Moin!



(disclaimer: this photo of me is really really old)

About me

- he/him
- Art director and game director
- 9 years game art teacher
- Freelance character designer
- Doesn’t use adobe products
- Sucks at drawing environments
- Has absolutely zero tolerance for AI nonsense
- Brought a pumpkin

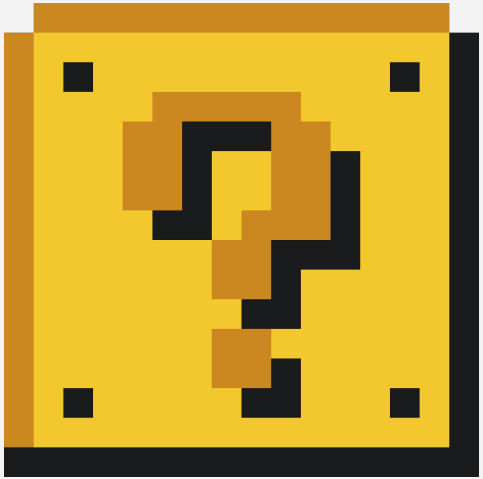
1. I talk fast and show a lot of stuff. But don’t worry, you can get the presentation on my homepage in the Bonus section.
2. Happy to answer question afterwards.
3. Yes,I’m going to give you some insights on how I work as an artist later.

But first let me talk to you as an art director.

Part 1

Yeah, sure, honey. 💔

… or why you are like super stupid
for drawing stylized art.



Excellence in the craft?

(Craft: skill + technology)



The craft was always about the pursuit of realism.

Film makers having to justify making animated movies (kids stuff, low art)



Moving from 2D to 3D is technological progress, simulation as benchmark

Kenney @KenneyNL · 5h

Don't let billionaires convince you slop is the future. They're used to managing & directing, not making things themselves. Of course they can't see the difference. They don't understand your love for the craft. Keep making personal, beautiful games.

You've got my support

54 187 1.8K 43K

Tim Sweeney
@TimSweeneyEpic

This is bullshit, Kenney. I'm the same tech tree following optimist who moved from C to C++, from 2D to 3D, and from closed source to open source. I run a company. I write code. I contribute to published papers. I've upped my expectations of AI. Up yours!

2:03 PM · Oct 18, 2026 · **28.9K** Views

18 Quotes **31** Reposts

70 49 1.2K 79

Relevant

Post your reply

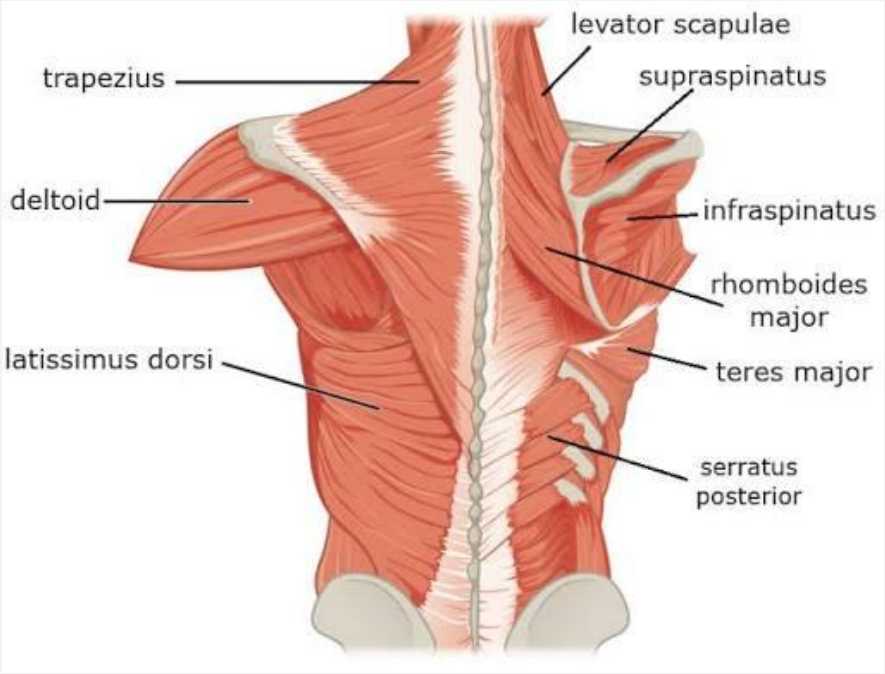
Reply

you did yourself.

Let stuff speak for itself, and (given the backlash on the 'vibecoded'

Name that muscle, you impostor!



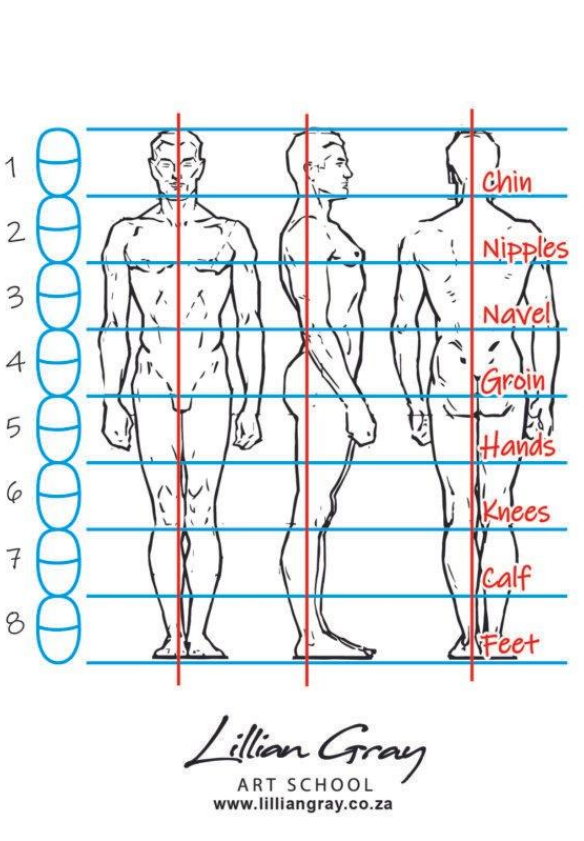


Art teachers coaching you on drawing “from life”, PIcasso was drawing perspective wrong

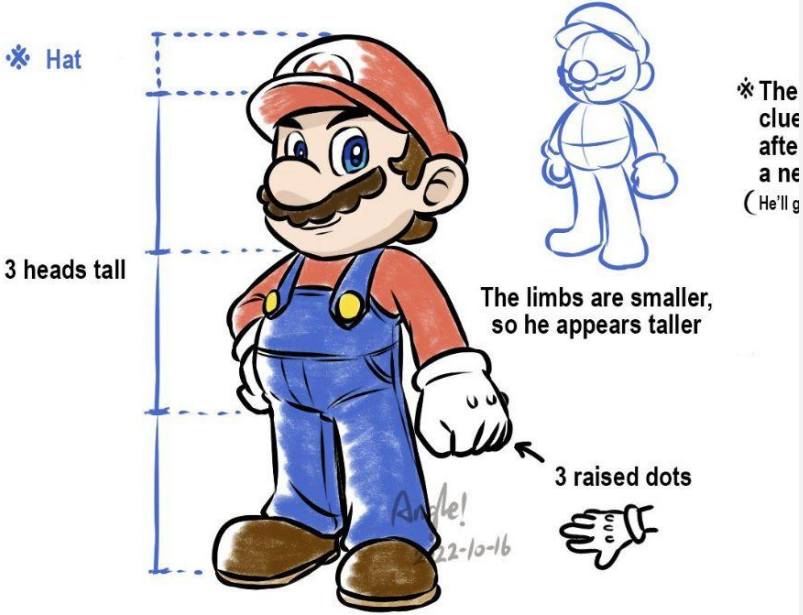


Even your disapproving parents finally see you have talent when your drawings are more realistic…

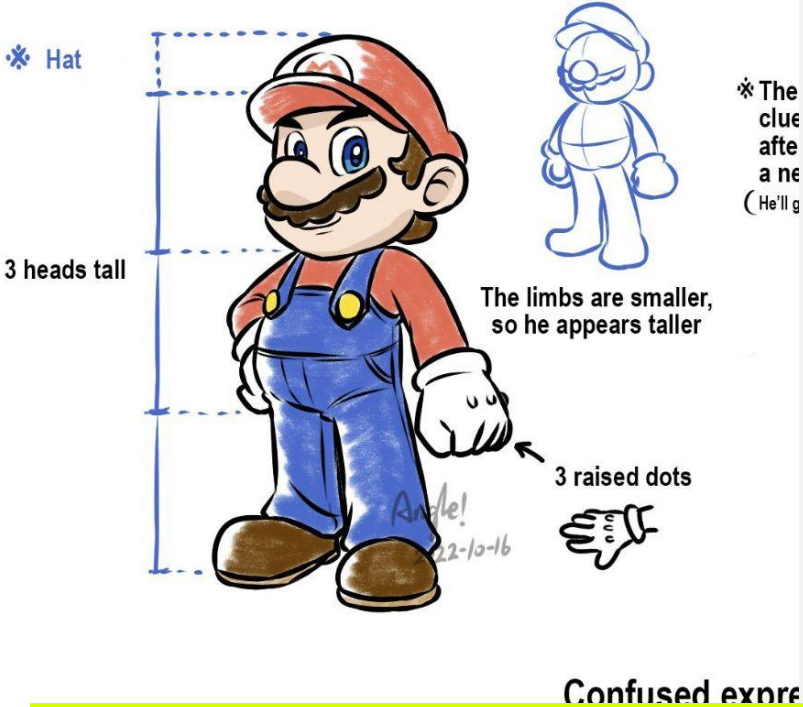
Every how-to-draw book ever has this:



The CORRECT(!) way to draw a figure is to make it 7-9 heads high



..and you draw a guy only 3 heads tall???



..and you draw a guy only 3 heads tall???

Ewwww! What is your deal???



(you know that isn't true)





You know what you like and what drives you

You know that there is nothing inherent about realistic characters that makes them more appealing to audiences



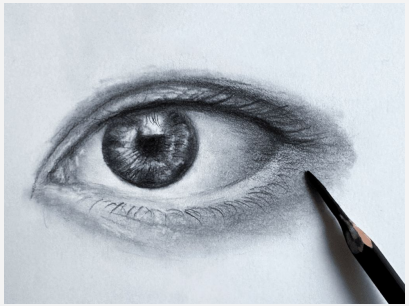


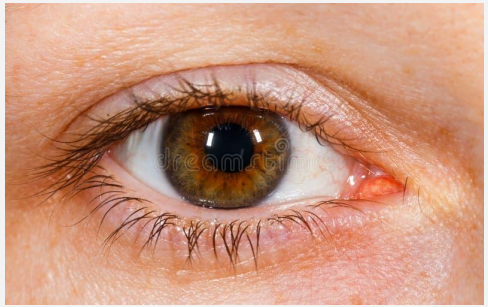
You know that there are whole nations that do not have that hangup.





Rule for excellence in the craft:
long gap = bad
short gap = good





Even your disapproving parents know that much

Honey, your drawings have improved so much.



Really impressed with how realistic your art looks, boy.

I was so worried you would never become a viable artist, but your art almost looks like photographs, so lets have children.

But what when you don't want to pursue realism?

But what when you don't want to pursue realism?

...when you don't want to capture existing reality but design a new one?



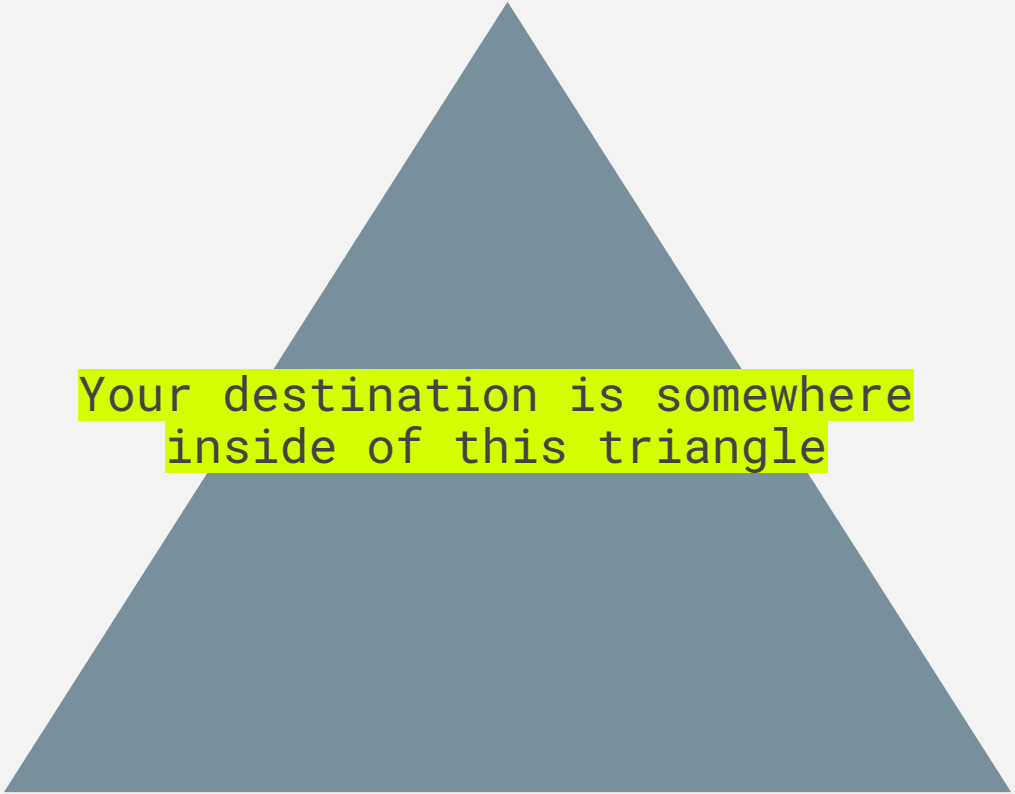
What then????

Part 2



Visual Language

… or how to define targets for excellence in stylized design.


Your destination is somewhere
inside of this triangle

Step 1

Redefine realism not as a goal, but as an ingredient.

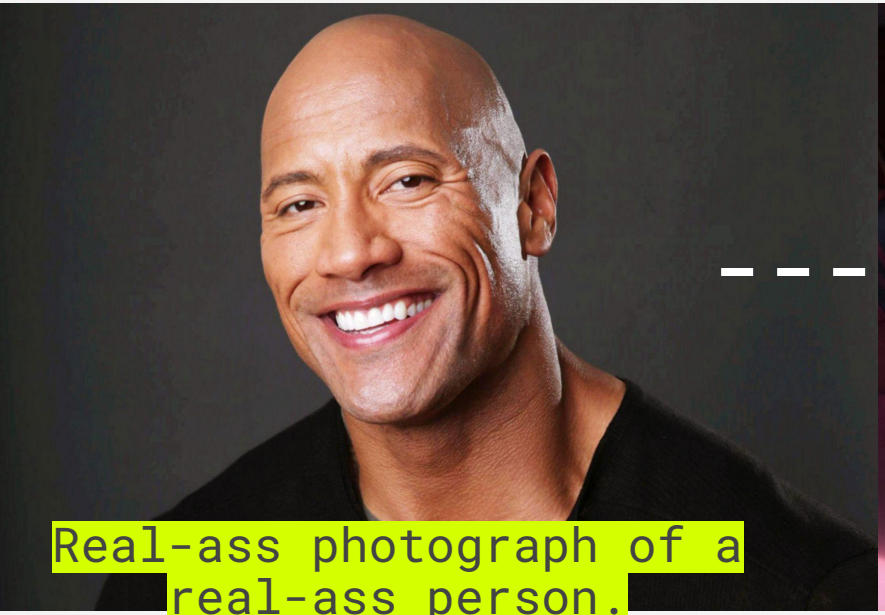
Kids, stop fighting!



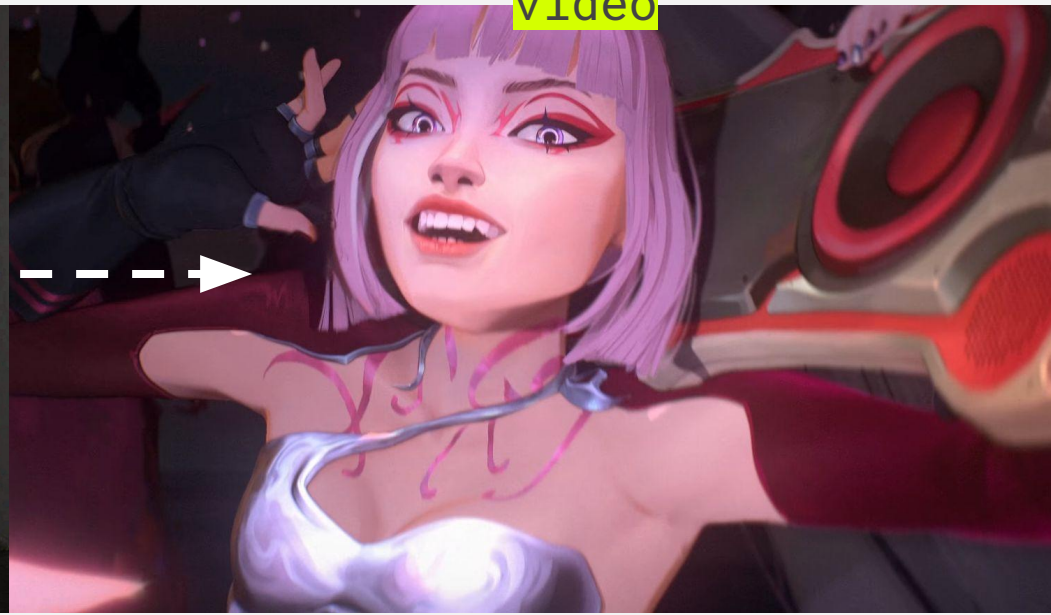
Achieving realism is impressive

The sensation of the real can be quite powerful

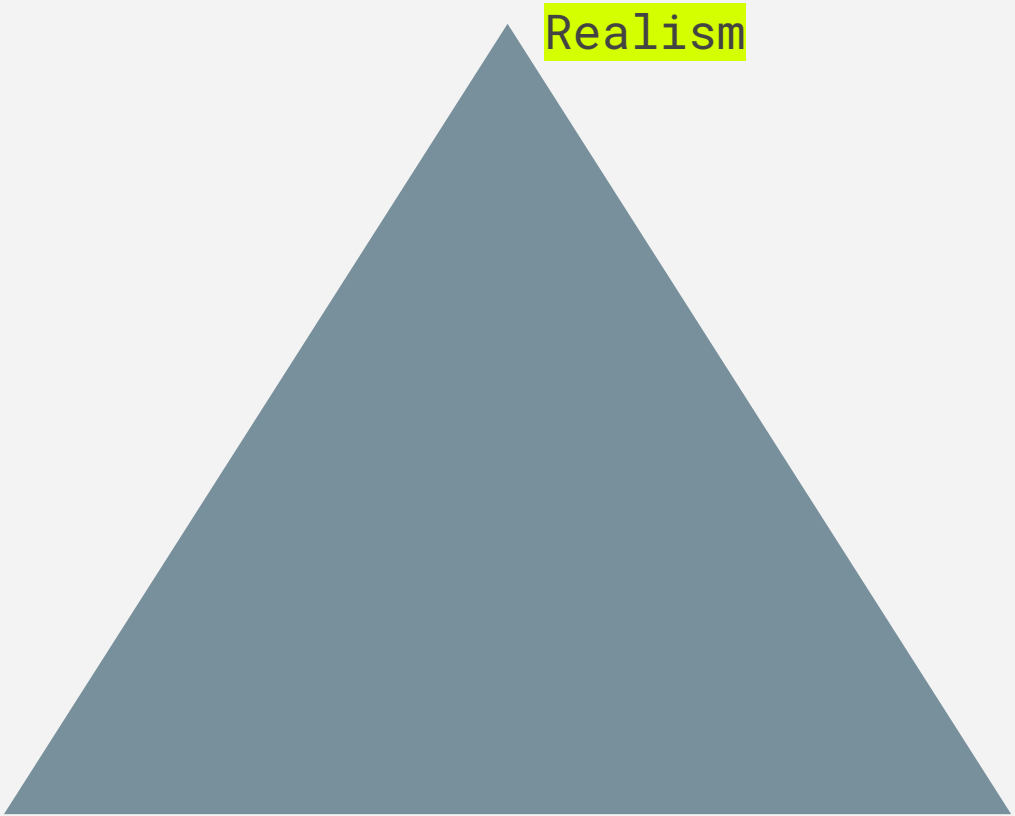
Frame from recent Fortiche music video

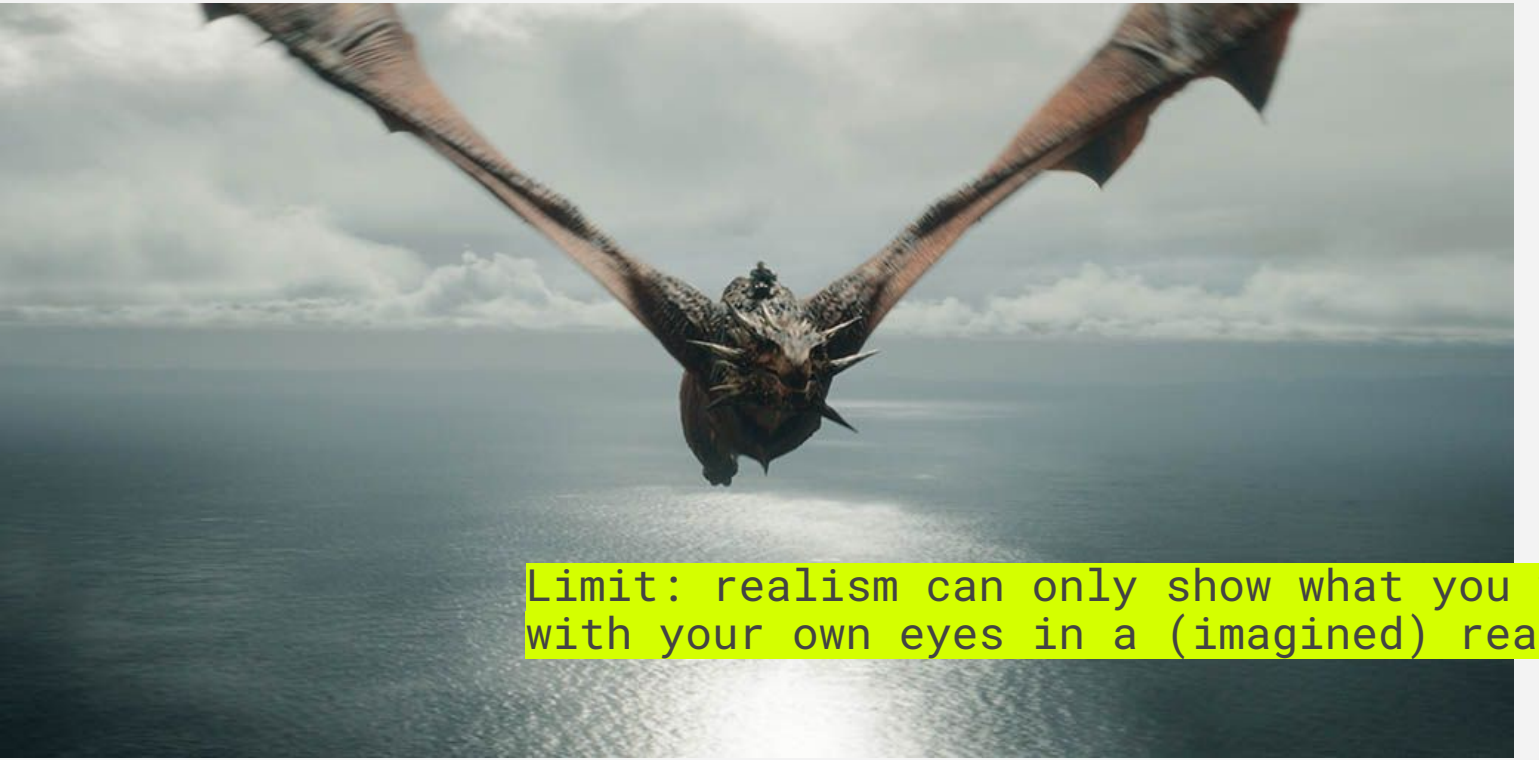


Real-ass photograph of a real-ass person.



You tell me who has more realistic teeth!


Realism



Limit: realism can only show what you would see with your own eyes in a (imagined) reality.

…but there is so much more: concepts, feelings, non-visual sensations, visual information beyond the target medium

Realism can show you a person in pain, artefacts of pain, but not pain itself





Ability to stylize can, tho.

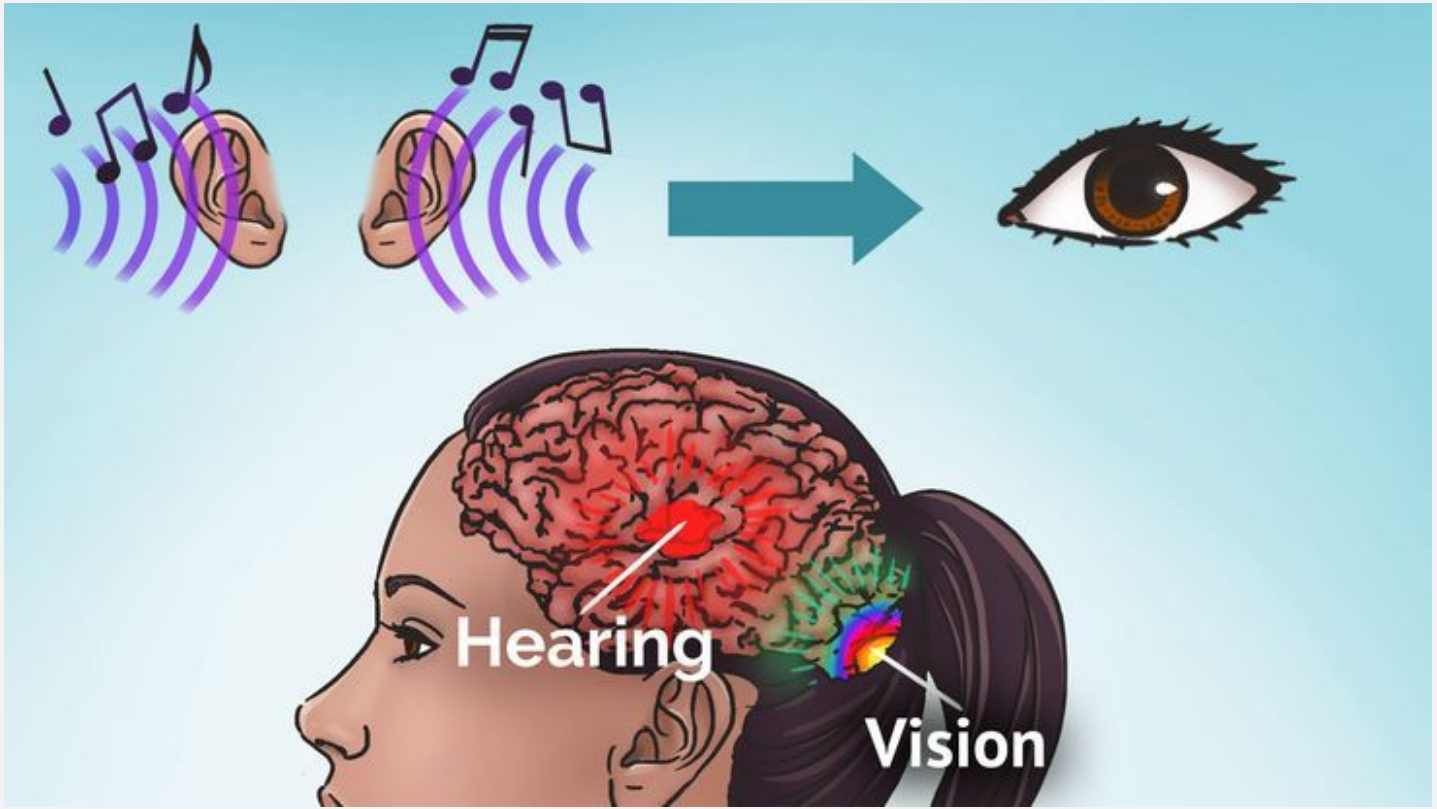




Ingredient 2

Voluntary synesthesia

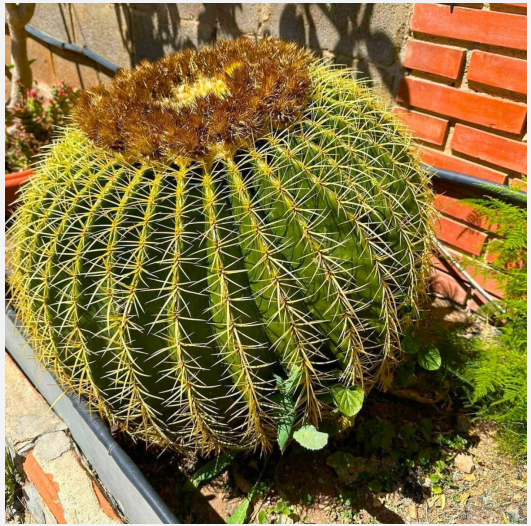
Synesthesia is involuntary cross stimulation of the senses. Hearing colors, smelling sounds and such.



Which of these objects is hostile?



Round and smooth



spiky

Oh, good, he brought the pumpkins back into play.

Which of these Mega-Man characters is hostile?



Round and smooth hair

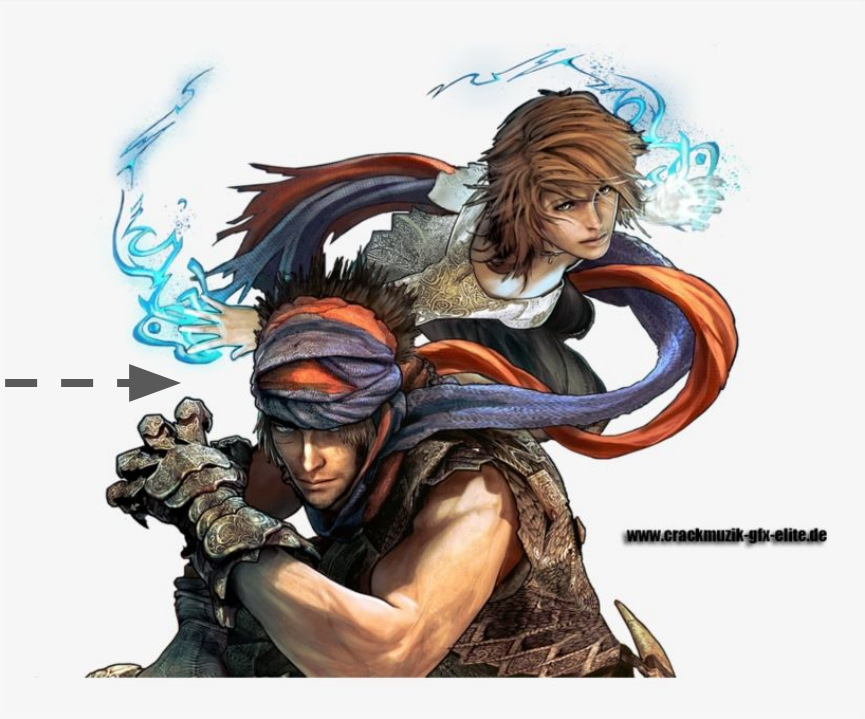


Spiky hair


Cold bastard
Hot head

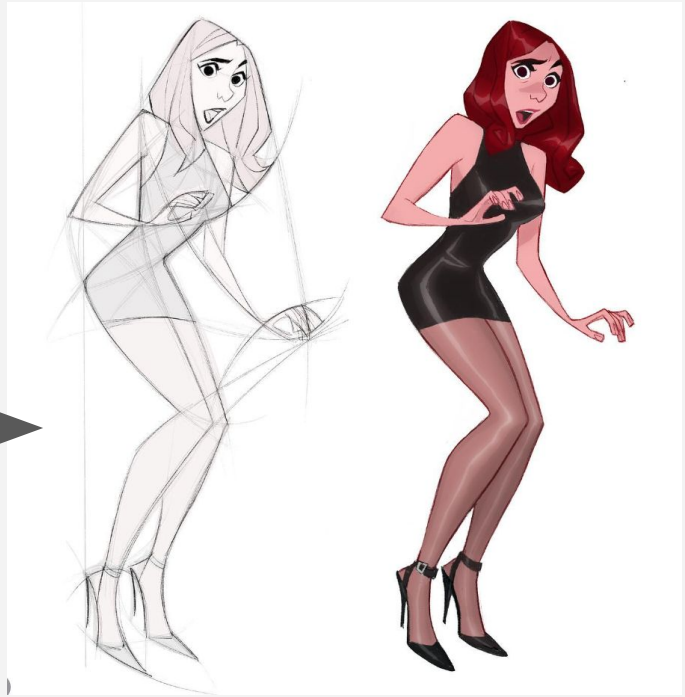


kinetic brush stroke



…transferred to character movement

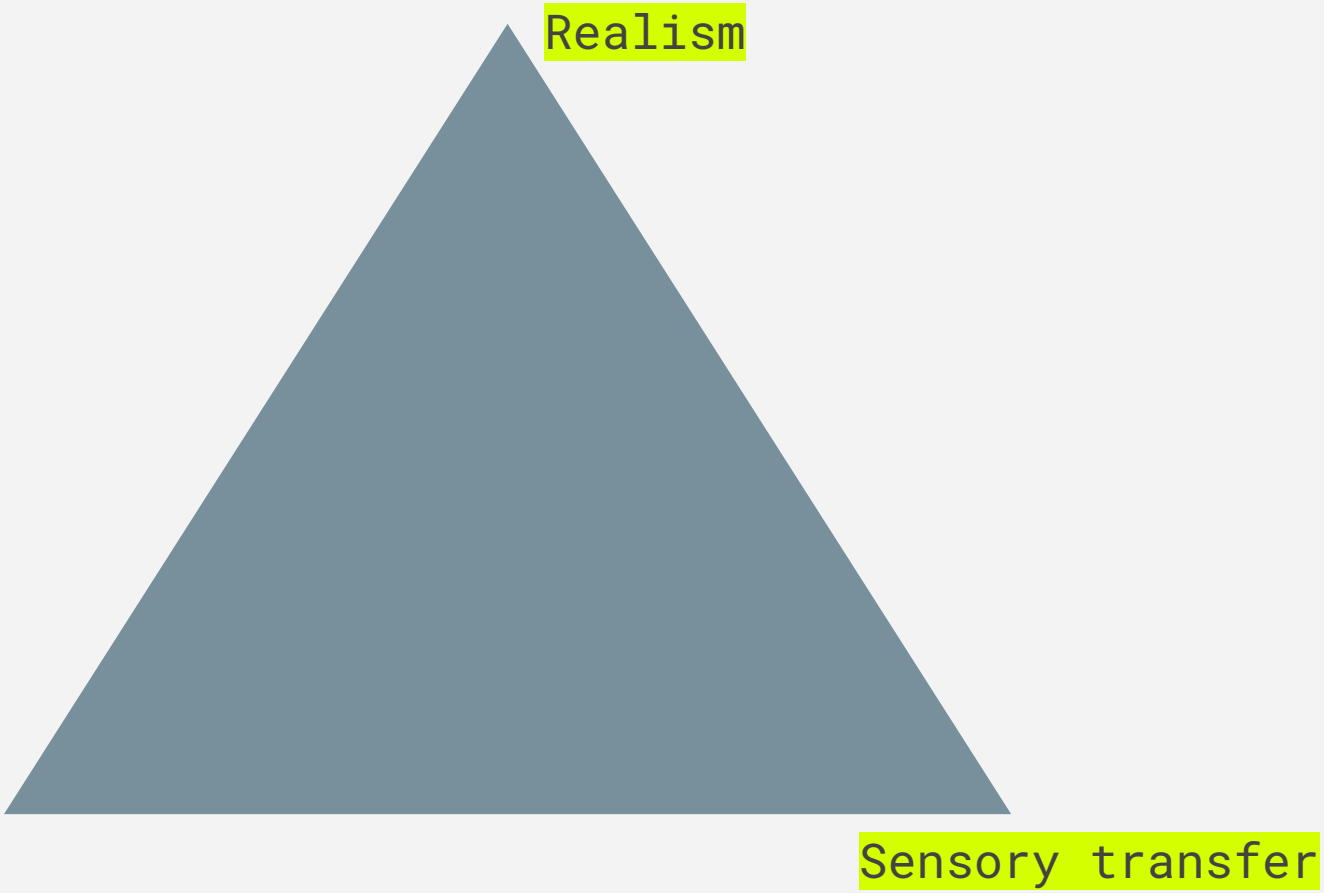




Attractive connected lines and shapes

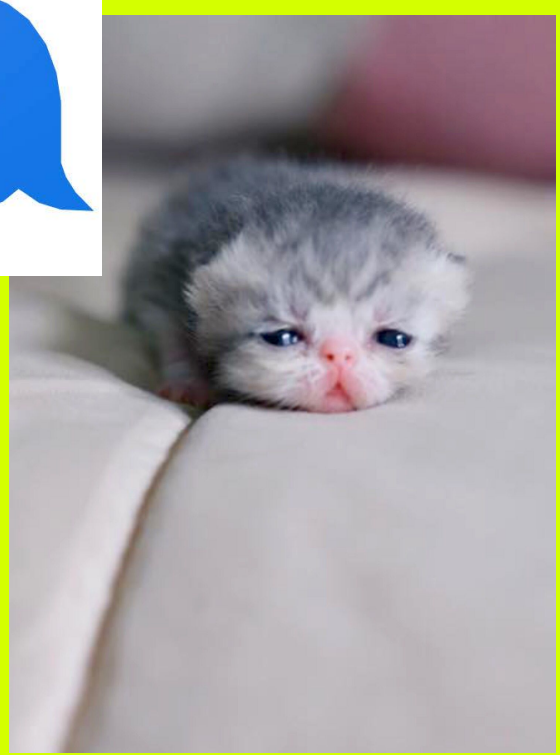
…transferred to character design

Look for references beyond other character designers:
    - your own experience
    - nature
- Fashion design (check out moodboards)
- Architecture
- Interior design
- Object design


Realism
Sensory transfer

Ingredient 3





Coded language / symbolism

anger ----▶ 





You have to know them, even if sometimes, you can see where they are coming from.



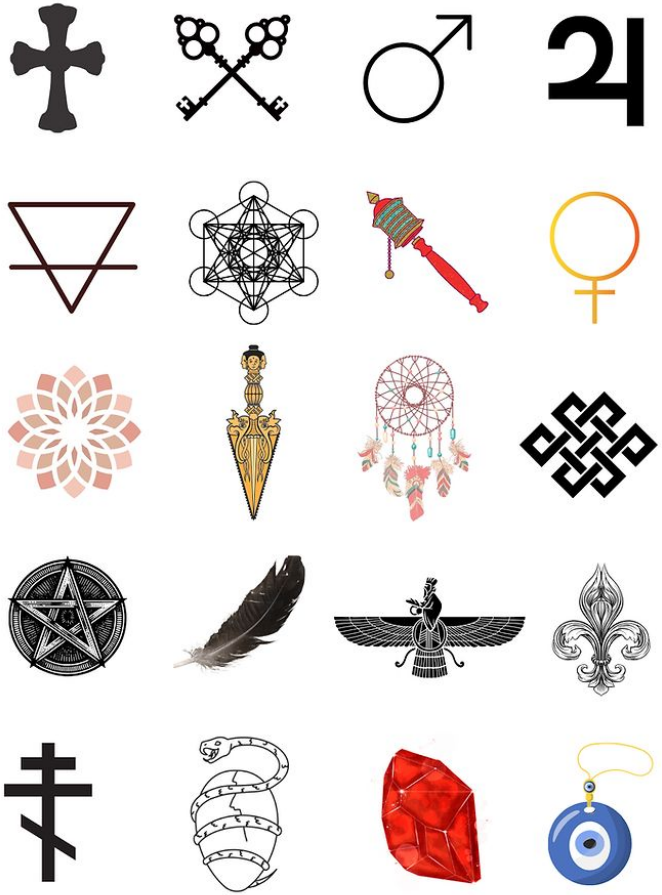




Sometimes the origin has been lost in translation


Some symbols are completely arbitrary
Ceci n'est pas une pipe.
Magritte
Cunpi

STREAM AND ESOTERIC KNOWLEDGE."

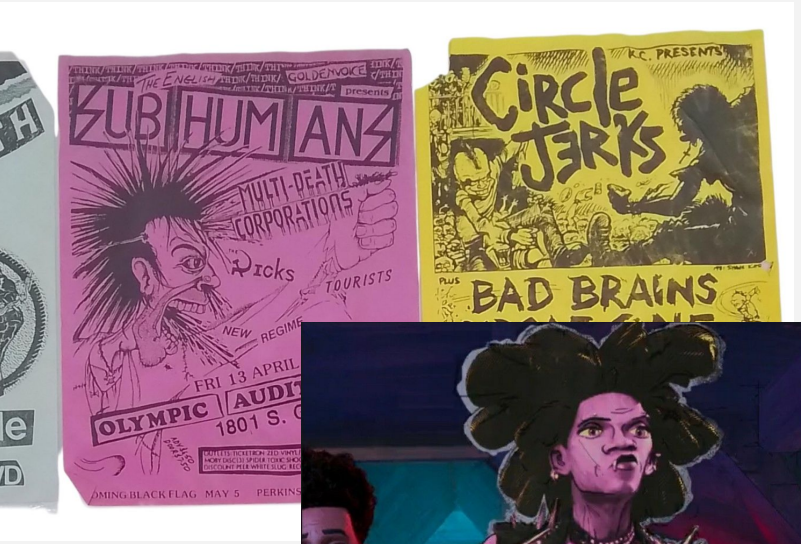


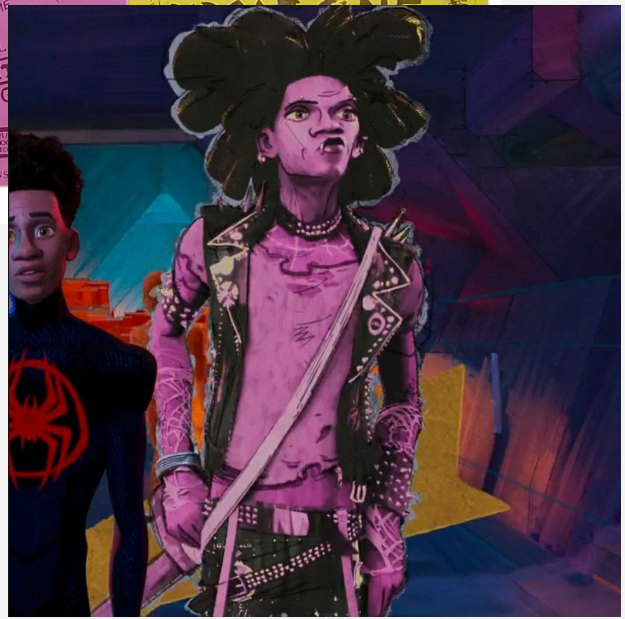
‼️

Symbols can not just be seen, they have to be known.

Do your research, grow a library.

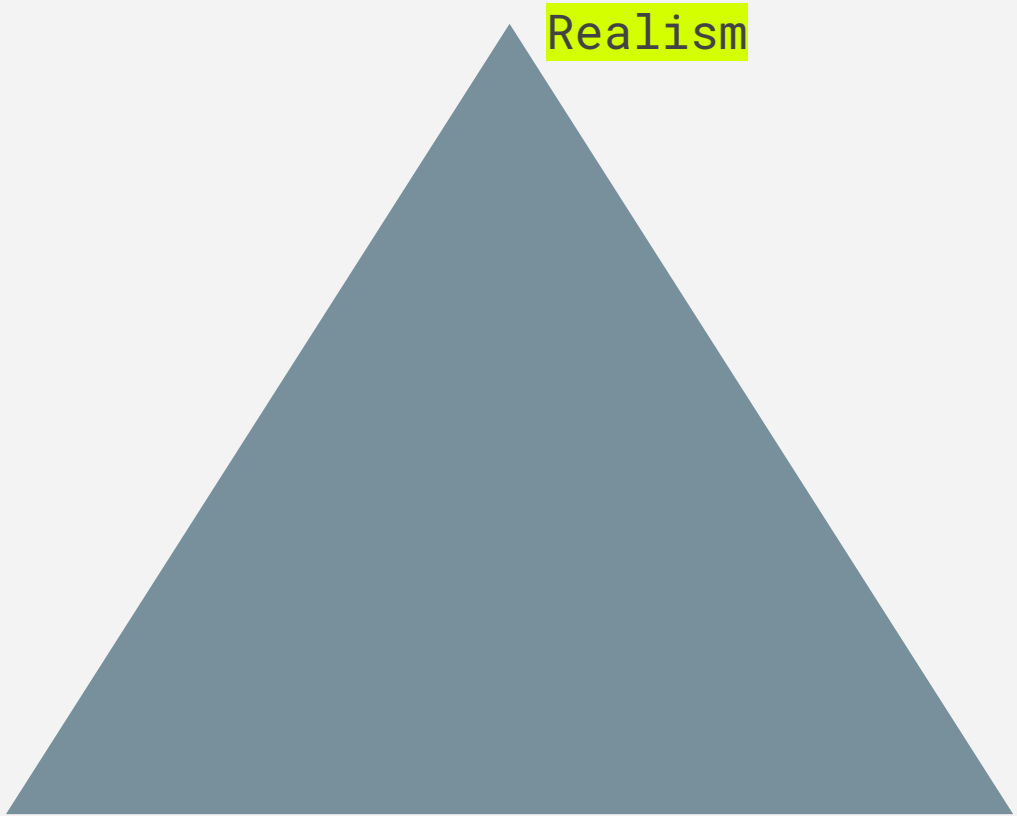
…symbolism includes references to other media and art styles










Realism
Coding/Symbolism
Sensory transfer



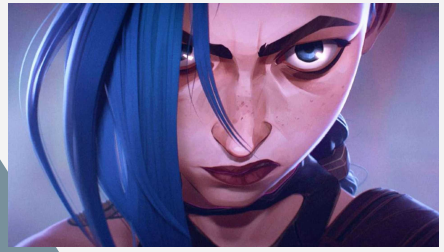
Realism

Coding/Symbolism

Sensory transfer

Before finding yourself here, remember that a map needs landmarks to work. So add your reference or competition projects to the map and find your position among them.

Realism

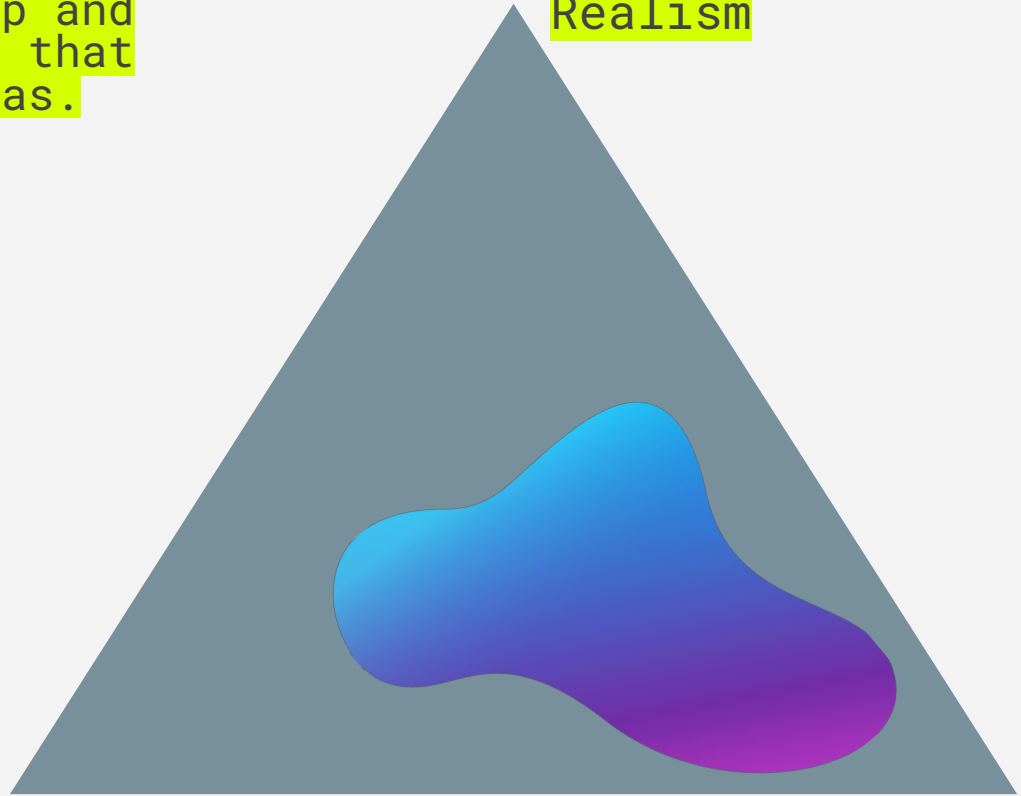




Coding/Symbolism

Sensory transfer

Also, maybe you are no point on this map and more of a shape, that covers whole areas.





Problem solving for production limitations (constraints for moving inside triangle)

Signature style
(is a byproduct/outcome of navigating the triangle)

Part 4

The craft

… or how modern technology gives you access to the whole-ass triangle.



Realtime cel-shaded graphics 2003




Realtime cel-shaded
graphics 2025

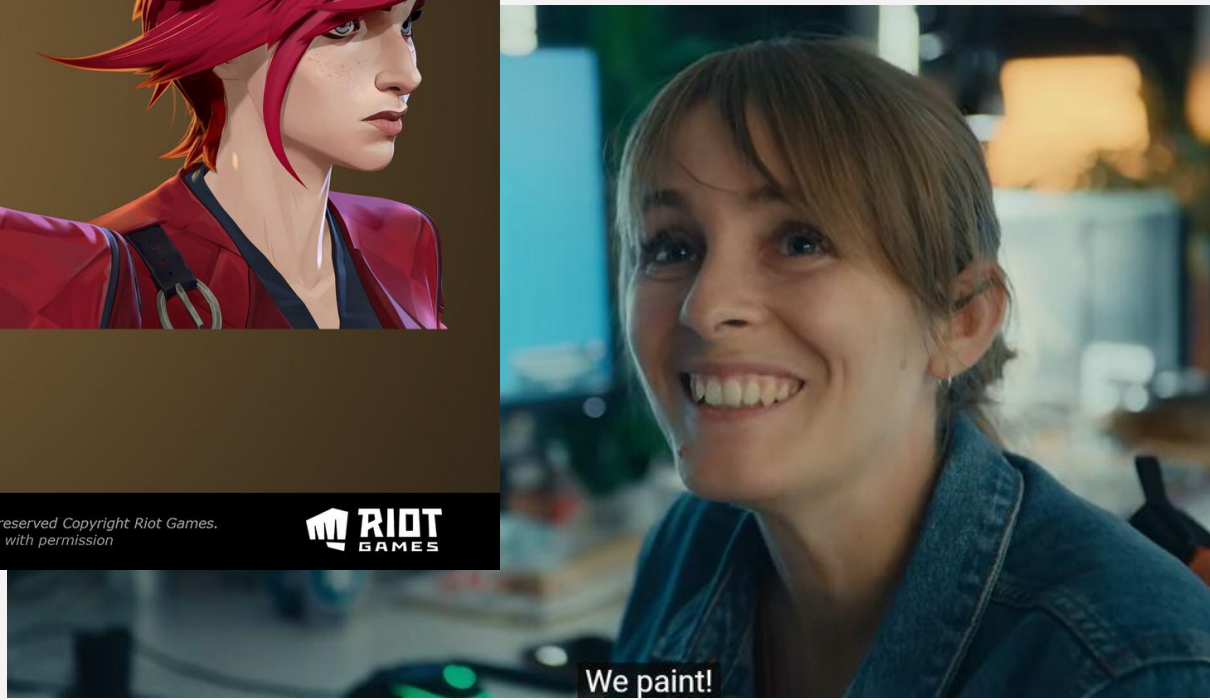

2D+3D hybrid solutions are much more seamless now.
1
1
2

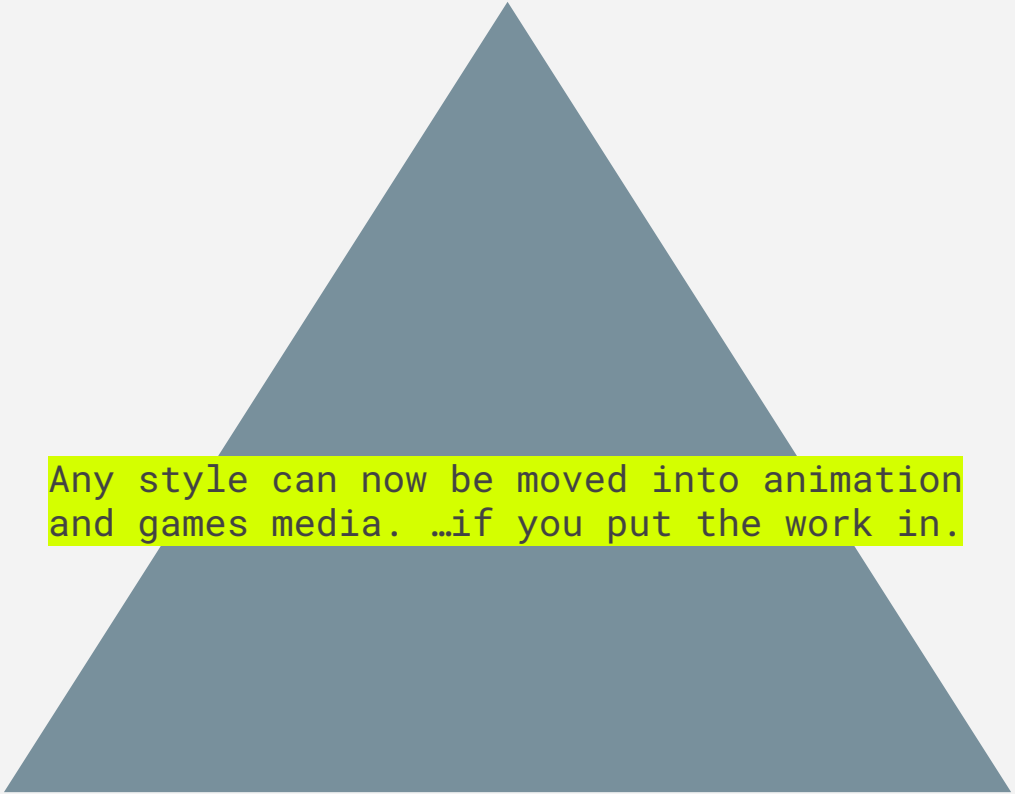

Mixed media can now happen inside the digital space.


Stylized design can be produced and
RE-produced in astonishing detail

High fidelity did not become less work, tho…






Any style can now be moved into animation
and games media. …if you put the work in.

Part 4

How I do...

… or how i do. What?
I don’t have clever lines for everything. It’s late, I wanna go to bed. Leave me alone.



Prelim line drawings, doing them less and less



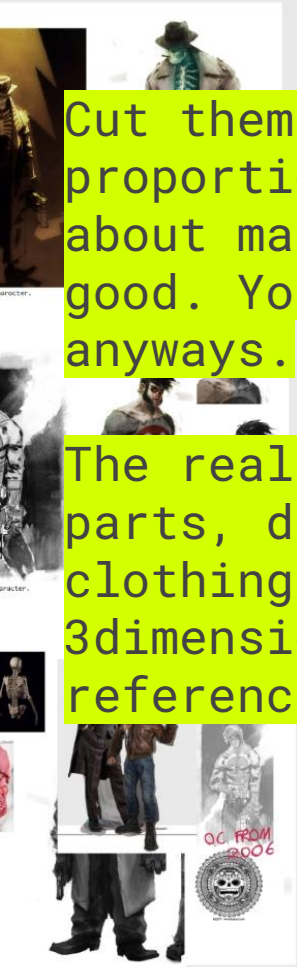
Separating rough line objects via color helps with early readbility

Taking photo references and bashing them into stylized designs is the very often the first step.



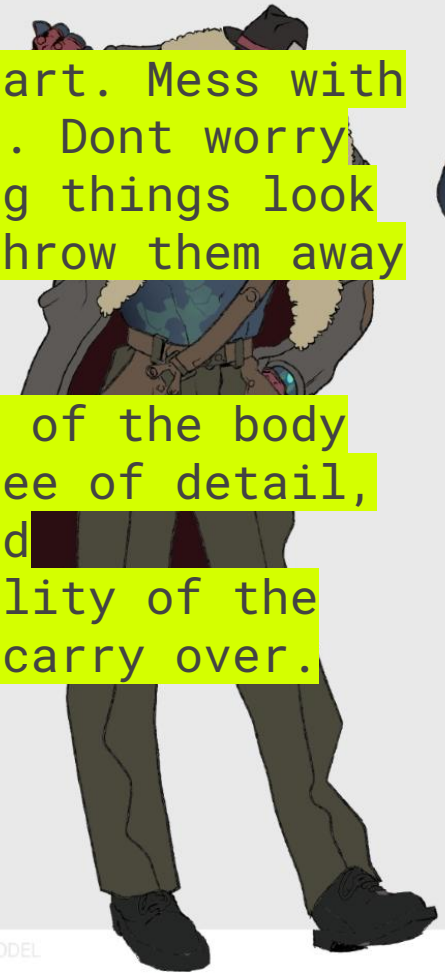






Cut them apart. Mess with proportions. Dont worry about making things look good. You throw them away anyways.

The realism of the body parts, degree of detail, clothing and 3dimensionality of the references carry over.





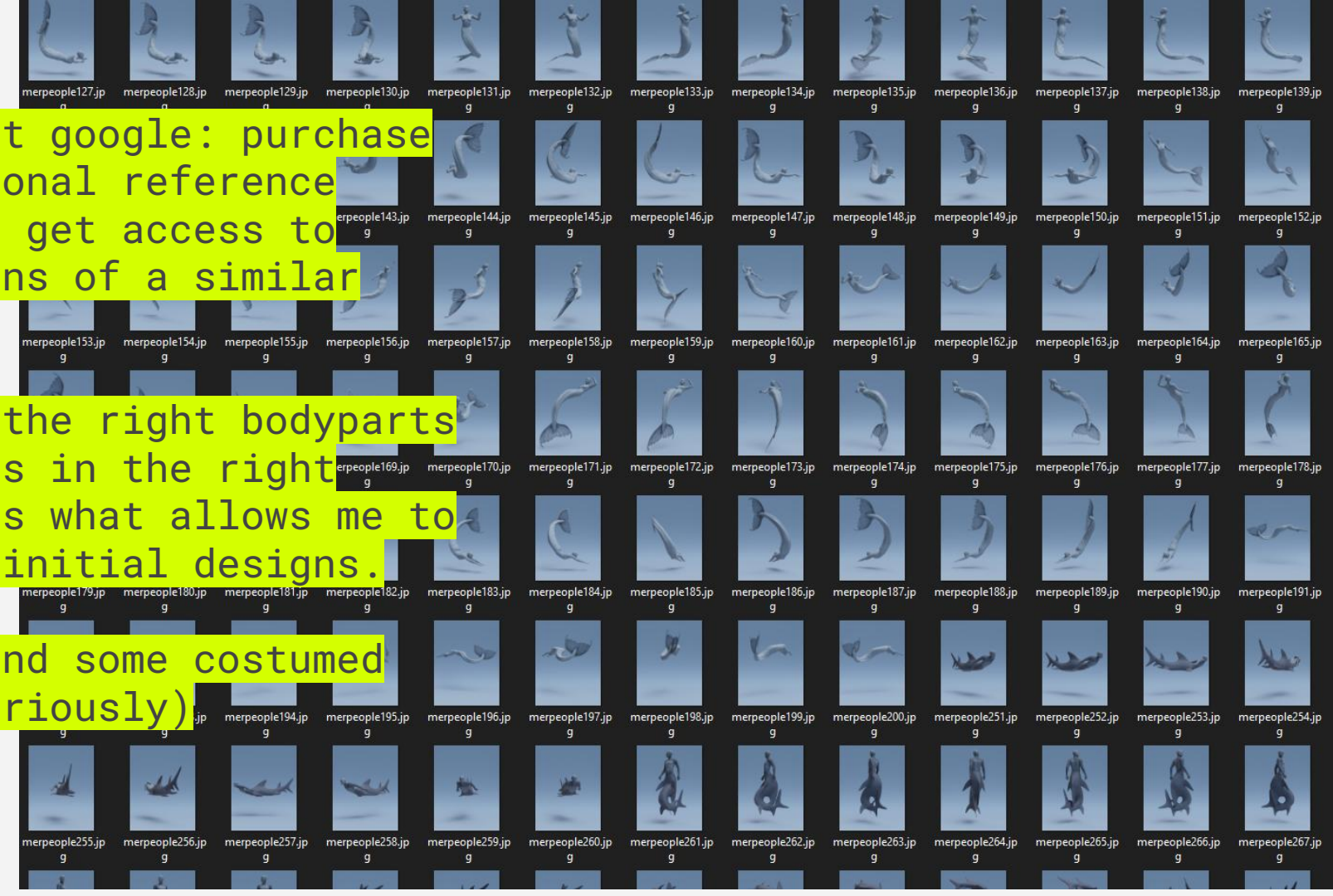


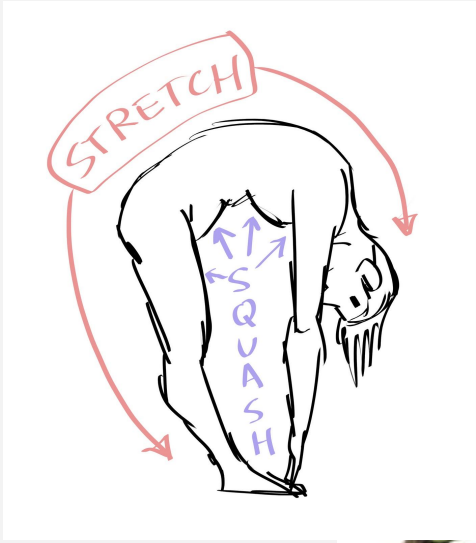


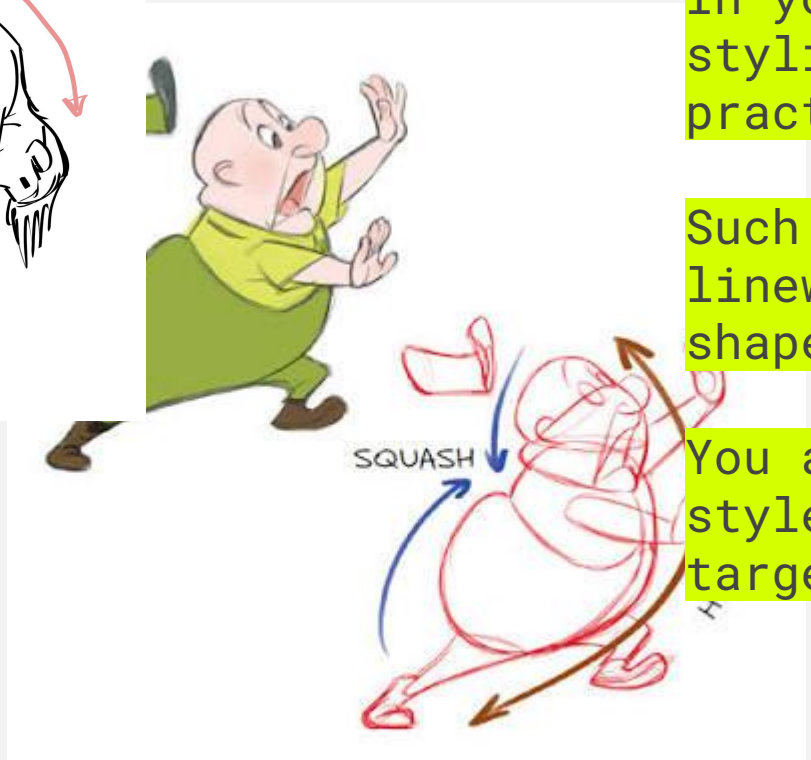
Dont just google: purchase professional reference packs to get access to variations of a similar model.

Finding the right bodyparts and poses in the right angles is what allows me to bash my initial designs.

(also find some costumed ones, seriously).







In your draw-over apply stylized linework practices.

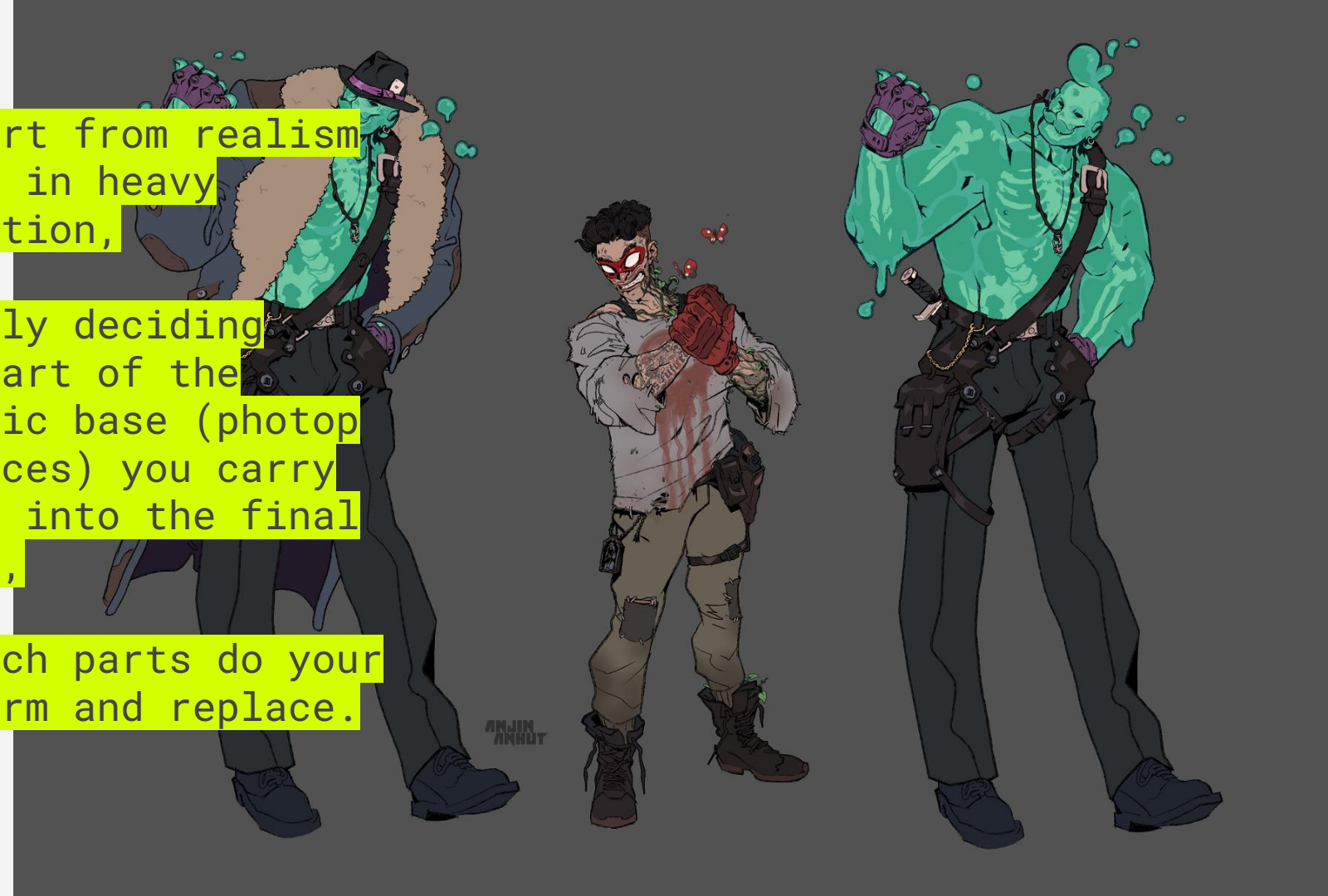
Such as Stretch&Squash, lineweight, follow through, shape language.

You also choose a rendering style, that is not targeting realism.

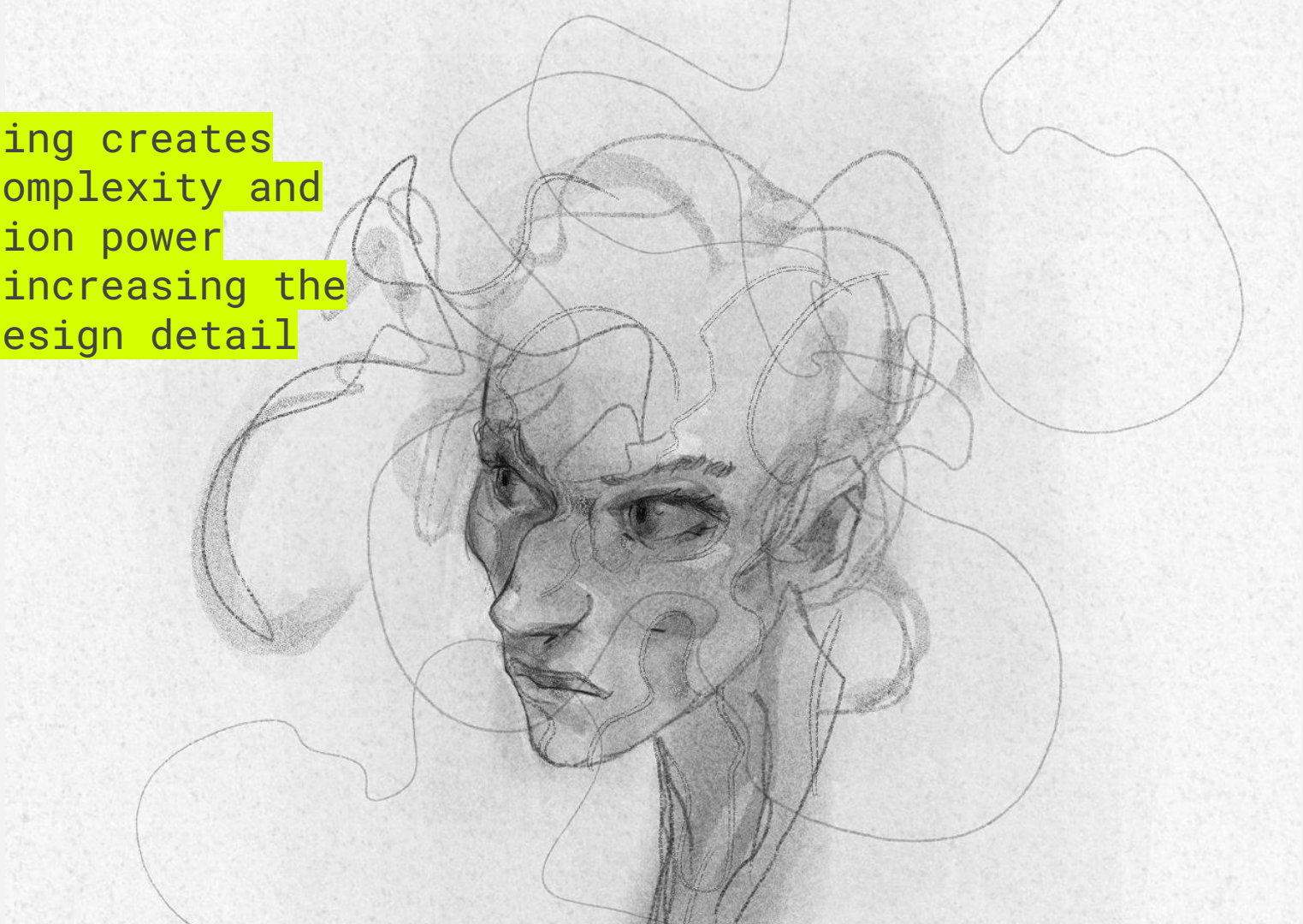
You start from realism and end in heavy stylization,

carefully deciding which part of the realistic base (photop references) you carry forward into the final designs,

and which parts do your transform and replace.



Artefacting creates visual complexity and stylization power without increasing the actual design detail



Your design needs to be promising in every step. You will never “fix” a design that doesnt click now in a later step.

Only move to lines when your sketch is clicking.

Only move to colors when your lines are clicking.

Make sure you care before going in further.




You don't have to go through all the steps in teh same order tho. How about being happy with the cel shading first, then moving to detailing?
Just build your confidence each step.

Even if you consider yourself a 2D artist:

Learn Blender. At least enough to create references for yourself.



Divest from Adobe.
Cancel today. GTFO.

Use Clip Studio Paint… it is by far the superior software for drawing and painting. (not so much photo editing and 3Dtexturing tho)

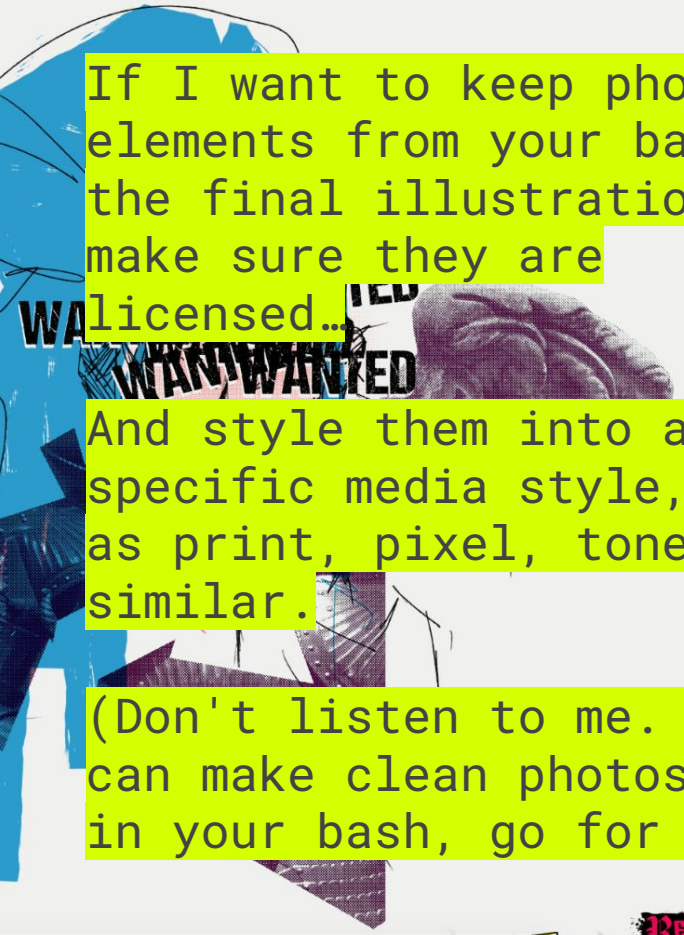
Or use Procreate for a more streamlined program (tablet only tho)



If I want to keep photo elements from your bash in the final illustration, I make sure they are licensed…

And style them into a specific media style, such as print, pixel, tones or similar.

(Don't listen to me. If you can make clean photos work in your bash, go for it.)



Clef

PUNK-VIBE CHARACTER EXPLORATION

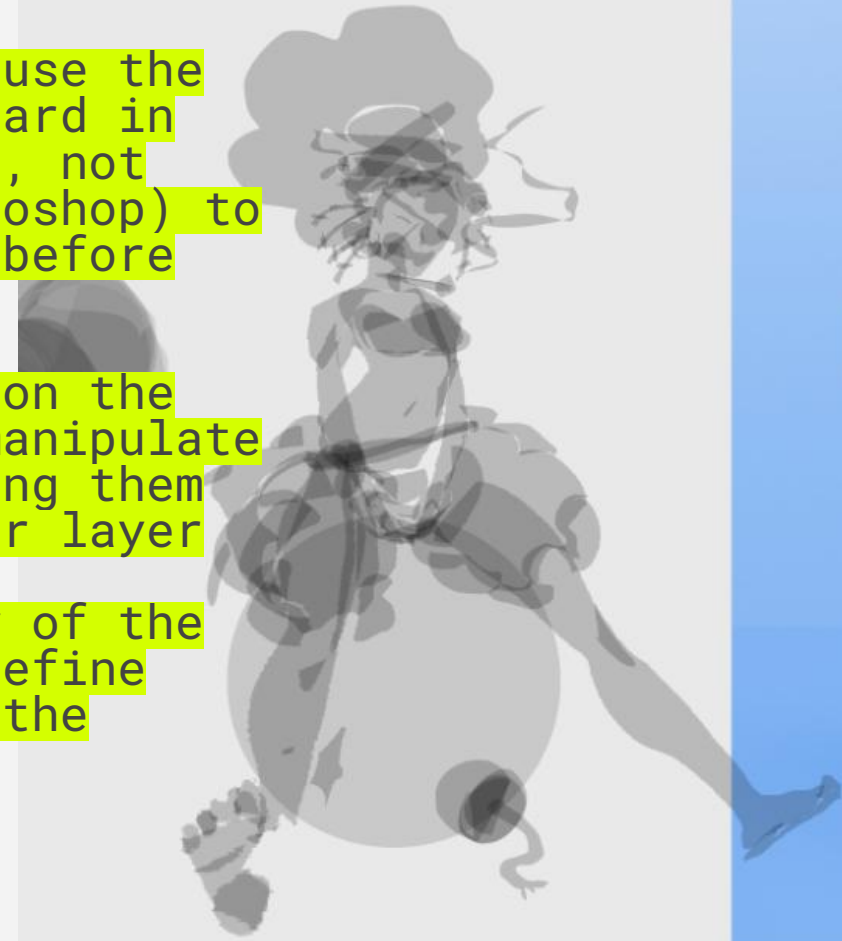




Alternatively, I use the fill lasso (standard in Clip Studio Paint, not available in Photoshop) to block out shapes before drawing.

I add new shapes on the layer above and manipulate them before mashing them down to the master layer

The lower opacity of the shapes helps me define things inside of the silhouette.

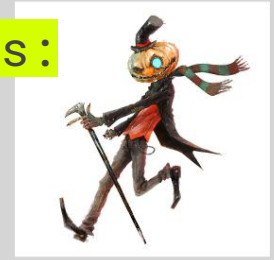


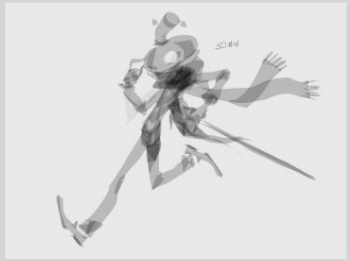


Like this:



Or like this:





Oh, god, not the pumpkin AGAIN!!! What is his problem?

Part, done already



TYSM

Find me and say hi!