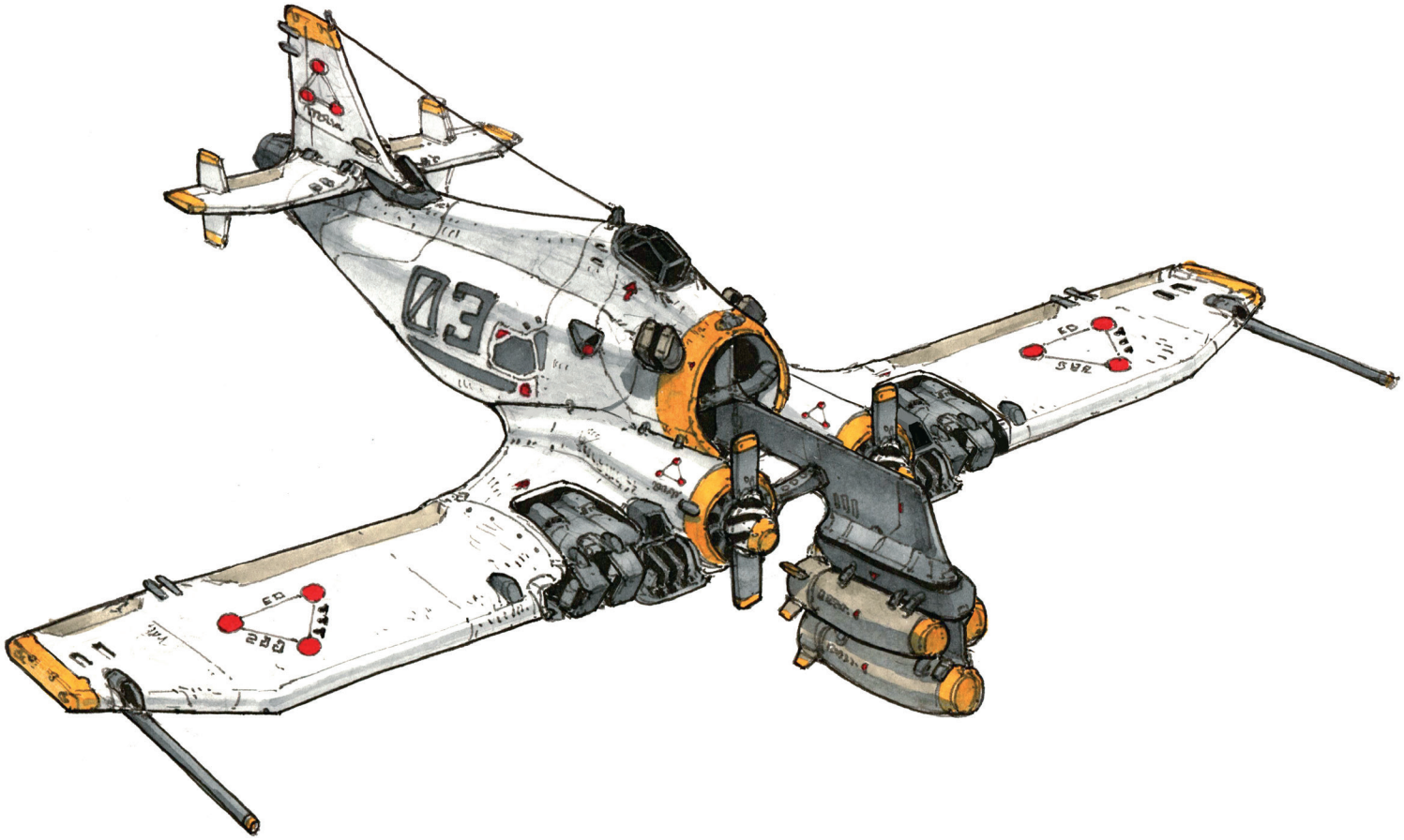
I use red very minimally on the body of the plane, except on the logo, which is an important feature of the design that I want to stand out against the white.

The final concept

For the final step in this tutorial, I scan in the line drawing and open the file in Adobe Photoshop to make some final adjustments to its presentation. I use the Lasso and Transform tools to select and adjust some elements, like the far wing, to improve the image's sense of depth and perspective.

Above
Adding finishing touches and a few more colored decals

Top right
Scanning and tweaking the final drawing © Sheng Lam

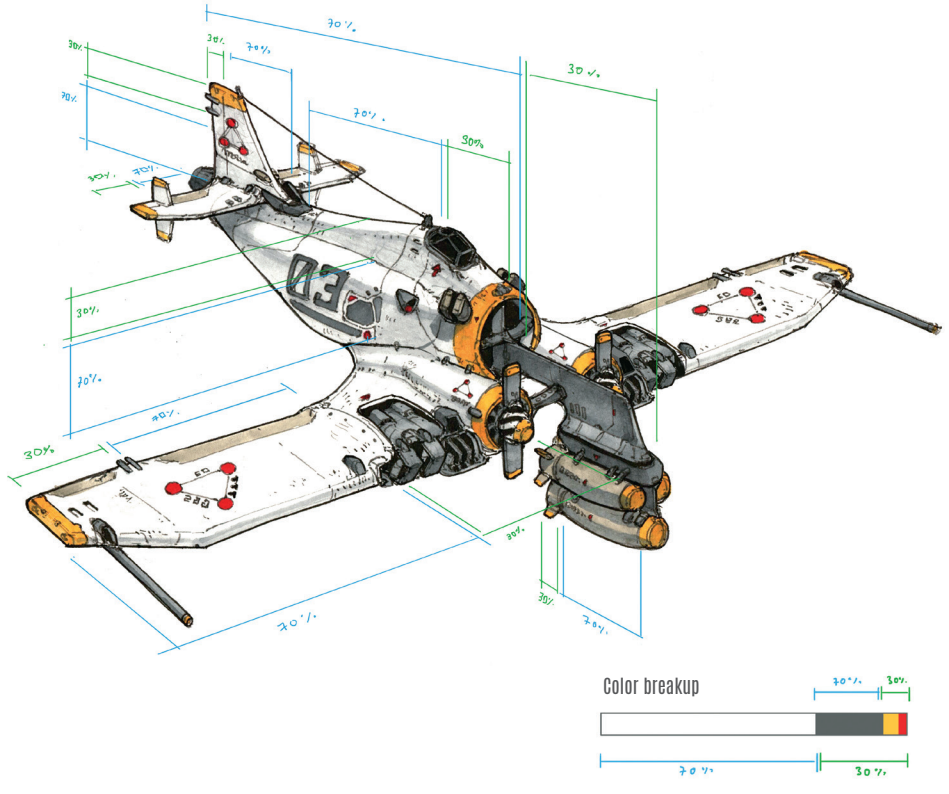


ARTIST'S TIP

Design principles

During every stage of my process, there is a design rule that I try to follow as best I can. Let's call it the "70/30 rule." Generally speaking, large shapes should make up 70% of your design, while the remaining 30% consists of medium and small shapes.

This rule can be applied to almost everything: proportion relationships, shape breakdowns, material assignments, composition, and so on. If everything is divided into exact 50/50 proportions, the design can become mundane. Having a deliberate imbalance helps to achieve a more interesting outcome.



MEDUSA
THE GORGON

Sketching and illustrating with Denis Pakowacz

edding

Illustrator Denis Pakowacz walks us through creating a detailed ink drawing using pencils, pens, and his trusty light table.

Materials

This tutorial will be devoted to illustrating Medusa the Gorgon in a black and white graphic style. In Greek mythology, Medusa was the most well known of the three Gorgon sisters. She was a monster described as a winged woman with living snakes instead of hair, whose glance turned onlookers to stone. Medusa was the only one of the three Gorgons who was mortal, and was eventually slain by Perseus, who fought her while watching her reflection in a mirrored shield he received from the goddess Athena. Even after death, Medusa's severed head was able to turn humans to stone.

I am going to draw a portrait of Medusa the Gorgon with black ink. The tools I will be using are: colored and graphite pencils for preliminary rough sketches, a soft 2B pencil for detailed sketching, black 0.3 mm and 0.5 mm Edding fineliners, a fountain pen or a dip pen, and a technical pen or ballpoint pen for the final illustration.

Rough doodles

I start by splitting my sheet of paper into eight parts for the small thumbnail doodles. The main goal at this stage is to work out the composition and proportion of the main elements. I usually use a blue pencil for rough sketches, as it can easily be covered with black ink or hidden by switching off the blue channel in Adobe Photoshop or another graphic software.

Playing with shapes

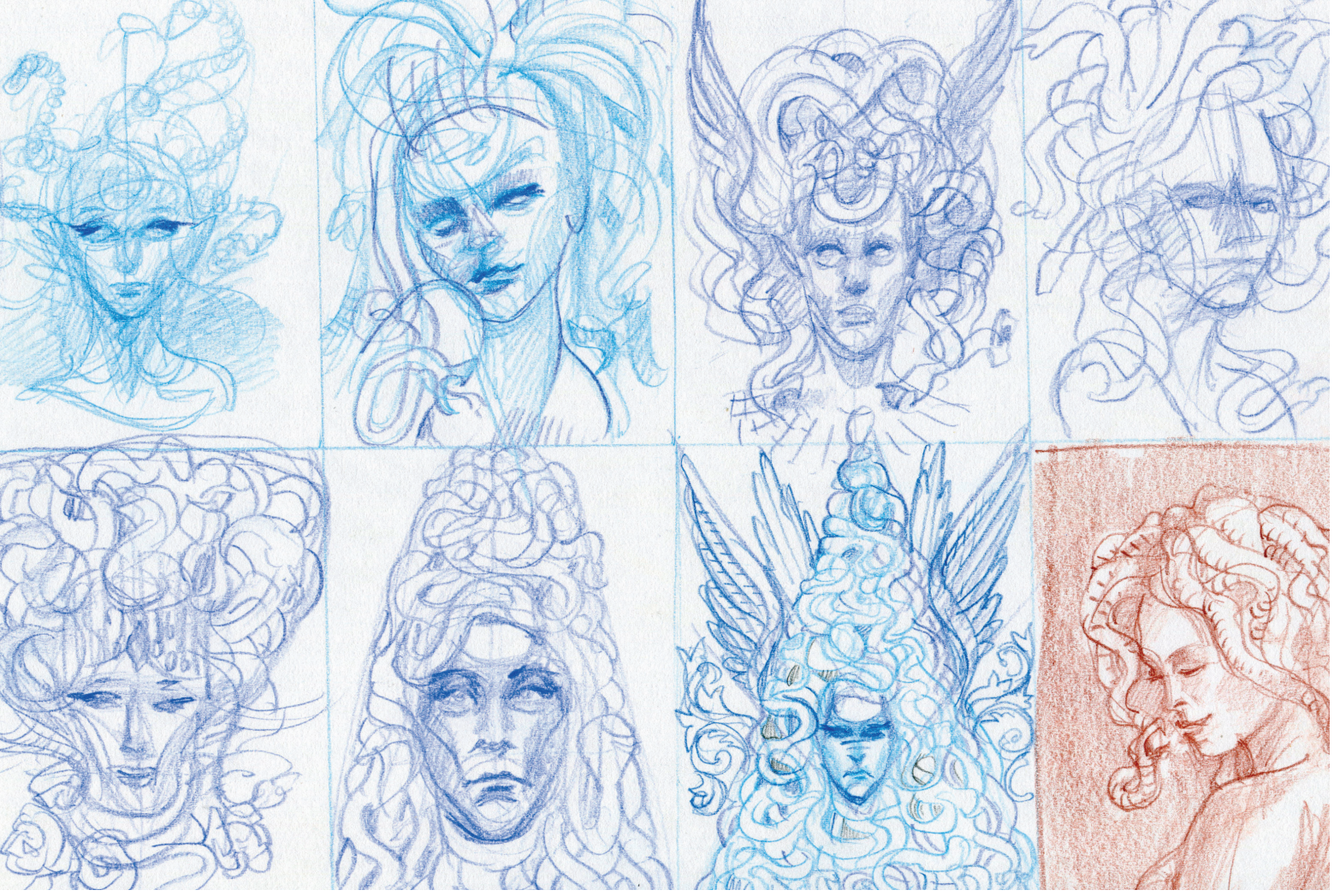
As you can see in the sketches on the right, I try to play with the basic form of the hairstyle, shaping it into triangles and other geometric primitives. You should avoid going into details at this stage; your drawing should be very loose and soft. To achieve this, try holding your pencil by its last third, as a drummer might hold their sticks.

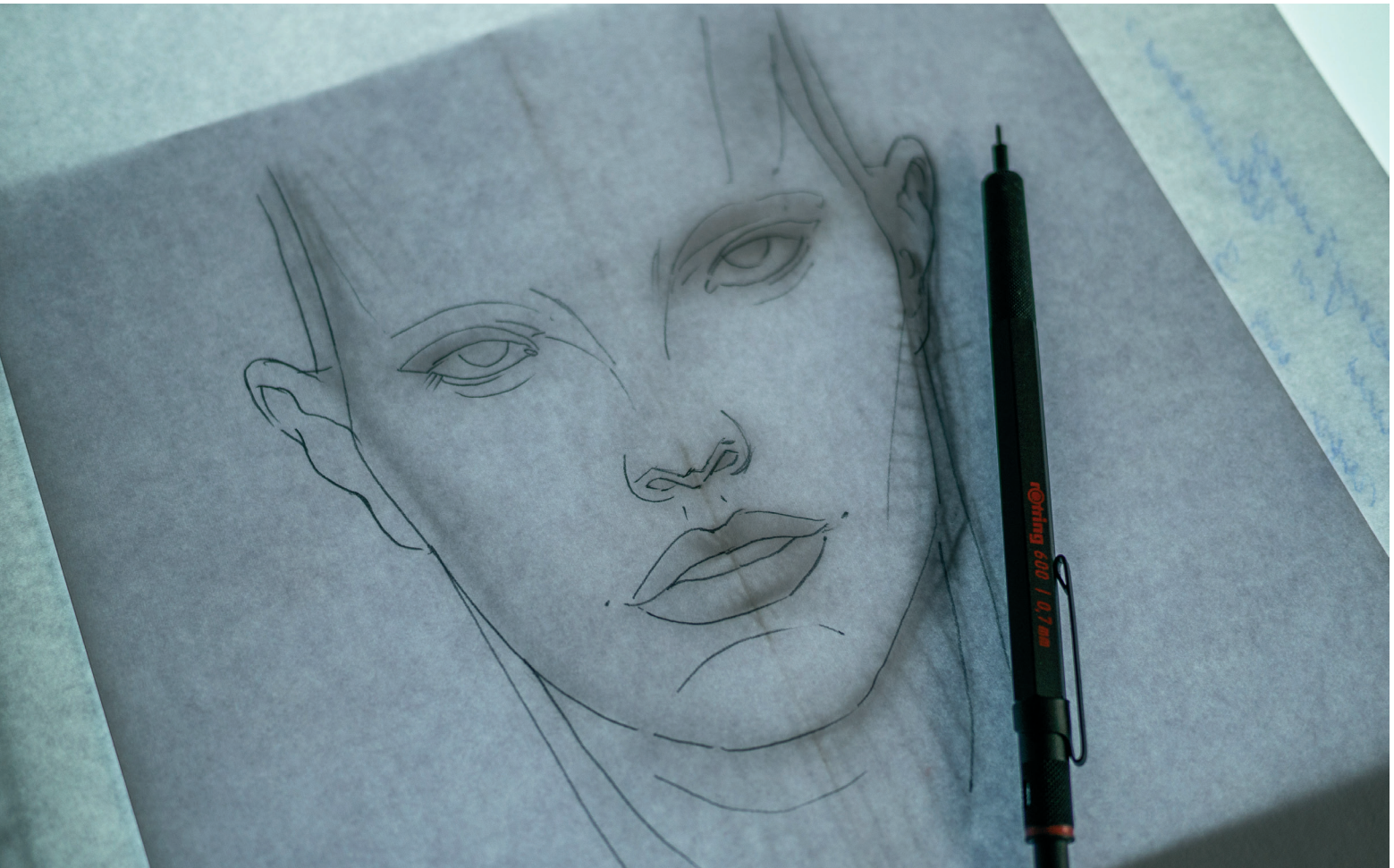
Above
The drawing tools for this project

Top right
Doodling some rough thumbnail ideas

Bottom right
The shape of Medusa's face and hair will be key to this composition

KOH-I-NOOR HARDTMUTH Mondeluz 3710/17




rOtring 600 / 0,7mm

Making a decision

The doodling stage can be used to explore different tone variations. I check if the composition would be stronger with more light or dark areas, or if the character is on a white or black background. I consider which elements of the image to emphasize using contrast. There is no "right" amount of preliminary sketches to do. When I am satisfied with the composition and proportions of a thumbnail, I can move on with the drawing. The strongest elements from multiple thumbnails compose the final idea.

Symmetrical face

Once I have chosen a thumbnail, it's time to redraw it at a larger size, so it can be traced onto the final paper. I use an old trick to achieve a quick sketch of a symmetrical face – drawing half of the face and then making a rubbing of it. For this, it's best to use a soft pencil such as a 4B. I fold the paper in half to create a central seam, open it up again, then draw half of the face on one side of the crease. Then I fold the paper back over and rub the back of the page with moderate pressure. This will transfer some of the graphite to the second half of the paper, and then all I have to do is redraw the lines to make them stronger.

Tracing the sketch

Now that I have an underdrawing of the correct size, I will use a light table to transfer the drawing to a thicker paper. Before I had a light table, I would use my window on a sunny day or a lamp under a table with a glass top. You can find your own solutions with a little initiative!

I choose Winsor & Newton 130 gsm smooth cartridge paper for the final drawing. I draw the outlines of Medusa's face on this new sheet of paper with a 0.5 mm 2B mechanical pencil.

Developing the sketch

Now that I am finished with the light table, I continue to work on the detailed sketch, still only using the 2B pencil. I block out where the main shadows will be, and start to determine the direction of the strokes. This will help to guide my line work during the inking stage.

Top far left

I briefly experiment with putting wings on her head, but withdraw the idea

Top near left

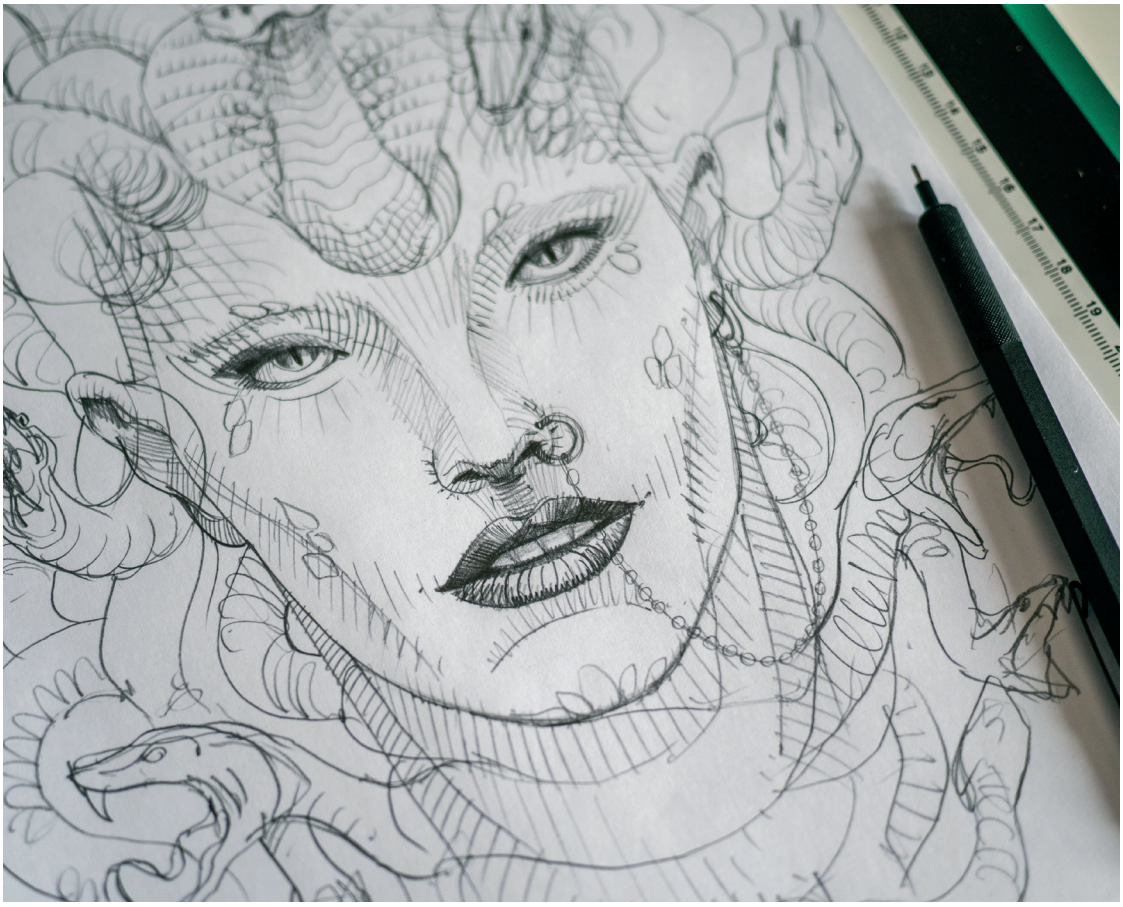
Rubbing the back of the paper is a useful shortcut for symmetry

Bottom far left

Making a cleaner pencil sketch with a light table

Bottom near left

Building up the pencil drawing



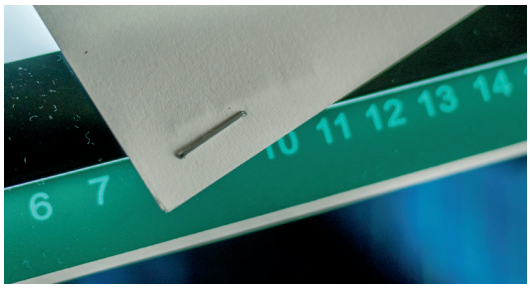
Top left
Fleshing out the composition with Medusa's snake hair

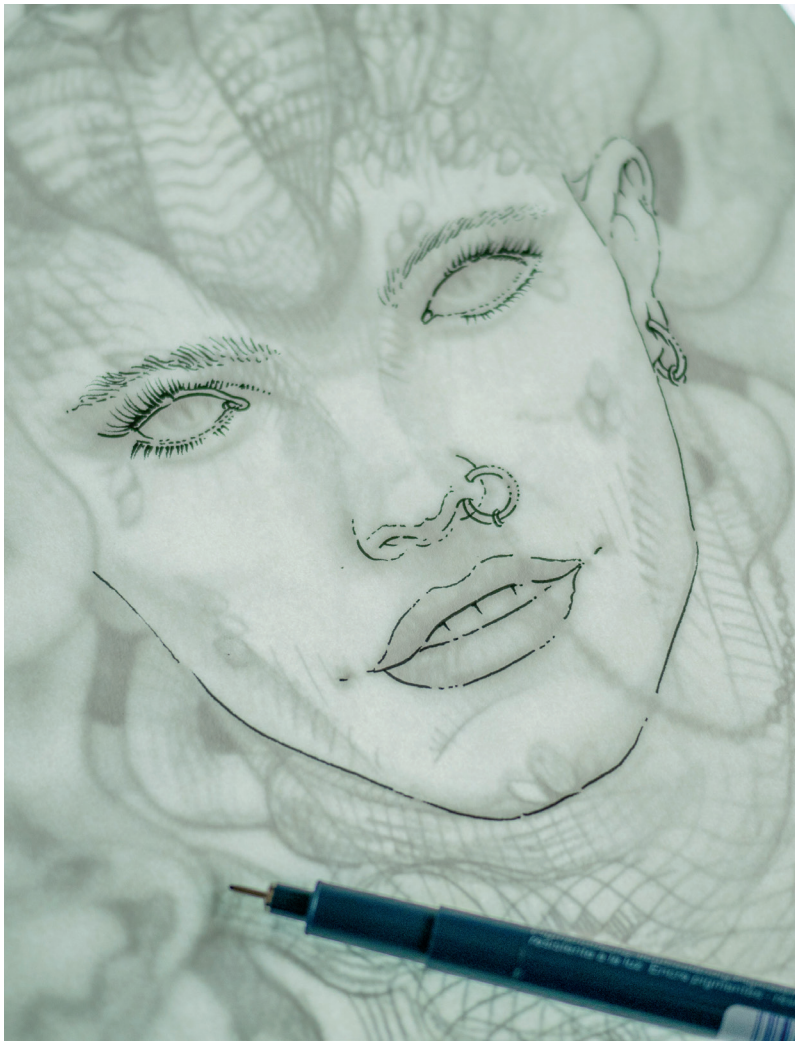
Bottom left
Using blending and lines to capture different skin textures

Top near right
The pencil underdrawing is now complete

Bottom near right
Stapling the sketch to the final paper to keep it secure

Far right
Starting to ink the drawing's contours





Sketching the snakes

Now that Medusa's face is sketched out, I start to add the snakes and extra details such as a facial piercing and some scales. When marking out the directions of the snakes, I take into consideration that a snake has a cylindrical form and its scales have to be placed accordingly.

Skin textures

Medusa is a monster, but also a woman, so I must consider her skin textures and how to render them. When drawing the face with pencil, I note that each extra stroke could be perceived as a wrinkle or skin defect, so I must be precise and accurate in how I shade. I create feathered halftones with a blending stick to make a more smooth, human-looking effect in some areas, contrasting with the reptilian scales in other areas.

Finishing the sketch

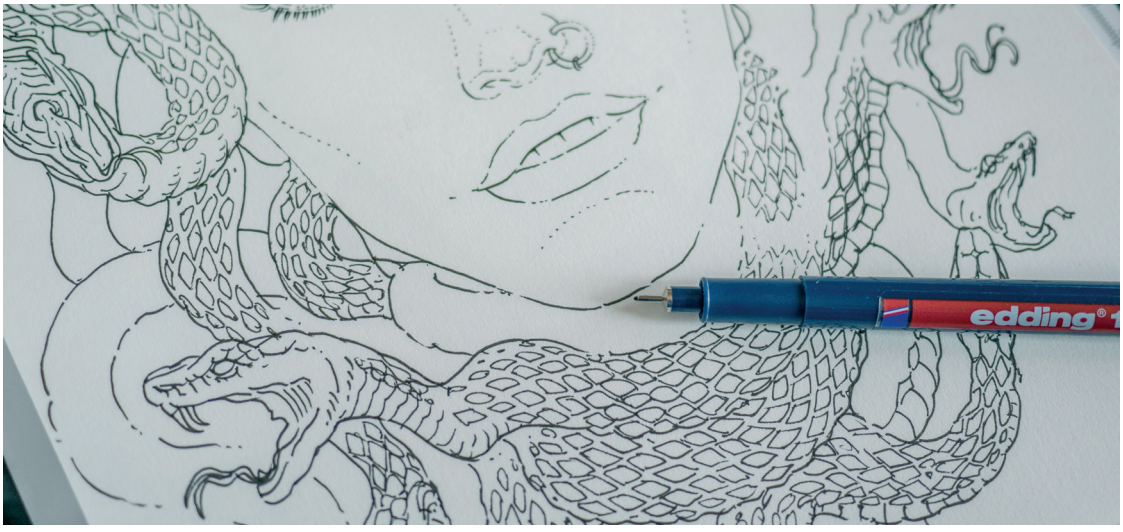
To make the drawing "pop" more and give it a three-dimensional look, I shade the snakes in the background almost black. In some shadowed areas, I increase the contrast with a mechanical pencil. I clean up lighter areas with an eraser to keep them bright. By this point, I consider my detailed sketch to be finished, and now I'm ready to proceed with the inking stage.

Second transfer

Now I am ready to begin work on the final piece, so the detailed pencil sketch must be transferred to the final paper. I will use my light table to transfer the outline of the pencil drawing to a blank sheet of cartridge paper, as I did before. To keep the paper layers from shifting around, I link them together with a stapler. The staples can be removed later!

Starting to ink

For my outline I am using an Edding 1800 0.3 mm Profipen. These fineliners are quite cheap, create a good line, and their pigment does not fade or bleed on lightweight paper. I start with the main contours of the drawing, the biggest element being the face. It is good practice to work from big forms to small ones in this way, as it gives you an overall impression of the finished image at each stage of your workflow, helping you to keep control of the whole picture.



Top left
Capturing the main outlines first

Bottom left
Adding details to the snakes

Top right
Starting to shade the final drawing

Bottom right
Adding detailed shadows to the snakes

Checking progress

Above you can see the results halfway through the transfer process. All of the main contours of Medusa's head and hair have been lined in ink. It is useful to periodically turn off the light table to see what the line work looks like without the sketch underneath.

Snake scales

Now I can add details to the snakes, building on the loose guidelines in the base sketch. As I mentioned previously, it's important that the strokes follow the shape of the subject; it makes your drawing look more accurate and three-dimensional. You should constantly keep in mind the cylindrical form of the snake and how the scales follow it.

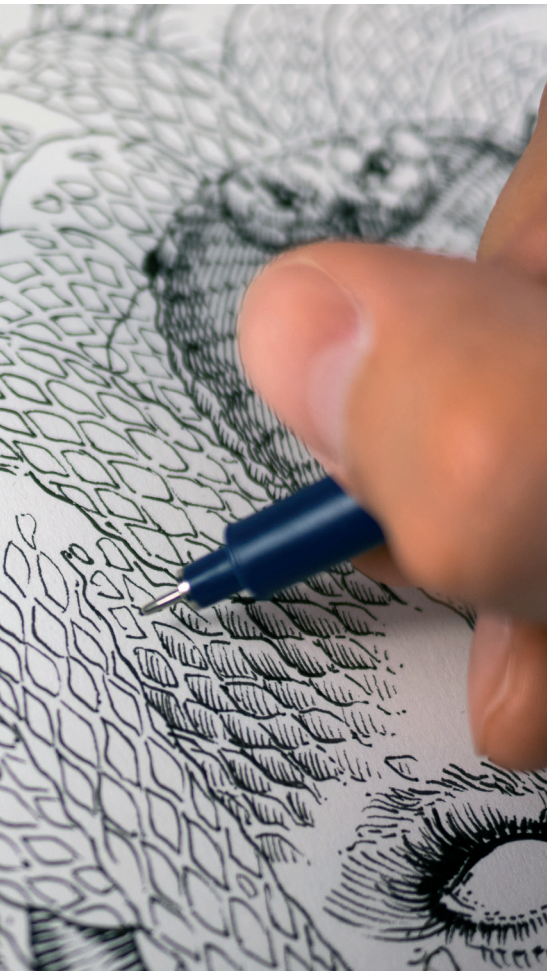
Shading with ink

I will presume that there is a light source placed above and slightly to the right of Medusa's head. I make the shadow under her chin stronger with a 0.5 mm fineliner, and fill the snakes farthest to the back with strokes of shading.

I use line variation to increase the picture's sense of depth, applying thicker lines in shadowed areas, and thinner lines in areas closer to the light source. Dashed lines and dots can be used to subtly shade the lighter parts, and the paper is left blank in the brightest areas. For the strongest shadows, I use cross-hatching or solid black.

Detailed shadows

Refining details is time-consuming but worth it in the end for adding that "wow" factor to your work. I start adding strokes to the snakes' scales with a 0.3 mm fineliner, constantly keeping in mind the light source and form of the objects. I also add the shadows cast by each snake; as there are many snakes and they bounce shadows onto each other, this stage takes a lot of time and patience.



edding

Completed line work

Now the line work is almost complete. I spend some time making a final decision about Medusa's eyes: should I make them like they are in the pencil sketch, or leave them blank as they were in some of my early ideas? In the end, I leave the eyes empty, making her seem less human and more like a statue or carved mask, as she is often depicted. Finally, I remove the staples, and the pencil sketch and ink drawing can be compared side by side.

Finishing touches

To finish off the image, I slowly move down the whole sheet from top to bottom, adding extra depth to the shadows and contrast so that the whole image feels more three-dimensional. I scan the page at 300 dpi and increase the contrast again using the Curves tool in Adobe Photoshop, and with that, the piece is complete.

ARTIST'S TIP

Choosing tools

Whether you believe it or not, the art supplies that you use do not matter. Every day I am faced with questions like, "What pen is that?" and "What paper do you use?" Of course, a cheap pen might spoil your work, but you do not have to buy the most expensive pen to create great artwork.

Another point to consider is the logic and efficiency of your tools. For example, don't try to fill large shadows with a tiny pen when you could take a brush and complete the same work in two minutes.

Top near right

Completed line work

Bottom near right

Removing the staples from the finished drawing

Far right

The finished drawing © Denis Pakowacz

PAKO
WACZ

Forest Behemoth

Sketching and painting a creature concept with Emily Hare

In this article, illustrator Emily Hare shares her approach to designing and painting a benign forest giant with pencil and watercolor.

Rough ideas

My first thought when designing a creature is whether it is a predator or prey animal. I want to design something for the world I have created, "Strangehollow," which is a vast enchanted forest. More specifically, I want to design something that lives in the swamps of Strangehollow. Initially, I imagine it as a predator, perhaps an ambush predator that would lurk in dark places.

You can see my drawing tools pictured here, which include various sizes of Koh-i-Noor HB and B mechanical pencils, a Faber-Castell 3B 2.0 mm mechanical pencil, a Palomino Blackwing pencil, a large eraser, and finally, a Tombow MONO Zero eraser for some of the finer details.

I start by roughly scribbling some shapes down and letting my mind wander. At this point I avoid looking at references and just want to put shapes and ideas down on paper. I like to use my very large Koh-i-Noor pencil for sketches and thumbnails as it has a lovely weight to it and stops me becoming bogged down in details – something which is easy to get carried away with!

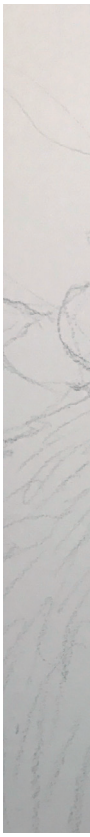
Sketching

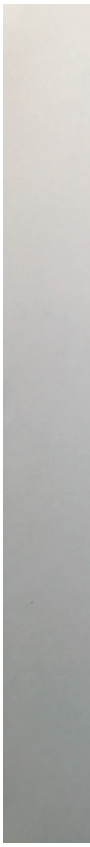
Once I have found some interesting shapes, I then work on them with a smaller pencil (usually my Faber-Castell mechanical pencil) and "find" more detail within the larger shapes. Here I think of anglerfish and other creatures which use lures – would the lure be inside its mouth, or on top of its head like the anglerfish? I explore different avenues and see what occurs to me.

Far left
The drawing tools used for this stage

Near left
Scribbling down some rough ideas

Right
Developing rough ideas in more detail





New ideas

As my thoughts go on and I keep doodling, I realize that as much as I want to design a predator, something keeps drawing me to the idea of a large herbivore. The main feature I keep coming back to is the long shaggy hair on this beast, almost similar to the algae and vines that hang off the trees in swamps.

Defining the concept

I have always had a plan to design a giant creature that lives in Strangehollow: something with a huge booming call, a little like a whale that you would be able to hear for miles around. I start to imagine a very slow-moving and docile creature, one which is so massive it has no natural predators.

This beast will have a very large bony head – to help with the resonance of its voice – and knobbly thick horns on the back. I imagine it to be the height of the trees so that it can graze the treetops. In my mind I picture a moose-like animal, perhaps a little "ugly," but rather magnificent, so I look through images and videos of moose to see how they move. Their extraordinary composition helps to inform my creature design.

Top far and middle left
A more concrete idea starts to emerge

Top near left, bottom far left, and bottom middle left
Developing more specific ideas for a large herbivore

Bottom near left
Deciding the size and appearance of the beast

Choosing paper

The sketch will be transferred to a larger paper for the final version. In this case, I will be using some heavy-duty watercolor paper. I love Hahnemühle paper and have chosen a sheet of their cold press "Leonardo" paper, which has quite a smooth texture despite being cold press, and is thick enough that I don't have to worry about stretching the paper. It is possible to dive straight in here with a lot of water without the paper buckling. I will also be using an A3 Artograph lightbox to transfer my sketch. It's a very chunky and heavy lightbox, but is bright enough to shine through even this 600 gsm paper.

Transferring the drawing

When handling my watercolor paper, I usually wear surgical gloves, in case I leave greasy fingerprints on the paper which would stop the paint from sinking in. It's a great habit to get into, though it can get sweaty in hot weather!

While wearing the gloves, I very lightly transfer the drawing onto the watercolor paper with an HB mechanical pencil. Sometimes I just draw or change details directly on the new paper, for example when making the creature's mouth shut, rather than open as it is in the sketch.

Painting tools

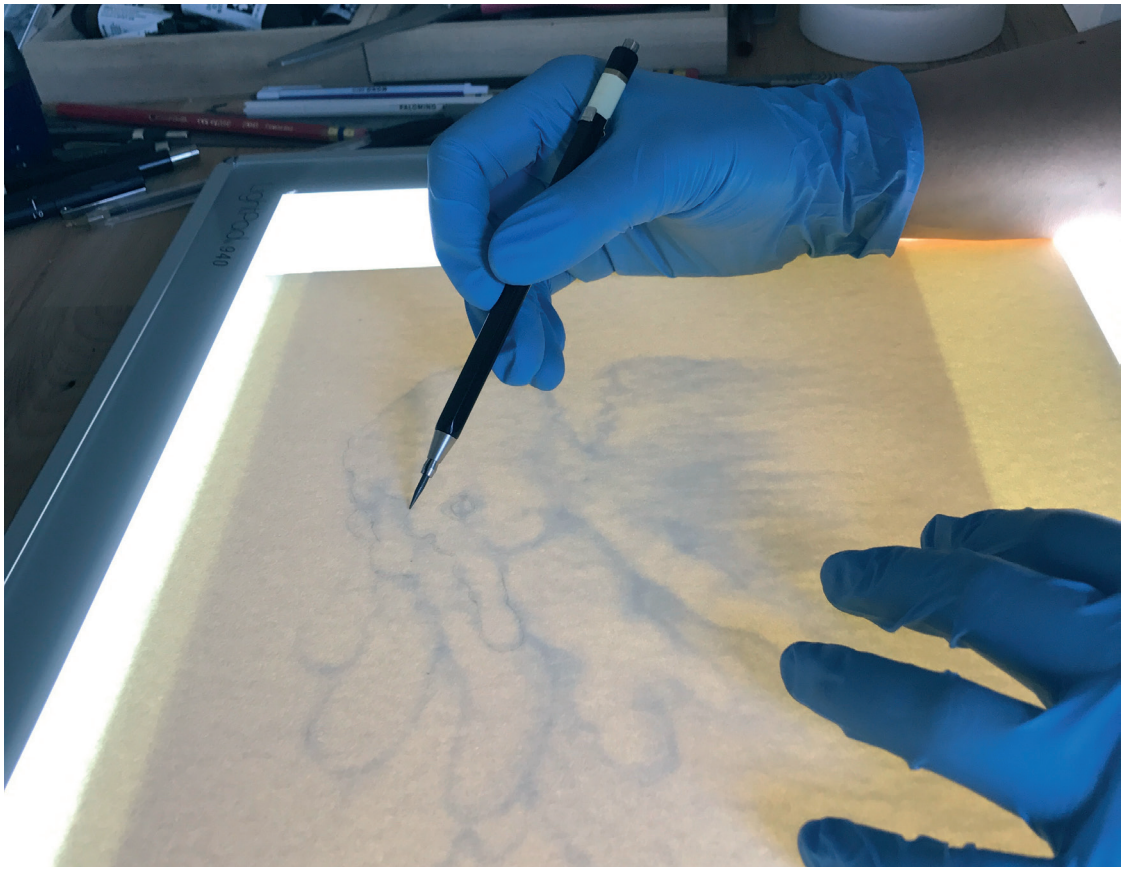
On the right you can see some of the tools I will be using to paint the final design. You can choose your own colors if you prefer, but the paints I have chosen are Daniel Smith Extra Fine watercolors in Moonglow, Mayan Blue Genuine, Undersea Green, Green Apatite Genuine, Indigo, Amethyst Genuine, Hematite Violet Genuine, Hematite Burnt Scarlet, Garnet Genuine, Deep Scarlet, and Ivory Black. I will also be using Holbein Acryla white gouache for highlights.

The brushes I will use are a Da Vinci Maestro Tobolsky-Kolinsky (size 6), Winsor & Newton Series 7 Sable (size 3), and Pro-Arte Miniature Painting (size 3/0). I also have a misting bottle full of water ready.

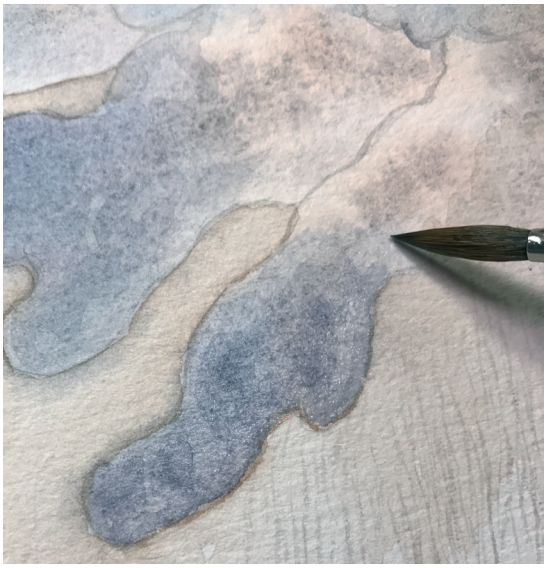
Top near right
Using a lightbox to transfer the sketch onto thicker paper

Top far right
Wearing gloves helps to protect the paper from smudging

Bottom right and bottom far right
Preparing the painting tools



Ivory Black
DANIEL SMITH
EXTRA FINE
WATERCOLOR
15 ml/.5 fl. oz.



Top far left
Revisiting the lines with some watercolor

Top near left
Lightly misting the paper with water

Middle far left
Mixing two watercolor pigments

Middle near left
Applying the initial color wash

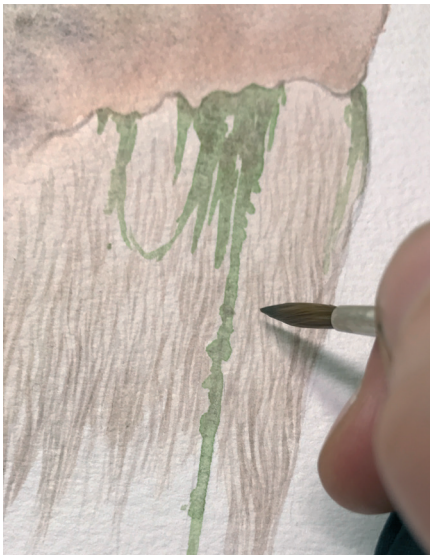
Bottom left
Painting in a blue base for the horns

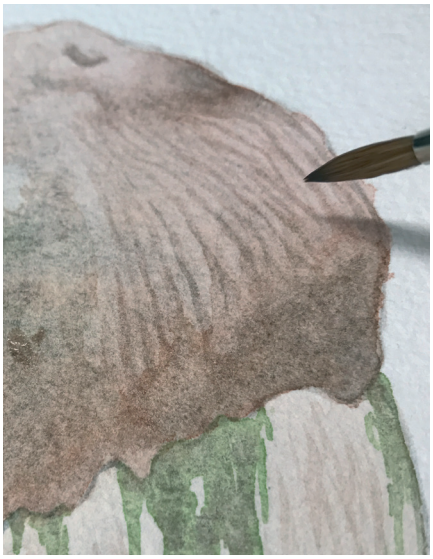
Top near right
Creating fine hair detail with the brush

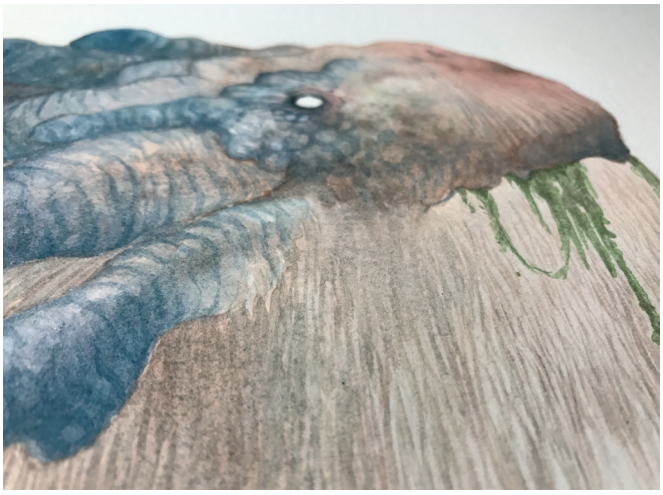
Top middle right
Adding a mottled texture to the horns

Top far right
Fine strokes give texture to the beak-like nose

Bottom right
Continuing to add more depth and color







First wash

Once I have finished the pencil lines, which I keep extremely light, I lightly go over them with watercolor to make them distinct. For the main color palette, I mix two of Daniel Smith's gemstone pigments: Hematite Violet Genuine and Hematite Burnt Scarlet.

Both have a gorgeous granulating quality that makes it easy to create textures. I spray the paper with my fine misting bottle, take some of the mixed pigment onto my brush, and start to lay it down and create texture.

Painting the horns

I decide to make the horns of the behemoth blue – since he doesn't have to be camouflaged, why not make him rather eye-catching instead? I use a mixture of the Mayan Blue Genuine, Indigo, and a little of the Amethyst Genuine watercolors.

When I have blocked out all of the basic colors, I can start adding more details; I often "draw" with my brush, as well as using washes of paint, and I apply this technique to the hair.

I use a hairdryer between washes so I don't have to wait for the paint to dry. This can be a useful method if you want to speed up the painting process, but care must be taken when doing so as it can change the way the paint dries.

Creating details

I use lots of fine brushstrokes to create the shaggy coat, then continue with the blue horns, creating a bumpy texture. Once the pigment is applied, I often use a clean wet brush to blend the edges. I give the behemoth's nose a bony texture by adding some grooves in his "beak."

Rendering

This is where the most fun can be had: rendering the textures and adding more depth with layers of watercolor. I let the paint guide where I want to lay down bumps or shapes, depending on how it has dried in an earlier wash. I add some ridges to the horns for extra character.

The eye

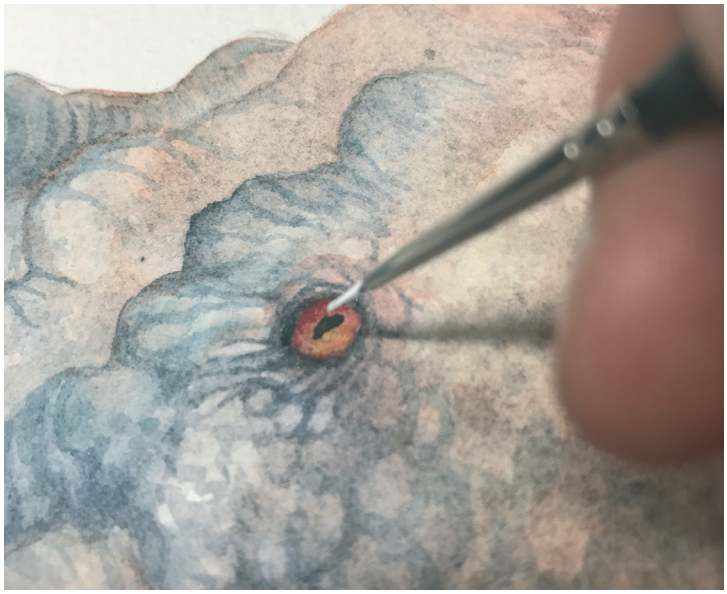
My next task is to give the creature a lifelike, glossy eye. For me, eyes are the icing on the cake for a creature design, really breathing life into it. I use a garnet red pigment, waiting for the basic color to dry before adding the pupil. I base the pupil's shape on the eyes of a goat, horse, or sheep, which help to give these animals very wide peripheral vision. The behemoth would not be concerned about anything sneaking up on him, but it's an appealing herbivorous feature.

Adding highlights

I use some white Holbein Acryla gouache mixed with a tiny amount of blue watercolor to paint the reflection in the eye, and then top that off with a pure white highlight. A couple of little dots of white in the corner of the eye add an extra shine. I always use a brush I don't mind eventually throwing away for any acrylic-based paints. Never, ever use sable brushes with Acryla gouache, as it would ruin them, as would some inks. It is useful to buy some cheap brushes for this purpose. I use the same white to add highlights to the horns, just to finish them off with more dimension and texture.

The final design

On the next page is the final design. This beast has been an absolute delight to create – I love how you can start out with a blank piece of paper, and then at the end of it, you have a brand new animal that never existed before. Drawing inspiration and ideas from real creatures is invaluable, even for a fantastical beast such as this. I can now picture the behemoth walking slowly, like elephants do, through Strangehollow's forest swamps, calling out to his mate in a deep booming call, and the returning cry is heard, echoing through the trees. Can you imagine the noise if these creatures butted heads like stags or mountain goats do in mating season? It would be thunderous!



Top near right
Painting in the red eye

Bottom near right
Using white gouache to add highlights to the eye and horns

Far right
The finished painting

© Emily Hare

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Travel Sketches
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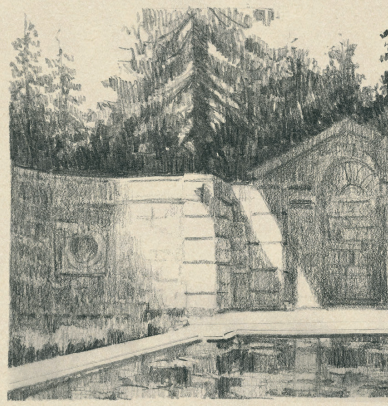
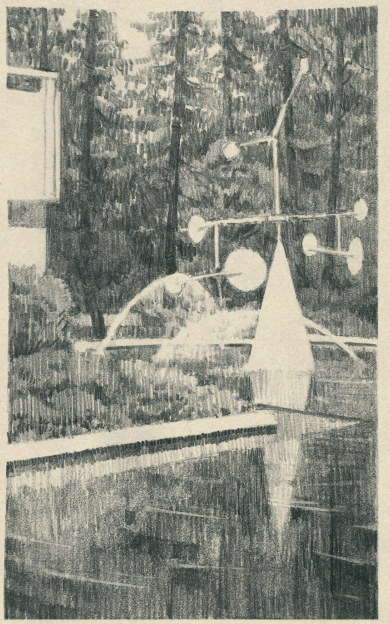
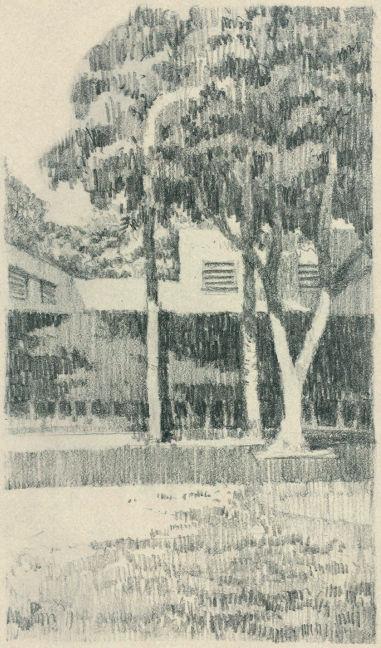
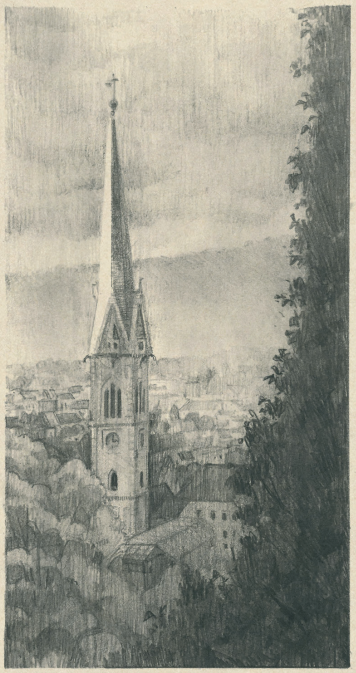
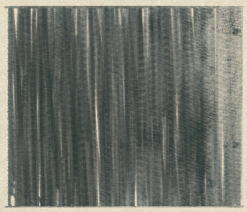
Graphite on paper

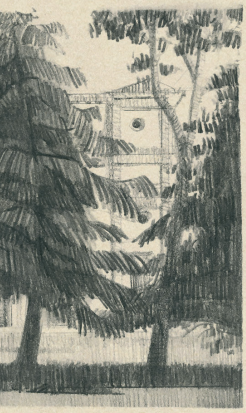


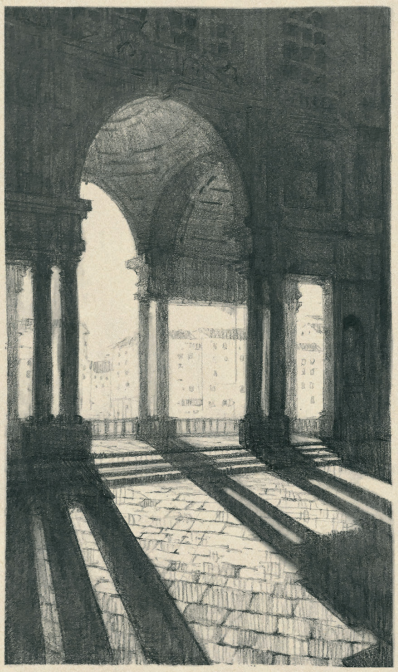












Rain
© Pepe Delgado Navarro
Graphite, 22 cm × 13.5 cm

Self-portrait

© Ricardo Nask

Traditional sketch
and digital ink

They Are Fascinated © Ulla Thynell • Micron Pigma ink pens and digital color

Wizards Like Moths © Kevin Keele • Ballpoint pen, Prismacolor marker, and white gel pen on toned paper

Magpie © Nataša Ilinčić • Graphite, watercolor, gouache, and digital painting

Bob
© Pavel Sokov
Conté charcoal on newsprint

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Matteo Marjoram is a freelance concept artist for the games industry, working out of Los Angeles, California. He has recently worked on projects for Naughty Dog, Ubisoft, and One Pixel Brush.

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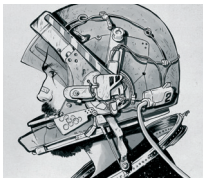
Pepe Delgado Navarro was born and raised in Guadalajara, Mexico. He is a character designer and visual development artist currently working on his own projects, with previous credits including Nickelodeon and Hasbro.

pepedn.artstation.com



Ricardo Nask is an artist with almost fifteen years' experience in graphic design, art direction, 3D, product design, illustration, and comics. His inspirations include European and Japanese comics.

cargocollective.com/ricardorodriguez

Ulla Thynell is an illustrator and graphic designer living in Finland, working on freelance commissions as well as personal projects. Ulla typically makes illustrations for publication, using traditional and digital media, and has a passion for fantasy and children's books.

ullathynell.com

Kevin Keele's work has been featured in award-winning picture books, in popular videogames, on best-selling novels, and once on his parents' fridge. He lives in Utah with his wife and three boys. He is most commonly sighted drawing, hiking, and beekeeping.

kkeeleart.artstation.com

Nataša Ilinčić is an Edinburgh-based illustrator who draws inspiration from European folktales and long hikes in locations where trees and ruins outnumber people. Her work has been published in books and magazines, and exhibited in various art galleries.

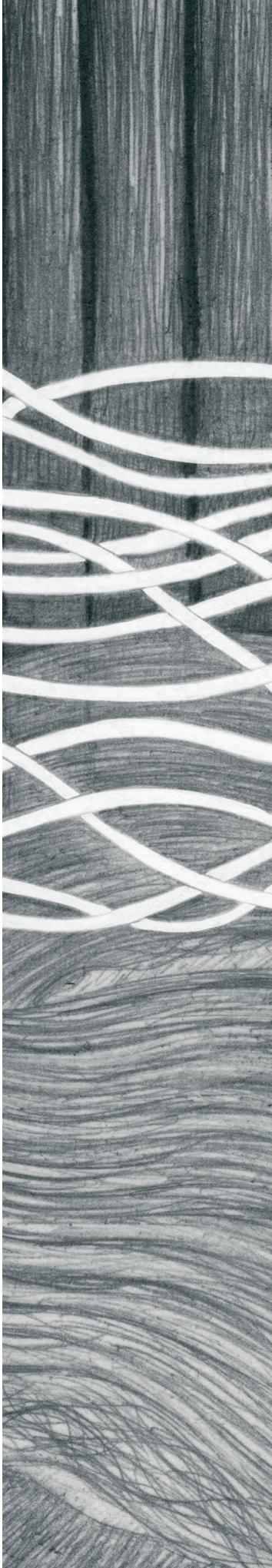
natasailincic.com

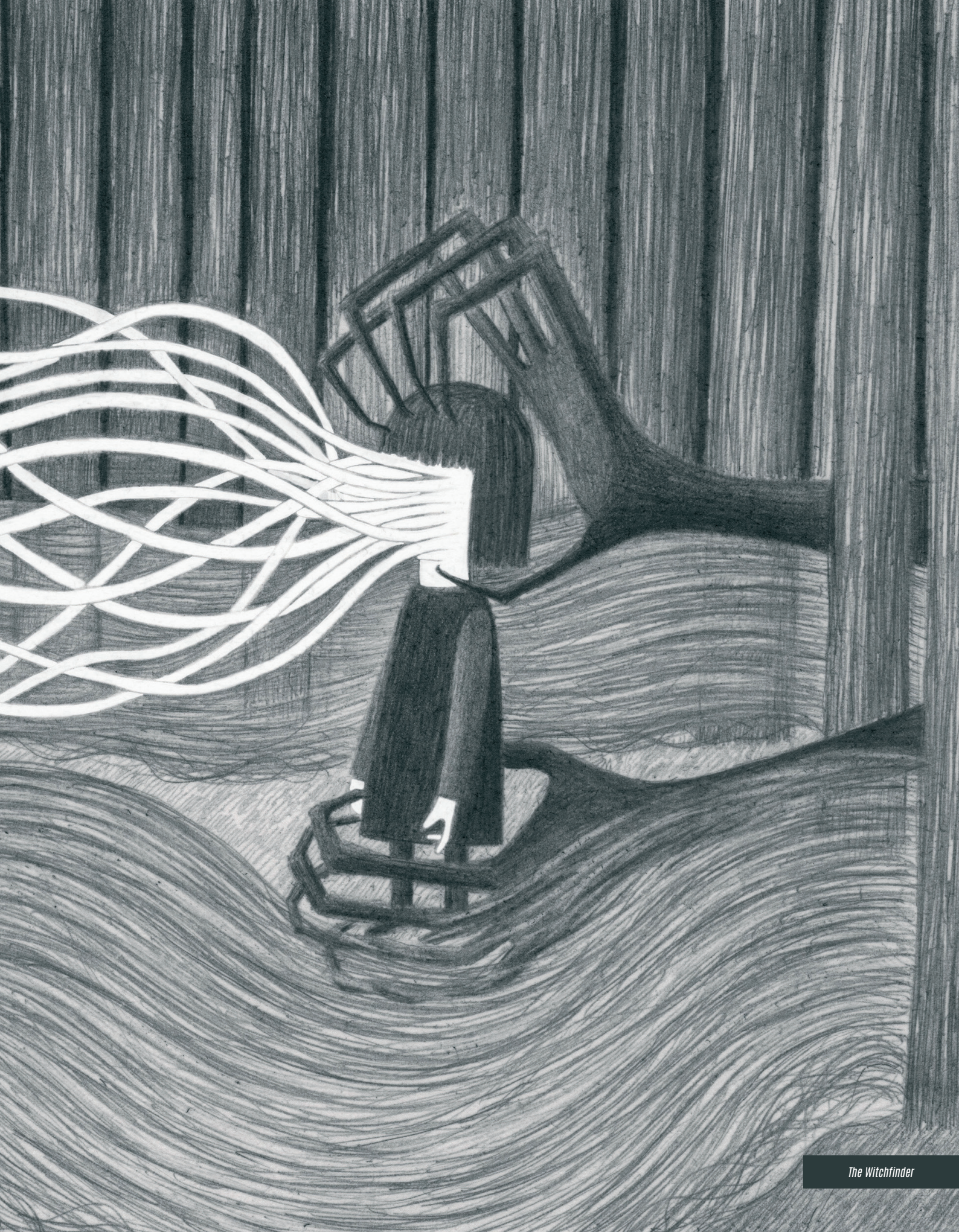
Pavel Sokov was born in Moscow, Russia, and emigrated to Canada when he was ten. He specializes in portrait commissions, including work for members of royal families and entrepreneurs, and many publications including *Time* magazine. He works primarily in oils.

pavelsokov.com

The Witchfinder

An interview with James Lipnickas





The Witchfinder

James Lipnickas is an artist with a distinctively eerie visual approach and an abiding love for the spooky and strange. We talk to him about the inspirations and work process behind his memorable illustrations.

Q· Thanks for speaking to GRAPHITE, James! First off: who are you, where are you based, and what do you do?

A· Thank you for having me! I am an artist and I currently live in New England, USA, where you can find me drawing the strange and unusual.

Q· What's your artistic background like? Did you always want to pursue art as a career?

A· Early on, I was fascinated with the creepy works of Charles Addams, Edward Gorey, and Charles Burns. Their genre inspired me to explore a different way of telling stories through visuals.

I didn't start drawing seriously until I was twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old. I ended up going to art school (School of Visual Arts) when I was thirty. I was always creating, but it usually involved music or short stories.

Above
A Strange Night on Route 34

Right
All the Children Are Gone

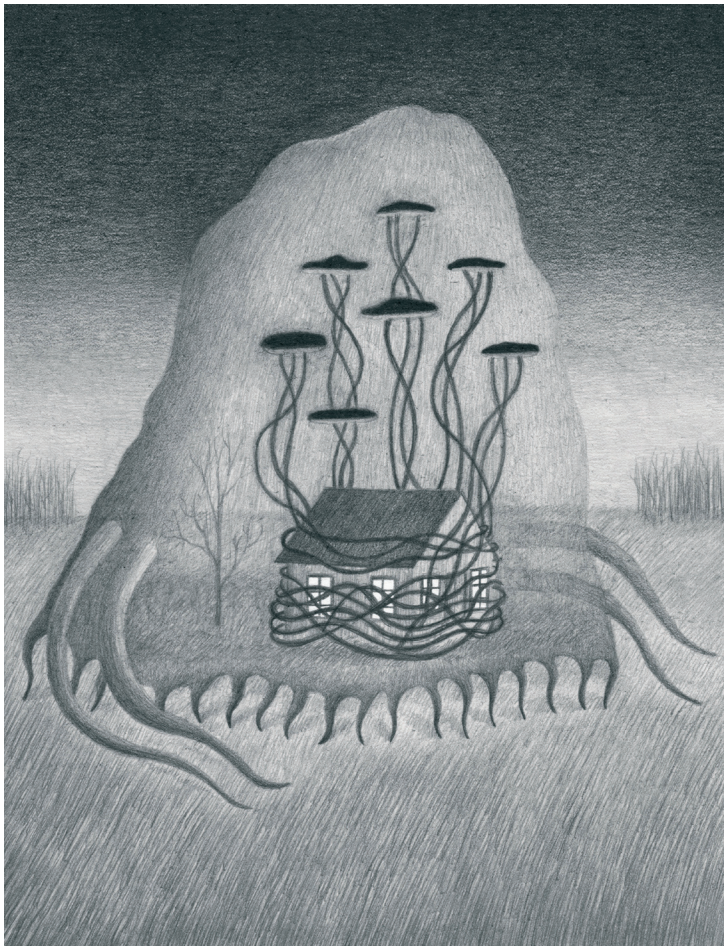
All images © James Lipnickas. Created with pencil on paper

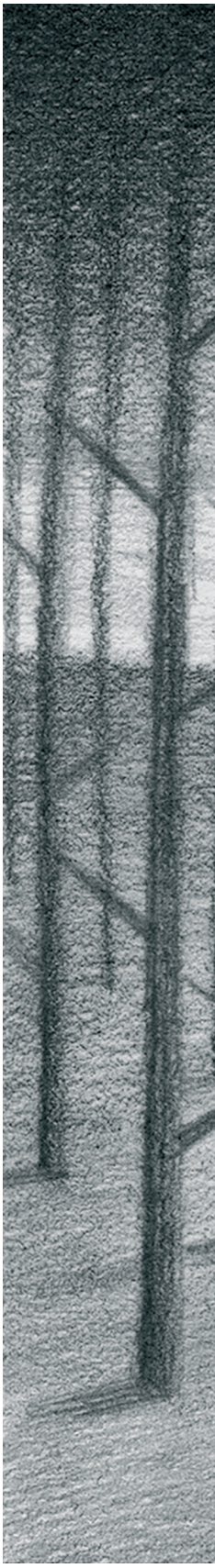
Q· Who or what are your biggest inspirations? Where did your love for strange things start?

A· When you grow up in New England, you hear lots of stories about hauntings, mystery, witchcraft, and all-around spookiness. There are quirky old towns, eerie cemeteries, and large areas with deep dark woods. It's hard not to be inspired by it. There is also a tremendous creepy history in New England, with exceptional writers and artists who lived here, such as Shirley Jackson, Stephen King, H. P. Lovecraft, Edward Gorey, and Edgar Allan Poe.

Q· What drawing tools and materials do you generally like to use? Any specific favorites?

A· I have a very minimal setup so that I can be more portable. I always have 0.3 mm and 0.5 mm mechanical pencils (Pentel, GraphGear, and Alvin Draft-Matic), rubber erasers, stick erasers, and an X-ACTO blade. I carry a small Moleskine sketchbook and a medium-sized Moleskine folio that holds different cuts of Arches hot press watercolor paper. All of this fits in my back pocket.

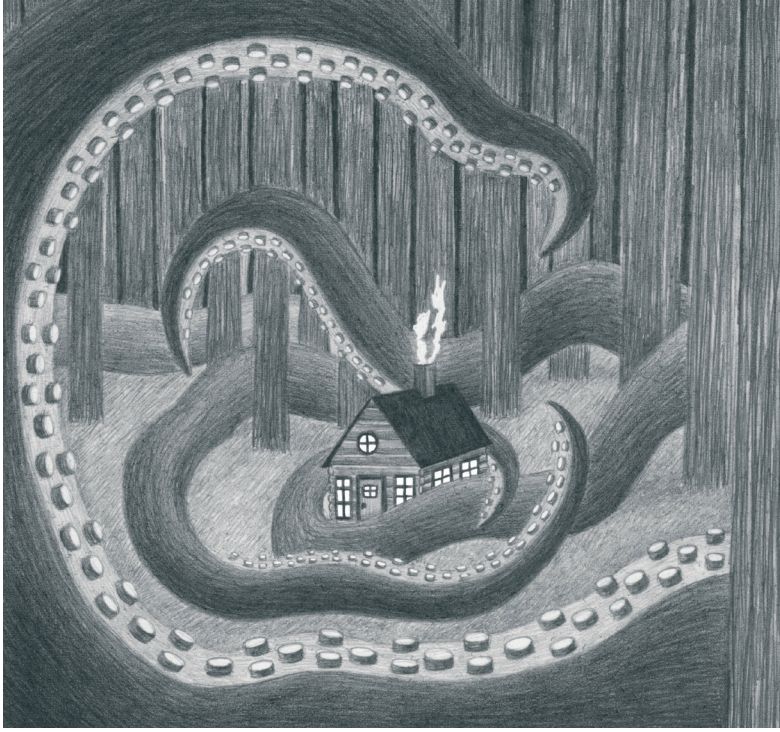




Top near right
It Creeps and it Crawls

Bottom near right
It Lives in the Fields

Far right
It Lurks at Night



Top far left
The Night Watcher

Top middle left
The Night Slithers

Bottom left
The Nocturnal Feeder

Near left
The Nightcrawler

Q· Could you describe your typical work process for us?

A· Most of my drawings start with a mess of a sketch, without much information and a loose idea. I tend to work everything out during the final drawing. I don't like to have the piece all mapped out because it becomes too mechanical. I like the mystery of not knowing where it's going to go.

Q· What is one valuable piece of advice that you'd offer to aspiring illustrators?

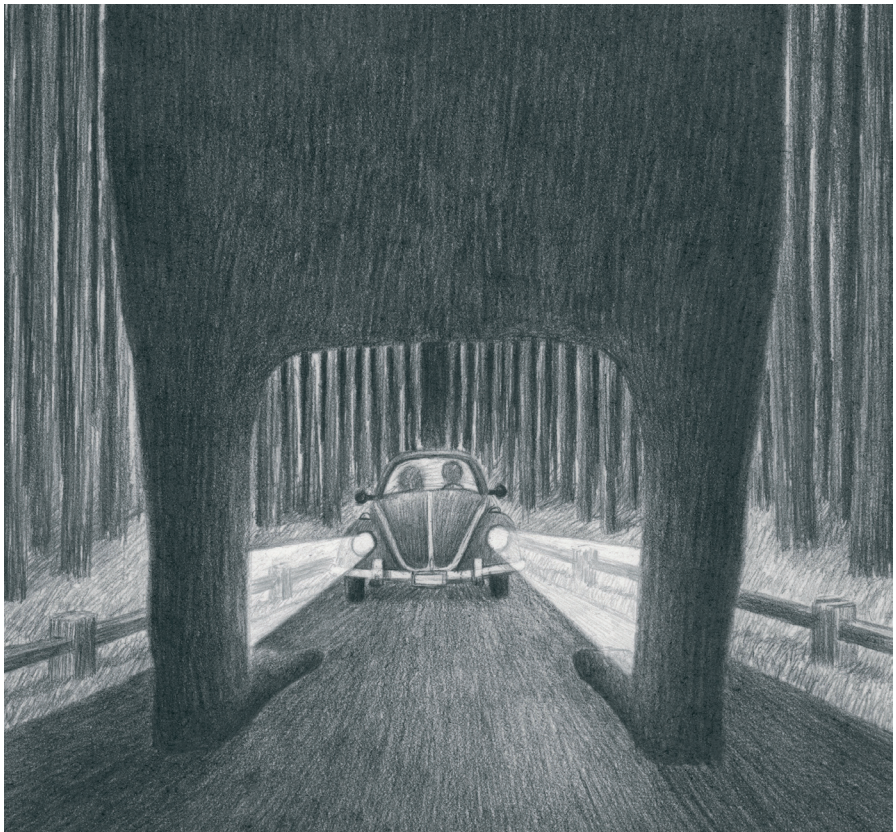
A· Draw, draw, draw, and keep drawing. The illustrators that I find the most intriguing are the ones that have a story to tell. They add something personal and are consistent in their vision. An artist's work that is unique and remains true to their style is inspiring.

Q· Have you got a favorite UFO, cryptid, or other weird phenomenon?

I don't really have a favorite – I enjoy them all. I tend to read or listen to UFO stories. Anything that George Knapp (Coast to Coast AM) has to say, I am more than willing to listen to.

Q· And finally, what do you do when you're not working on art?

A· I like to walk around town and drink coffee or drive on the windy back roads of New England. I am always thinking about my next drawing – it often keeps me up at night. Nothing makes me happier than storytelling.



Top near right
The Creepers (Return)

Bottom near right
The Creepers (Return Four)

Far right
The Machine

My home away from home

Sketching on location
with Melanie Reim

Join illustrator Melanie Reim as she visits her favorite urban sketching sites in the Dominican Republic, with ink pens and watercolors in hand.

Though I live and work in New York City as an illustrator and Professor at the Fashion Institute of Technology, I have what I consider to be my second home: the Dominican Republic, where the country and the people adopted me many years ago. I am just finishing a body of artwork from a year-long sabbatical, most of it spent in the DR, and would like to share some of that work with you.

I travel with a sketchbook never far from my side. What appeals to me most wherever I go are the slices of life, everyday scenes that make the ordinary extraordinary to draw. As an early riser, seeing and hearing an area come to life is my favorite time to get out to begin the story of whatever city, town, or village I am in. Gentle calls at bustling daily fruit or fish markets, people on their way to work, streets being cleaned; all of this is the beginning of the story of a day. Through these drawings, you'll see the narrative of Santo Domingo and some other parts of the country and the stories within.

Zona Colonial, Santo Domingo

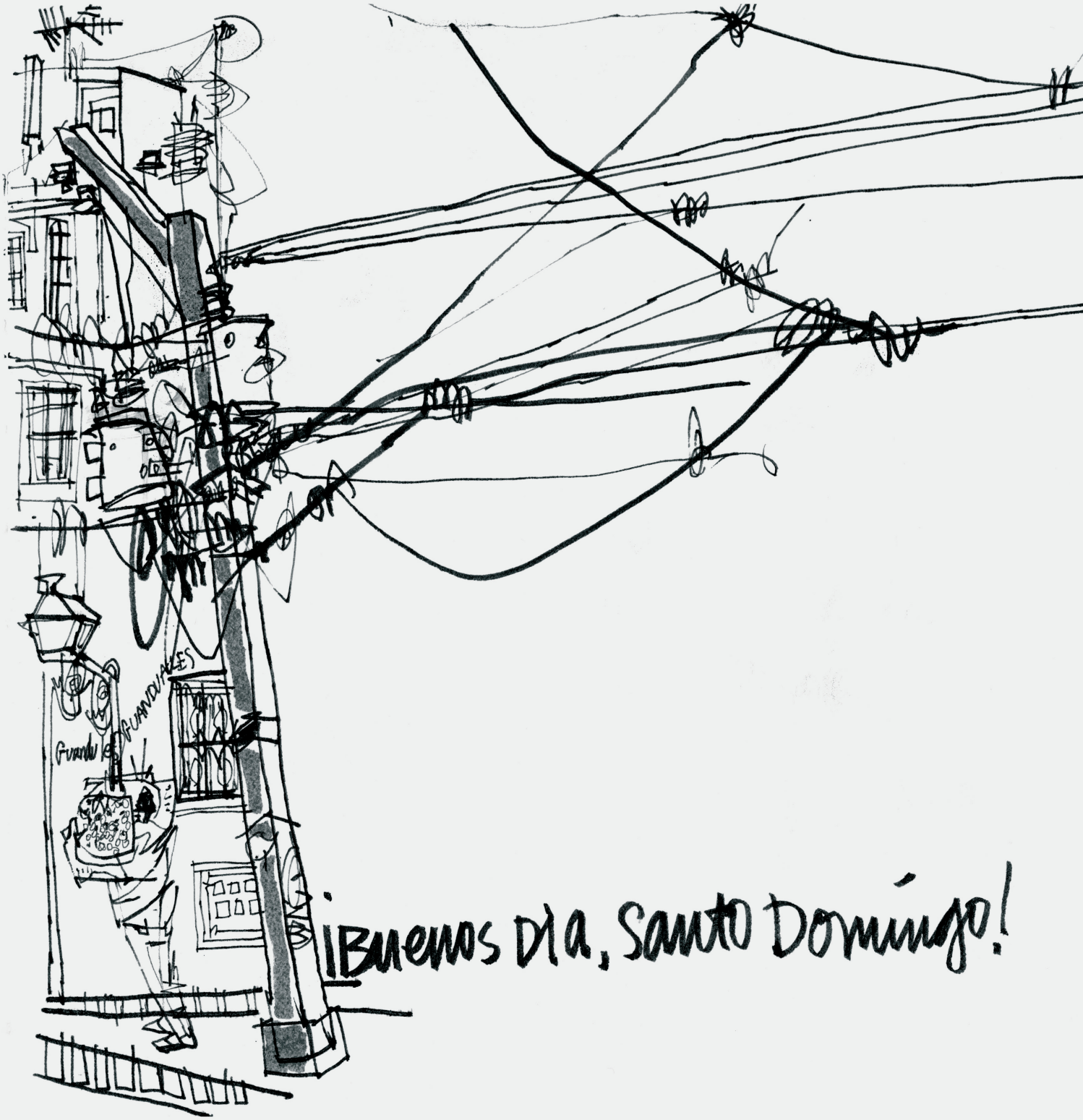
I am in Zona Colonial, the Colonial Zone in Santo Domingo, outside Villa Colonial, one of my favorite hotels, and down the block from Casa Quien, a wonderful art gallery. It's very easy to sit on the steps and take in the early morning crisp air and say *hola* to all who pass by. The wires that adorn the streets create a kind of calligraphy that is fascinating to me, and I knew immediately that I wanted them to have their own space in a composition.

This sketch happened very quickly, so I did not stop to photograph the process, and it was a great warm-up for a day of drawing. The street and details of the street lamps and windows were set behind the wires, and drawn with a lighter line to keep the attention where I wanted it: on the wires. Suddenly, the singsong "*gandules*" was in the air, and the man selling pigeon peas came walking by. You can see that I added him quickly, and overlapped my drawing to bring another layer of narrative into the image. Though many scenes that I draw are full of color, I often keep my drawings black and white. I love line and mark-making, and there is a lot of "color" to be found in black and white drawing. I drew this image with my ever-present Pelikan M200 fountain pen. The heavier lines were drawn with a Hero cartridge pen that I got while in Singapore. The rich black ink is Platinum Carbon ink and the gray is my Pentel brush pen.

Above left
Sketching on the beach

Above right
Early morning in Santo Domingo. The streets are fresh and cool and the wires are a character unto themselves

Right
The final sketch
© Melanie Reim


¡Buenos día, Santo Domingo!

Calle El Conde, Santo Domingo

Calle El Conde runs throughout the Colonial Zone in Santo Domingo, and bustles with the activity of locals and tourists alike. The café on the corner is the gathering place where I have spent many an afternoon, sometimes just stopping by for a quick refreshing drink. I am never at a loss for characters to draw, from the shoeshine man, to the domino players, the local artist, the tour guides, and just regular folk soaking in the Dominican sun and hospitality. On this afternoon, I was taken by the architecture, displaying hints of elegant times, facades that have remnants of days of glory. Typical intricate, black wrought iron balconies and the staunch army of lampposts line the streets. The Cathedral is a destination for many tourist groups. What you can see here is the housing and office for the Mayor. I started out by drawing one view, down one street, but as often happens, I started drifting over to the other side of my page. The drawing turned into a spread, encapsulating the nuances of the story of the plaza and a dreamy afternoon in the Zona Colonial. Executing an image such as this carries with it the notions of one- and two-point perspective (very casually addressed in my way), a sense of scale, people, of course, and oh, yes, the wires.

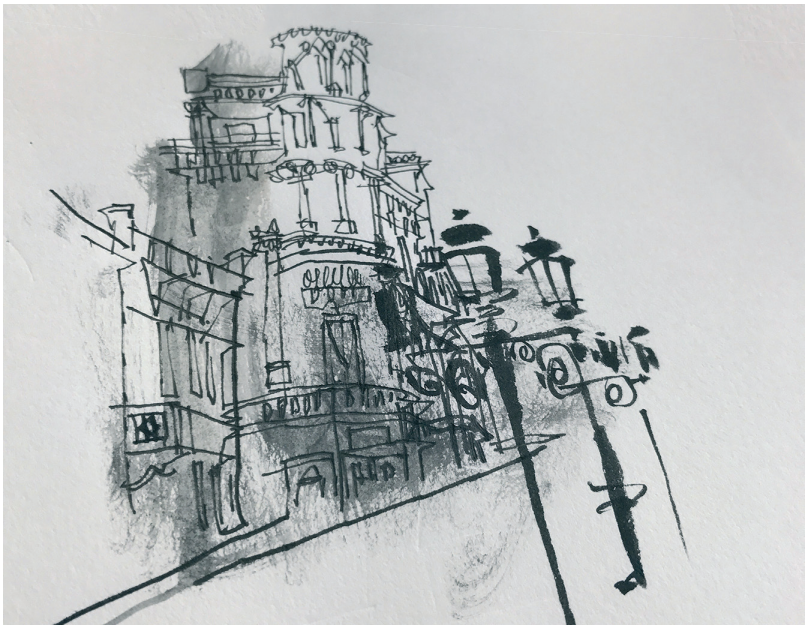
Top near right: A view down Calle El Conde

Top first middle right: I quickly block in a mass shape with Art Graf, a water-based graphite compressed into a tin. I like the grainy quality it provides, as opposed to a gray watercolor

Top second middle right: Over the mass, I start to draw the buildings, using a vanishing point to establish scale but still maintaining my expressive manner of documenting

Top far right: More detail, and now, with a Pentel brush pen, starting to draw that army of street lamps, using a calligraphic stroke and a heavier, singular line

Bottom right: I drift to the opposite side of my page, and start to fill in what is happening on the other corner. Final sketch © Melanie Reim



Colon Park, Santo Domingo

No matter the time of day, there is always a game of dominoes on the streets and beaches of Santo Domingo. It is a reportage artist's dream: collections of men, and sometimes women, huddled over the board, deep into the game. It is the theater of the park: playful, friendly, but make no mistake – this is also a very serious game! The body language of the players alone is like hitting the jackpot for model drawing. The gesture and expression is endlessly fascinating: focus, concentration, joy, agony, and often eruptions of heated discussions, with hands flying about. It's the hands that I love drawing the most, and they are what is most important to master in documentary drawing, for the hands tell the story of the pose of every figure.

This game was early on in the day, so the group was just beginning to gather. I focused first on the figures and then, selectively, added background elements. I began with a swish of color to identify the gesture, then the rest of the color was added after the line work. It is less about the "painting" of the figures than splashing some color and some modeling into the composition. Again, my line work is with my Pelikan pen and Platinum Carbon ink. I also carry a small watercolor set, made by Schminke, that came with a Da Vinci brush. It is a little gem of a brush that comes to a gorgeous tip and I often use it to "draw" my lines in color.

Top near right: I am beyond excited to find a game of dominoes happening early in my day. Sitting on the bench gives me not only a place to work, but also a comfortable vantage point that is not too intrusive

Bottom near right: I begin with a quick swish of color from my Schminke watercolor set to establish the beginning of the composition and the gesture of the figures. After, I draw the figures primarily in line. I see the group as a unit of shapes, not so much as individuals. In this way, I am designing the scene and the details will follow

Far right: It's best to watch for a quick few seconds to determine the position of the hands as well as the expression that you choose to capture. The figures are the main focus of the composition. The architecture, as beautiful as it is, serves as a backdrop. It's important to "edit" what you see so that it does not overpower the focus of the composition. The final sketch

© Melanie Reim

Las Terrenas Beach, Samana

I can barely think of a beach that I have not loved, but for sure, my favorite has to be Las Terrenas, to the north of Santo Domingo, in the Samana province. Here, the palm trees are majestic and towering. The wind is always blowing, creating a symphony of the swishing of palms, and a feeling of being windswept on an almost deserted hideaway. Las Terrenas is a bustling beach village that has always represented somewhere magical and soothing to me. My favorite time of day is early morning, when the skies are pastel and the village is coming to life.

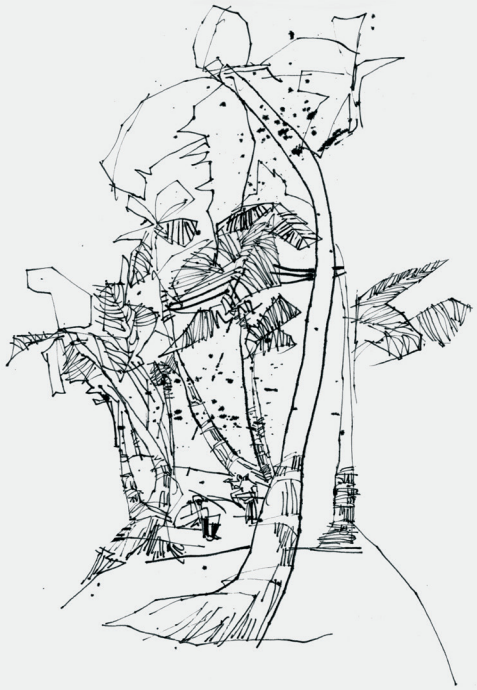
There is a small beach close to the edge of town, from which the local fishermen depart for the depths of the sea for the daily catch. As they return, the restaurateurs gather, as do locals, to see what is fresh for the day. The scale of the trees makes the simplicity of the beach and the lifestyle awe-inspiring. The practice of documenting this kind of scale can add drama to any composition. So, aside from the inherent beauty, it is a great drawing challenge. This morning, my scene evolved right in front of me. First the trees, then the people on the way to work, and then the fishermen arrived.

Top near right: I am awestruck by the beauty and natural design that the palm trees offer me. I feel small as I draw them swaying in the gentle morning breeze. The design of the leaves offers great shapes, and it is not necessary to fill in all of the spines. That makes it too complicated. As I drag my pen to get a single line of the height of the tree, it splatters - and I like it! It stays!

Top far right: To the right of the trees, across the road, the typical, almost Victorian architecture is equally appealing to draw. The homes look and must remain smaller, to emphasize the height of the trees. People on their way to work gather to wait for the bus. Here the line treatment is lighter and simpler to keep the focus of the image in the foreground

Bottom right: And then, the fishermen arrive, completing my morning story. It is important to document them swiftly, and capture the gestures of their body language to insert them successfully. The design of the trees provides little “peekaboo” areas to fill in some detail and other textures, as in the thatched roof, to offset the big shape of the palms. The final sketch

© Melanie Reim



A LOOK AT NATURE

Sketching techniques with Riccardo Pagni

In this article, illustrator and concept artist Riccardo Pagni shares some valuable approaches for designing trees and plants using simple tools.

Left
The drawing tools used for these sketches

Top near right
Drawing the main shape and all the bigger elements

Top far right
Indicating the volume of the branches and softly darkening the main shadow areas

Bottom near right
Pushing the contrast to define the bigger textures and starting the detailing phase

Bottom far right
Adding a little more variety to the textures and continuing to detail until I am satisfied with the result © Riccardo Pagni

When I started drawing trees about four years ago, I began to realize the incredible variety of plants that exist in nature. As a result, I started copying more and more from reality, trying to understand and memorize all the different shapes I could find. Now one of the things I enjoy the most is to play with all those shapes, trying to bring back to my memory all the details and little touches I have locked away in my visual library. In this article I will show some of the ways I sketch, focusing on different techniques and ideas.

I like to try a lot of different tools when I sketch, but most of the time I use tools that I can easily carry with me. All the materials I use for this article can be found in any fine arts store: HB, B, and 3B pencils, mechanical pencil, eraser, Bic ballpoint pen, a gel pen or regular fineliner, a brush pen, and colored STABILO Point fineliners.

Drawing from reality or photo reference

When studying from photo references or reality, I try not to simply copy what I see. I often like to add elements that are taken from other pictures or made up in the moment. This way I can keep making decisions about what I want to draw, and I have to make an effort to understand how to mix the reference that I choose. The purpose of this exercise is to study and memorize new elements and shapes that will eventually help you with your designs. The more that you study, the more elements you will have stored in your visual library.

Using pencil is a fantastic way to attain both smooth gradients and sharp textures, and makes it easy to change elements or redo things you don't like. To the right, you can see a fantastical tree design with many textures and elements that are based on trees I have studied in photographs and real life.

Top far left
Drawing the main shapes, trying to establish the flow of the whole concept

Top near left
Once I am satisfied with the main idea, I start to refine the pencil drawing, working out all the elements I want to include, until I am ready to start inking

Bottom left
Main shadows, bigger textures, and details - everything is drawn directly with pen. Most of the drawing is already complete

Right
The last step is all about pushing the contrast and refinement. I decide to add a darker branch to balance the image © Riccardo Pagni

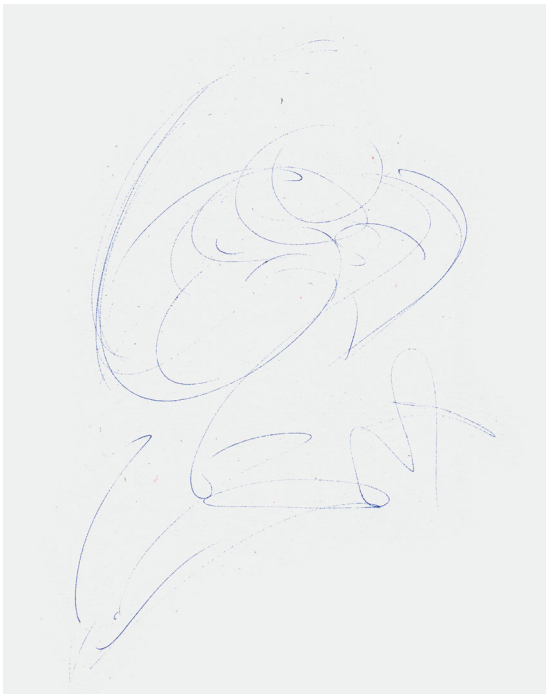
From pencil to ink

I use this kind of approach when I already have an idea in mind. Here I decide to draw a huge fir tree from my imagination. Starting the drawing with a light pencil layer allows you freedom to experiment with the shapes, and to manipulate the idea until you are satisfied with it.

I aim to create a flow with the lines by overlapping the shapes, putting some elements closer to the viewer and some behind the main focal parts of the tree. One important thing to remember is that you are drawing natural shapes, so try to avoid symmetry, or it will look strange.

Once the pencil drawing is complete, I personally love to finish it with an ink pen. I start by darkening the main shadow areas. To push the contrast, it is useful to overlap lighter areas and darker areas. Indicating the strong cast shadows, as you can see cast under the foliage, makes the textures pop out.

Always remember that you are drawing a three-dimensional volume, so, when refining the textures, make sure that they band the shape in the right direction. This is also valid for the extremely jagged textures. Observe reality (for example, the bark of a pine tree) and try to understand what makes a particular volume look three-dimensional.



Top far left
Drawing a random shape directly with a Bic ballpoint pen

Top near left
Following the random lines, I start defining the shape of a tree and some of the bigger elements I want to draw

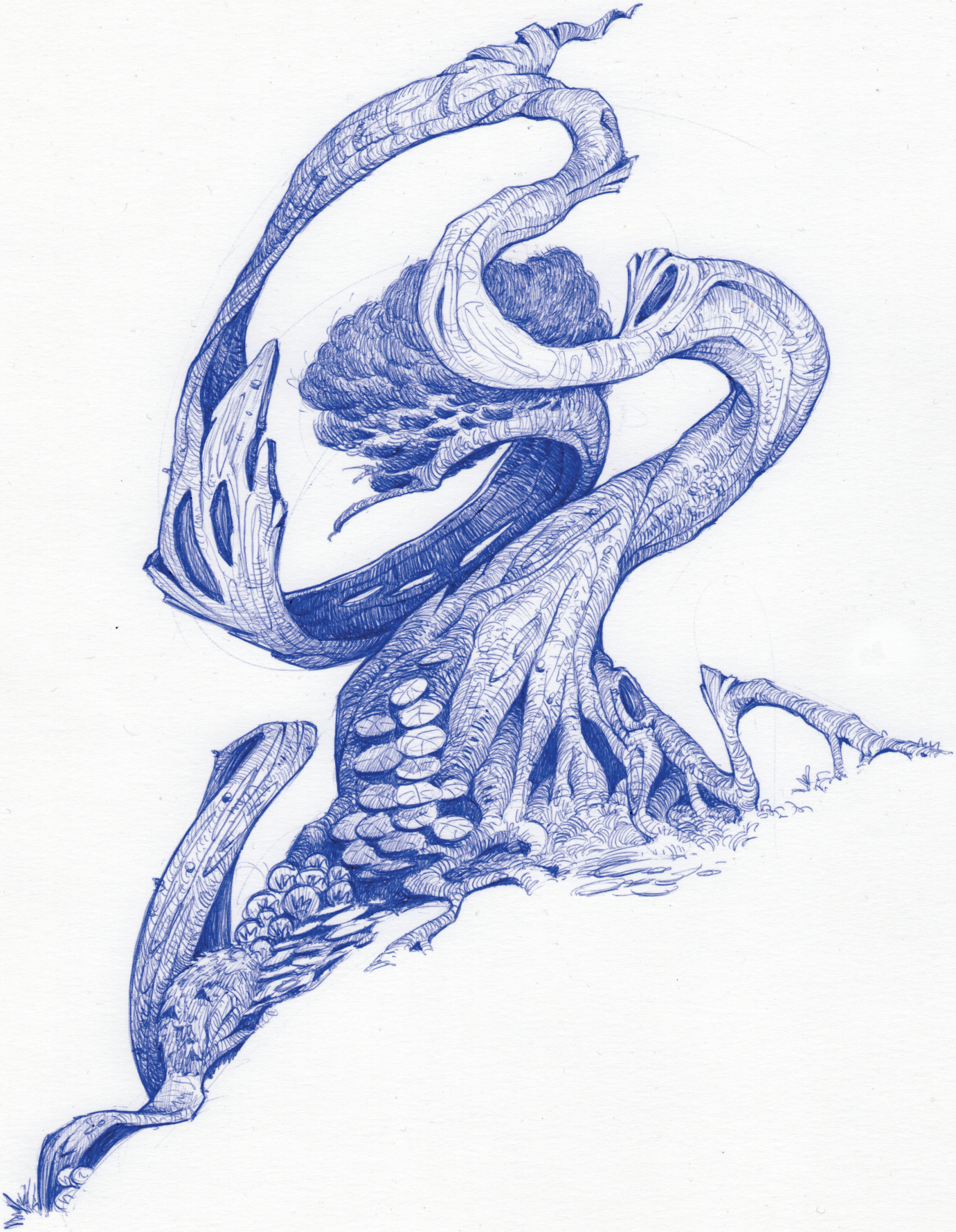
Bottom left
I decide where the main shadow areas will be, then I begin to define the volumes and the textures

Right
Again, the last step is focused on refinements
© Riccardo Pagni

Sketching with a ballpoint pen

This technique is very useful when I almost know the kind of tree I want to draw, but can't figure out an interesting shape yet. Forcing yourself to follow some random lines pushes the envelope of what you might expect. All that I said about shapes and volume is still valid, but the challenge now is to find interesting ways to overlap the different lines. When drawing the roots or branches, one common error (that I often make) is to draw parallel lines, creating a tube-shaped volume that lacks interest. To avoid this, don't use parallel lines. Instead, overlap little segments of the edges to attain a "twisted" shape.

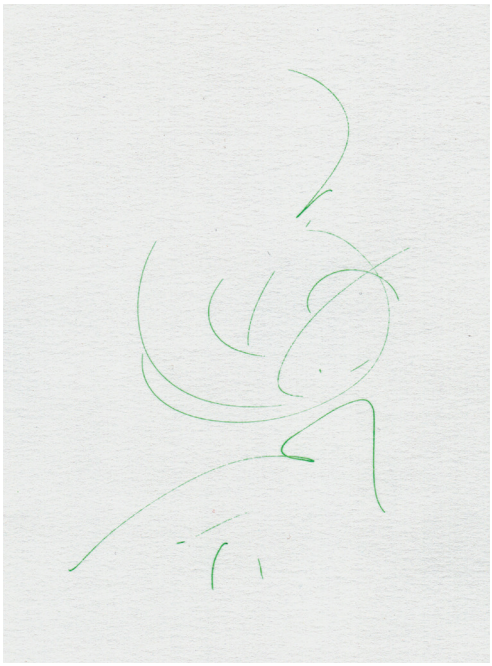
I use a Bic ballpoint pen because it is extremely versatile. It is easy to vary the line thickness when adding crosshatching, and it is also possible to achieve very soft shadows.

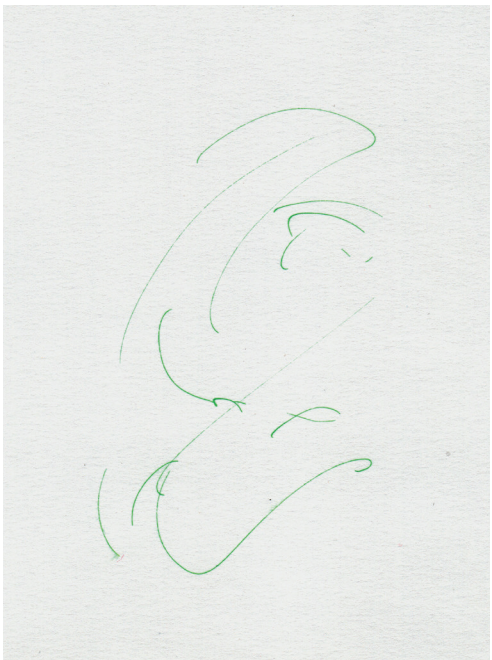


Weird random shapes

This is an exercise that I often perform as a warm-up. My main focus here is to experiment with shapes, trying to push them to the limit. Sometimes I end up with a bunch of weird alien trees, but that's part of the fun! I do not usually polish or refine these sketches because I like to maintain the freshness of their shapes. I normally draw directly with a marker or something else non-erasable.

When doing this kind of exercise, try to imagine the trees as creatures. Exaggeration is the key. One useful trick is to not draw the ground, so you don't have the limitation of the roots facing down and the branches facing up. Just think about shapes and experiment with whatever comes to your mind. Think about a gesture, and then draw a shape that follows that gesture. You can give a lot of personality to your tree with a simple line of action.



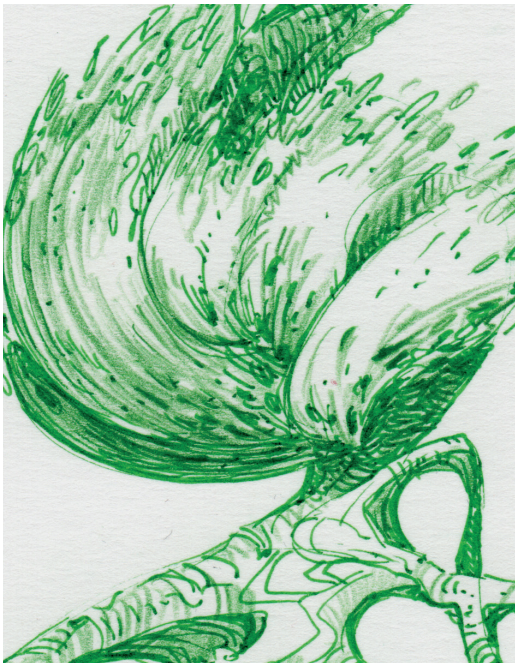


First column (near right)
Drawing multiple random lines directly with a marker

Second column
Following the random lines to find new shapes

Third column
I finish the drawings by adding the shadows and refining the shapes a little more, without going too deep into detailing

Fourth and fifth columns
Adding a layer of soft green pencil to better define some volumes © Riccardo Pagni



WINGS

A narrative illustration project with Eliza Ivanova | Story by Adam J. Smith

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"Instinctively touching her back, she felt coarse feathers bristling through her skin, like acupuncture needles she was once compelled to touch. That had been weird, but nothing compared to this. She pulled on one nascent shaft and felt her skin peel towards it. It was stuck, but she got the feeling that if she pulled a little harder, it would pop, and come out in her fingers.

In the mirror, she shrugged her shoulder blades and feathers, black – highlighting the opalescence of her pink skin – blossomed like a blast of sudden spring. They grew, forming wings, knocking toiletries from shelves and slamming like a fist against the window pane.

The window. The sudden urge to open it was overwhelming."

Join Eliza Ivanova, a character animator with a passion for fine art and film, as she creates a narrative illustration using simple graphite and blending sticks.

Drawing tools

For this illustration project, I have limited my choice of tools to the bare minimum, which is a mechanical pencil (I usually use HB or 2B), a couple of blending sticks, and an eraser. It's an easy set of tools that I can carry with me, and gives me enough versatility to achieve a highly detailed illustration almost anywhere.

The first marks

After carefully choosing about ten different references for the torso pose, overall body position, props, and background, I begin by laying the first marks down. These initial lines are the most important for me. In this case, I want to capture the woman's worried face from the very beginning, to confirm that my references are suitable.

Adding key elements

Once I am happy with the character's face and general pose, it is time to start building all the elements of the illustration mentioned in the narrative extract, the most important being the wings. They need to feel huge and powerful, yet painful. For now, I just outline their basic shapes for scale.

Setting the scene

The foundation of the illustration is laid out and now it's time to figure out the overall mood of the piece. I want to achieve a Victorian Gothic feel, and the mirror is the first prop to include elements from that time period. Victorian furniture is very detailed, so I make sure to check some references and pay extra attention to the smallest details, like the filigree on the mirror frame, and not just improvise them.

Background composition

As a precaution against mistakes, I only draw a few lines for the window arch (the window being a pivotal piece of imagery in the story). This way I can visualize the entire design before committing to the finer details, in case I want to make major changes early on. Thinking back to some of my storyboarding classes in college, I decide to tilt the window frame to create a slightly diagonal layout. Diagonals in film and cinematography are used to enhance a dramatic moment, such as this one.

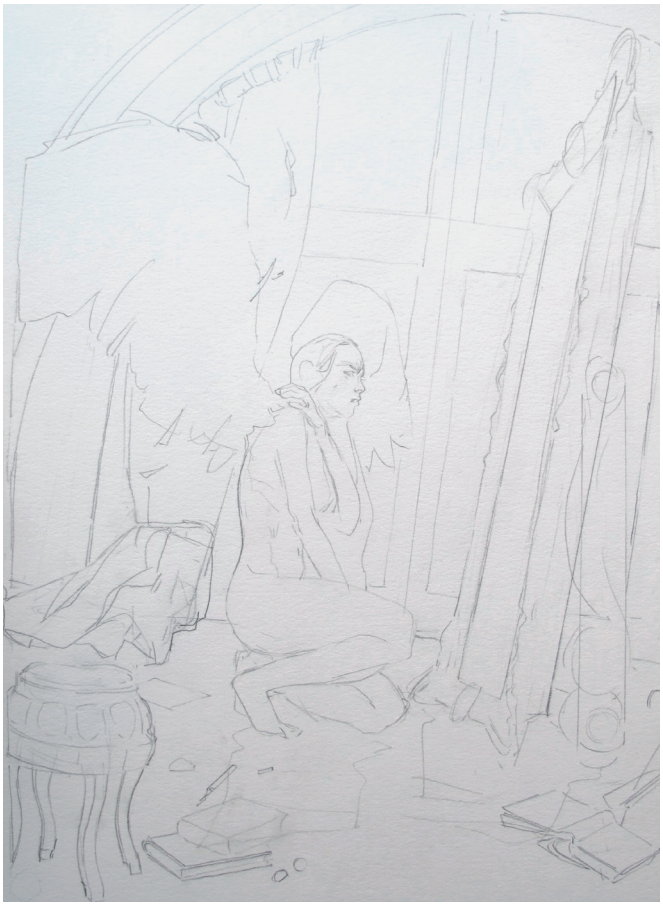
Above
The tools used for this project

Top near right
Placing the first few lines

Top far right
Foundation elements

Bottom near right
Starting to craft the scene

Bottom far right
First background lines



Completing the base scene

At this stage, it's time to lay everything out and "mess up" the scene. In the description, the girl's wings knock over whatever is on the cabinets around her, so I pepper in some books, papers, and small objects to create the visual busyness I imagine. I also change the mirror from being propped against a wall to being on a stand in the middle of the room. This allows me to add some extra detail behind the mirror and hint that the room is large and continues beyond this illustration.

Developing detail

Once all the props are added to the image, I decide to dive into the Victorian details I've been anxiously waiting to do. The mirror is the most intricate prop and also a central point of the sketch, so I take extra care in making sure I stay true to my references. In the background, I leave the window frame simple as visual contrast to the mirror.

The shading begins

Now that the foundation of the image is built and all the props are added and refined, it is time to shade. I always start with my biggest blending stick, which has enough graphite left over from previous drawings to build a first layer of tones. As with the line work, I begin with the girl's torso, which is one of the image's most important elements to establish first. I do pay close attention to the anatomy in my references, but I simplify it into larger light and dark shapes while still being anatomically correct.

The wings

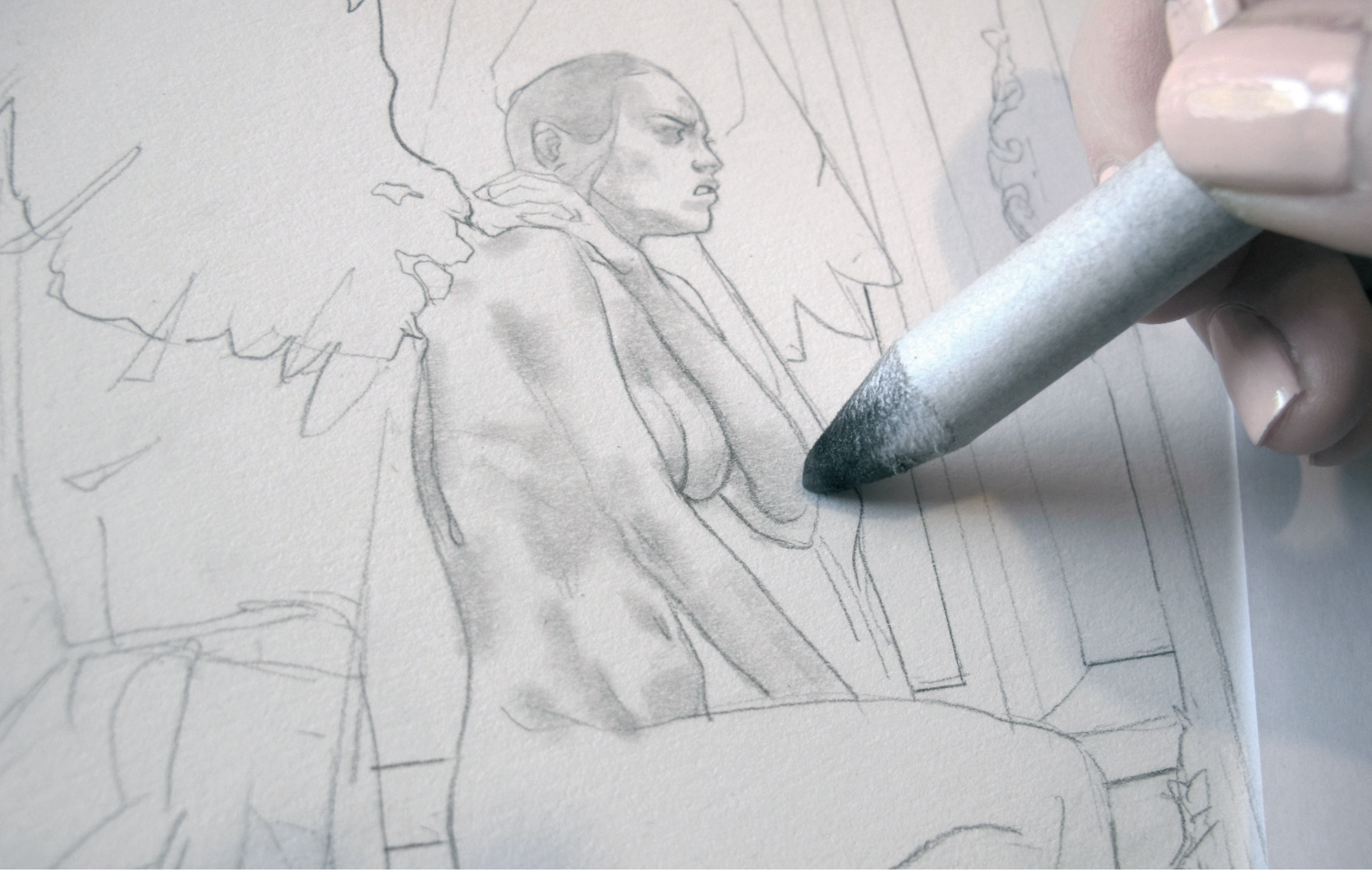
The wings are the centerpiece of the story, so I want them to be the centerpiece of this illustration. I add an extra layer of graphite to them to make sure they are the elements with the highest contrast in the composition, guaranteeing that the viewer's eyes will go directly to them. I go through a process of laying a foundation of shading with the blending stick, then going over it with the pencil, then blending again. I add extra definition around the highlighted areas to make them stand out more.

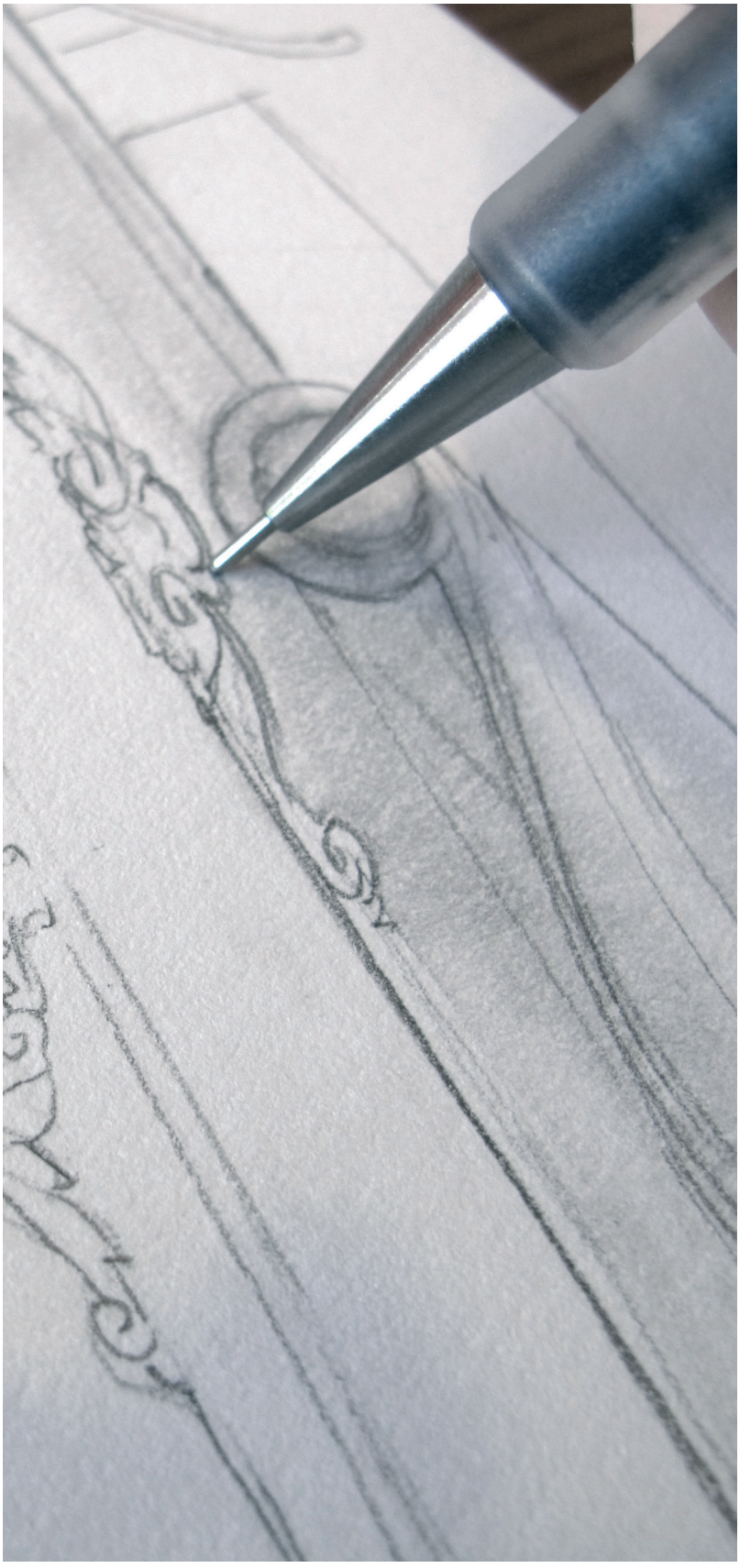
Above left
Adding all the props

Above right
Refining the details and line work

Top right
Shading with a blending stick

Bottom right
Shading the wings





“Going back and forth between using the blending stick and the sharp point of the mechanical pencil greatly speeds up my illustrating process”

Finishing the shading

Here I have laid down most of the base shading. A mental note that I always have when making an intricate piece like this is *not to overdo it*. Throughout the years, the blending stick has allowed me to develop an eye for what to shade and what to keep simple, in order to not create visual clutter. Using the stick is a quick enough method to block out large areas of light and dark, and decide on the focal point of the piece from the beginning. The blending stick applies thin layers of graphite that are also very easy to erase if an image begins to look overly shaded.

Refining the details

The blending stick allows me to achieve a spontaneity of shading similar to using charcoal. This way, when I go back to focusing on the small details, I’m not exhausted by tedious crosshatching. I continue refining the Victorian filigree on the mirror, which is an almost meditative activity. Going back and forth between using the blending stick and the sharp point of the mechanical pencil greatly speeds up my illustrating process.

Far left
Shading (is) everything

Near left
Working on some of the finer details

Elements of design

Though I use references continuously, I try to have fun with the shapes and "design" within the anatomy of the body. This is a shorthand I have developed in the past five years of constant sketching, and is also a visual cue that this is an imaginary world. My intention is not to make a hyperrealistic illustration, but rather my interpretation of this imaginary scene, and it is the small designed details and stylized flourishes that give that impression. It's a subtle but deliberate choice.

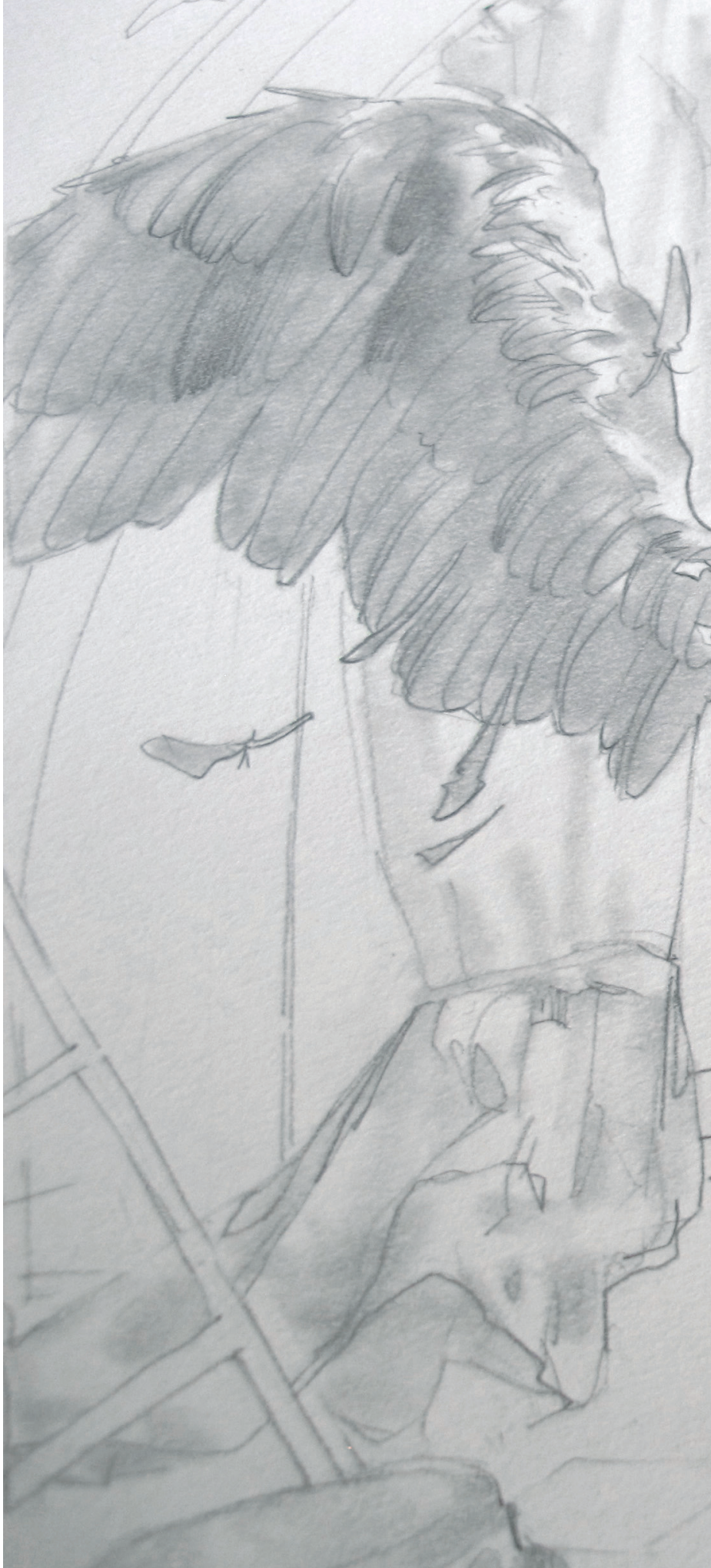
ARTIST'S TIPS

Storytelling with light

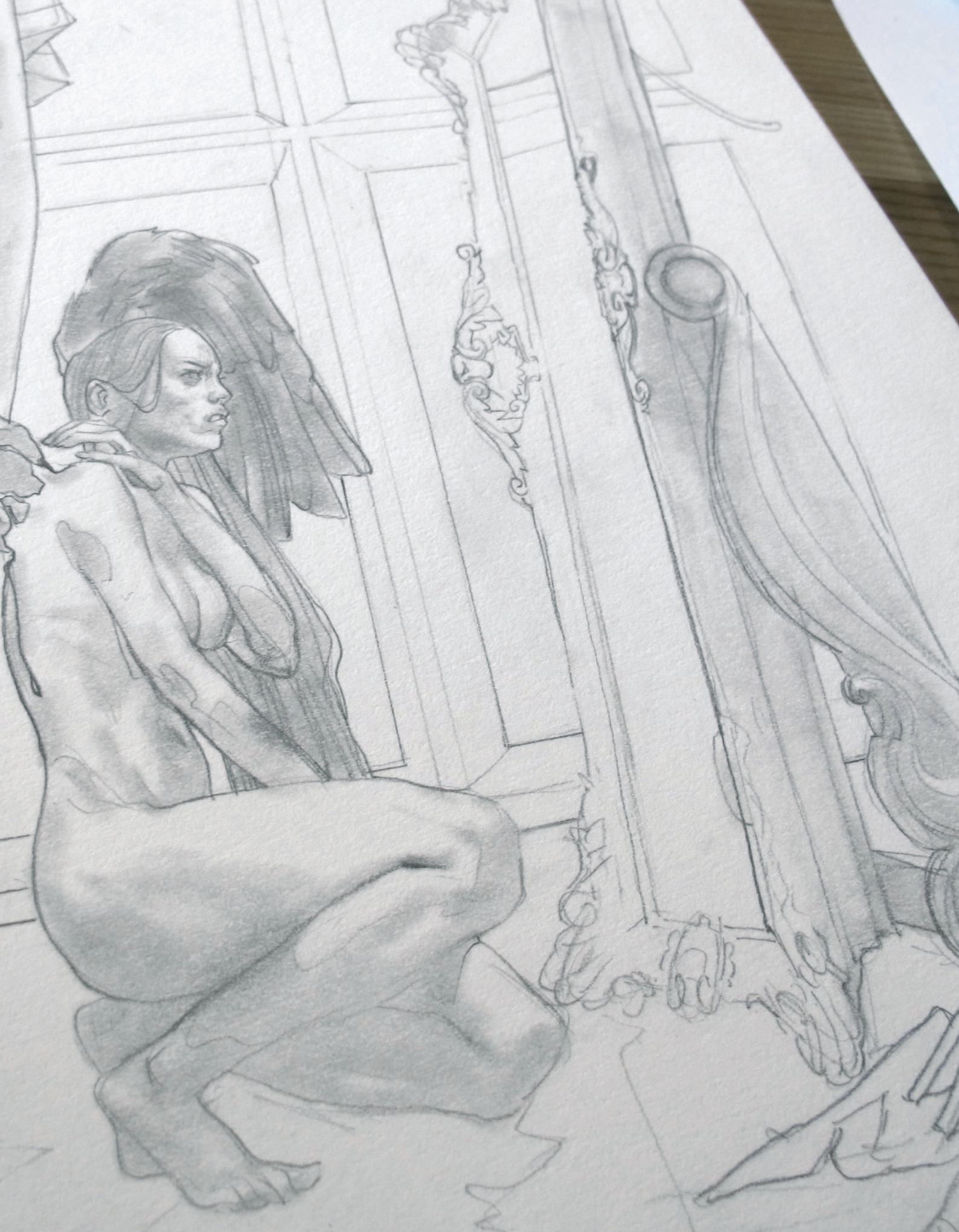
If I were to overanalyze the lighting of this illustration and question the logic of it, it would have been interesting to have the woman's entire body in shadow, backlit by the main light source of the giant window behind her. However, again delving into some cinematic ideas, I chose not to do that for clarity's sake, instead making sure that her expression is clear to the viewer.

The illusion of detail

Approaching shading with a blending stick – or anything else that smudges, including fingers – eliminates the need to spend a long time on hatching and shading an area, unless that's your own aesthetic choice. This shading still gives the illusion that there is a lot of visual detail. Tricks like this can reduce drawing fatigue, especially for someone like me who has experienced symptoms of repetitive strain injury.



Right
The overall design of the values and shapes adds to the fantastical nature of the scene



Visual balance

At this stage, it is very easy to overwork the shading, because tonally similar elements increasingly exist next to each other. Hence I keep the wall and window simple, even when adding more detail to them, while the girl, mirror, and floor remain visually busier to achieve a cluttered effect. A strong sense of value and silhouette is very important to me, and something I have learned to respect religiously through my experience in film and animation.

Revisiting the outlines

Some of the outlines have been lost after substantial smudging, so I take the opportunity to bring some of the details back to the forefront. I redraw the filigree patterns, the window pane, the messy curtain folds, and the books in the foreground. It makes the whole image crisper and helps to make the elements pop. If I need to blend something back out of focus – such as the stool in the foreground, which I feel is battling with the

wings' contrast – I can always go back in with my trusted blending stick!

The final image

Above is the final result. My last pass is less about drawing and more about assessing the overall look. A little hint of detail here, a bit of erasing there, until it feels that I will only overdo it if I continue. I stop the moment the image feels like the right balance between being detailed and sketchy, and also graceful and delicate. As a final check, I hold the drawing in front of my own mirror and judge it there, because seeing the reversed image is like seeing it with fresh eyes that haven't gotten used to each and every line.

Above left
Finding a balance with shaded elements

Above middle
Bringing the outlines back into the image

Above right
The finished illustration © Eliza Ivanova

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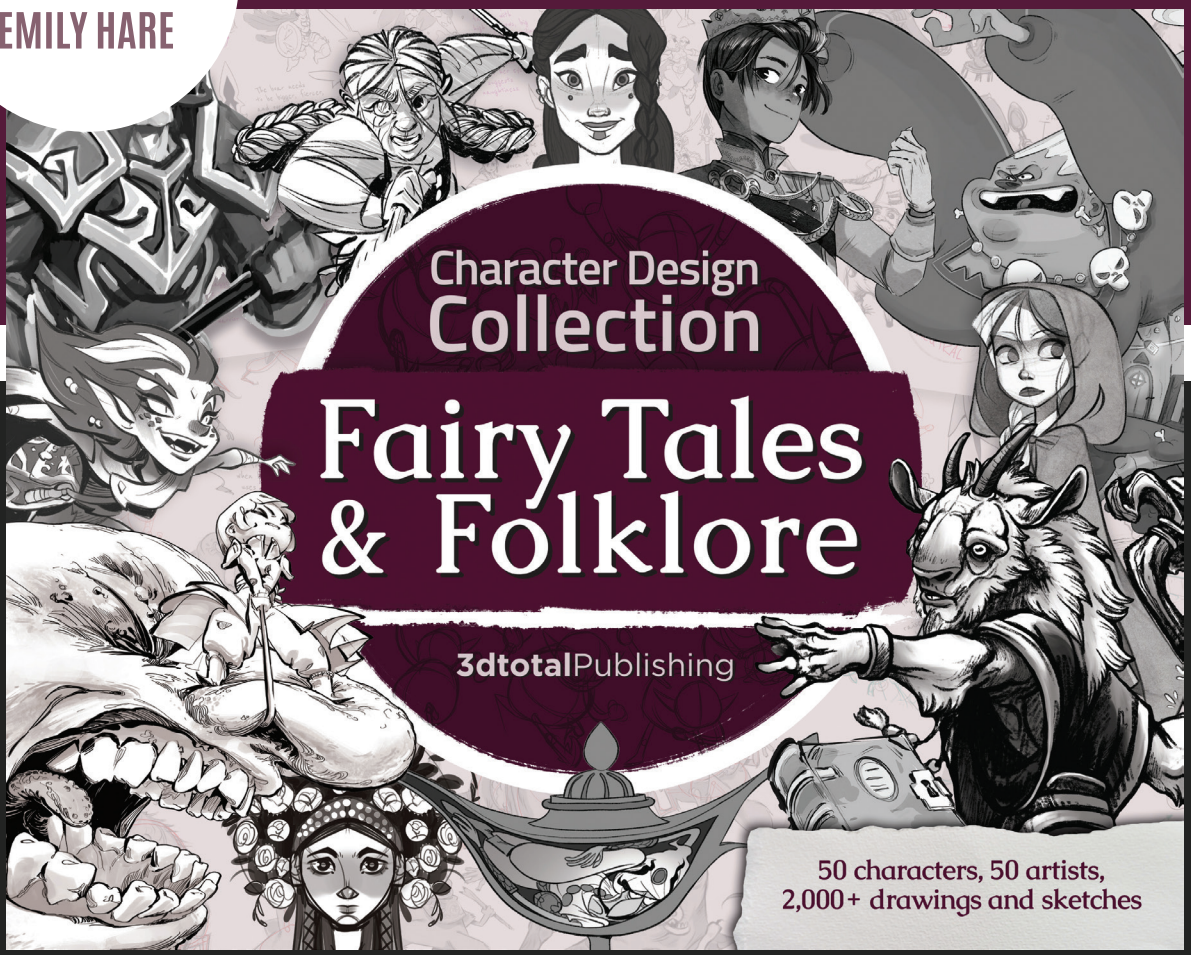
SEE MORE FROM EMILY HARE



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