



CHARACTER DESIGN QUARTERLY



HAPPY WHIMSICAL MONSTER

BY SHAUN BRYANT

There are a lot of ways to approach creating a character. I want to demonstrate how you can go beyond a character sketch and create a design that portrays a specific emotion at first sight. Using story and shape-play you can drive your design to display a specific feeling.

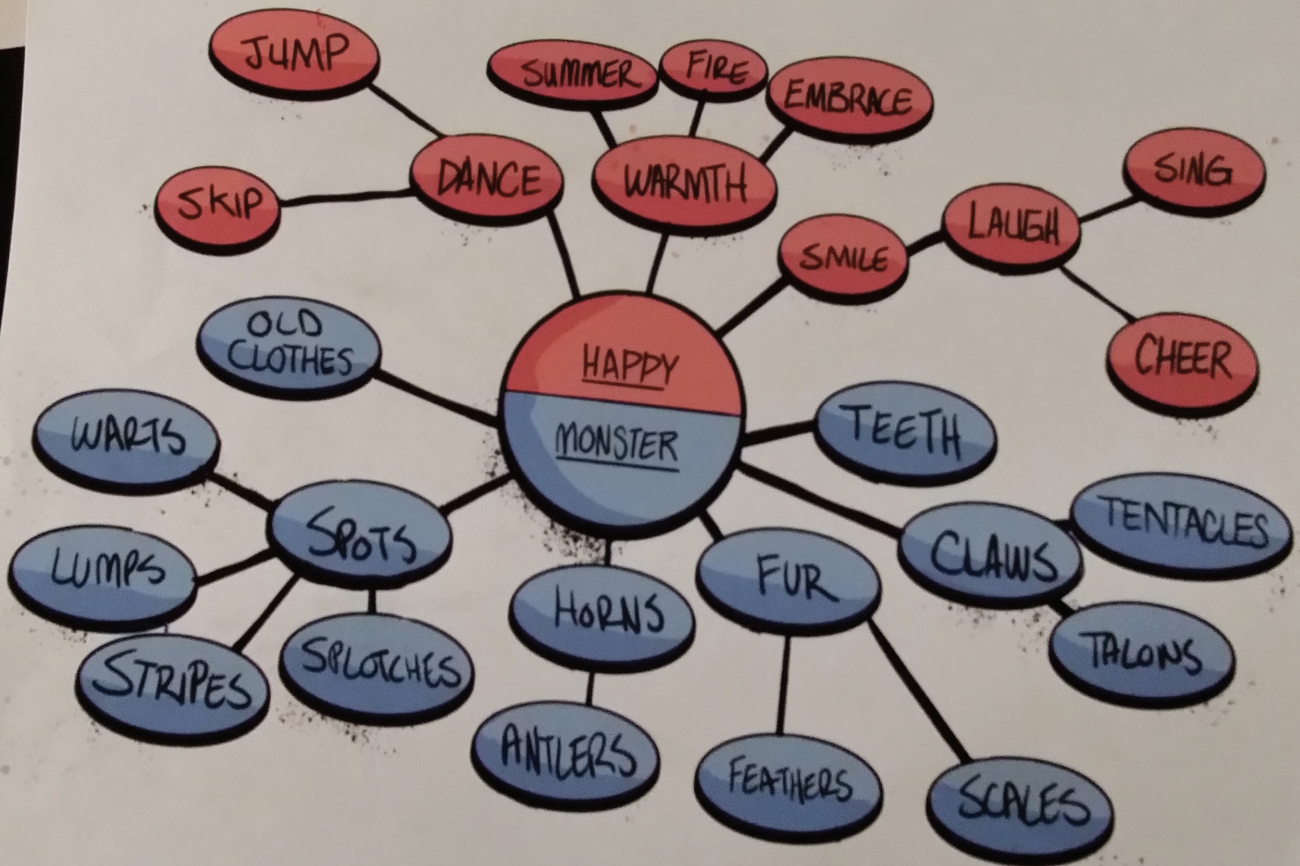
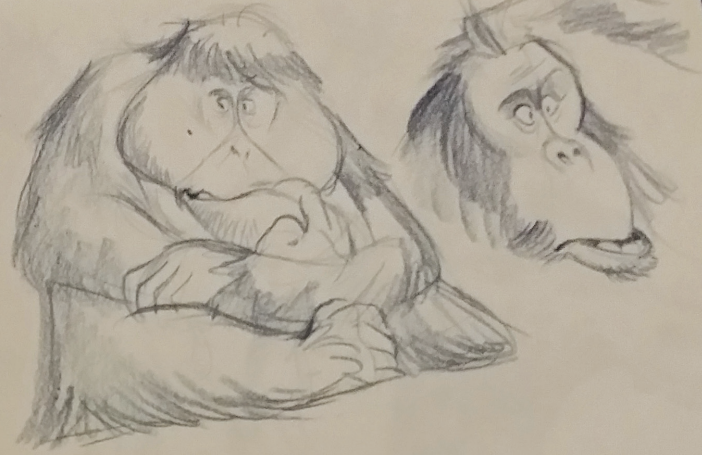
Our only caveat in the brief is to create a character based on a feeling, so let's create a character that exudes happiness. Here is a little plot for a story that we can use to create our character:

"On the top of a sunny mountain lives a huge monster. He comes down into the valley and scares all the sheep and shepherds away. One day a brave shepherd who isn't afraid to be eaten, turns and starts to perform for the monster. So pleased that he has someone to talk to, the monster shares in the good cheer. It turns out this monster isn't hungry for sheep or shepherds, he is just starved for attention."



left-hand page: From a central theme,
branch out with related words

Above: Colors differentiate words that
need different types of reference





MIND-MAPPING

I find that when I'm given a wide open topic or if I'm free sketching, the best thing to do is impose a boundary or theme. This helps to generate usable ideas quicker because you will have something to throw your ideas against.

Make a short list of subjects for the theme and emotion such as angry pirates, happy monsters, confused aliens, or surprised animals. Select one and try to create a mind map to explore a variety of ideas using text. Try to use verbs to describe the feeling and nouns to describe the character theme. Use word association to create a web of ideas that can help direct your exploratory drawing and save time by creating a compass for your designs.

FINDING REFERENCES

Use your mind-map as a shopping list in your hunt for references, which will give you a less ambiguous target and save you time. Shoot your own reference when possible. Go to zoos, museums or life drawing classes to shoot photos and draw studies that will help create a more detailed design.

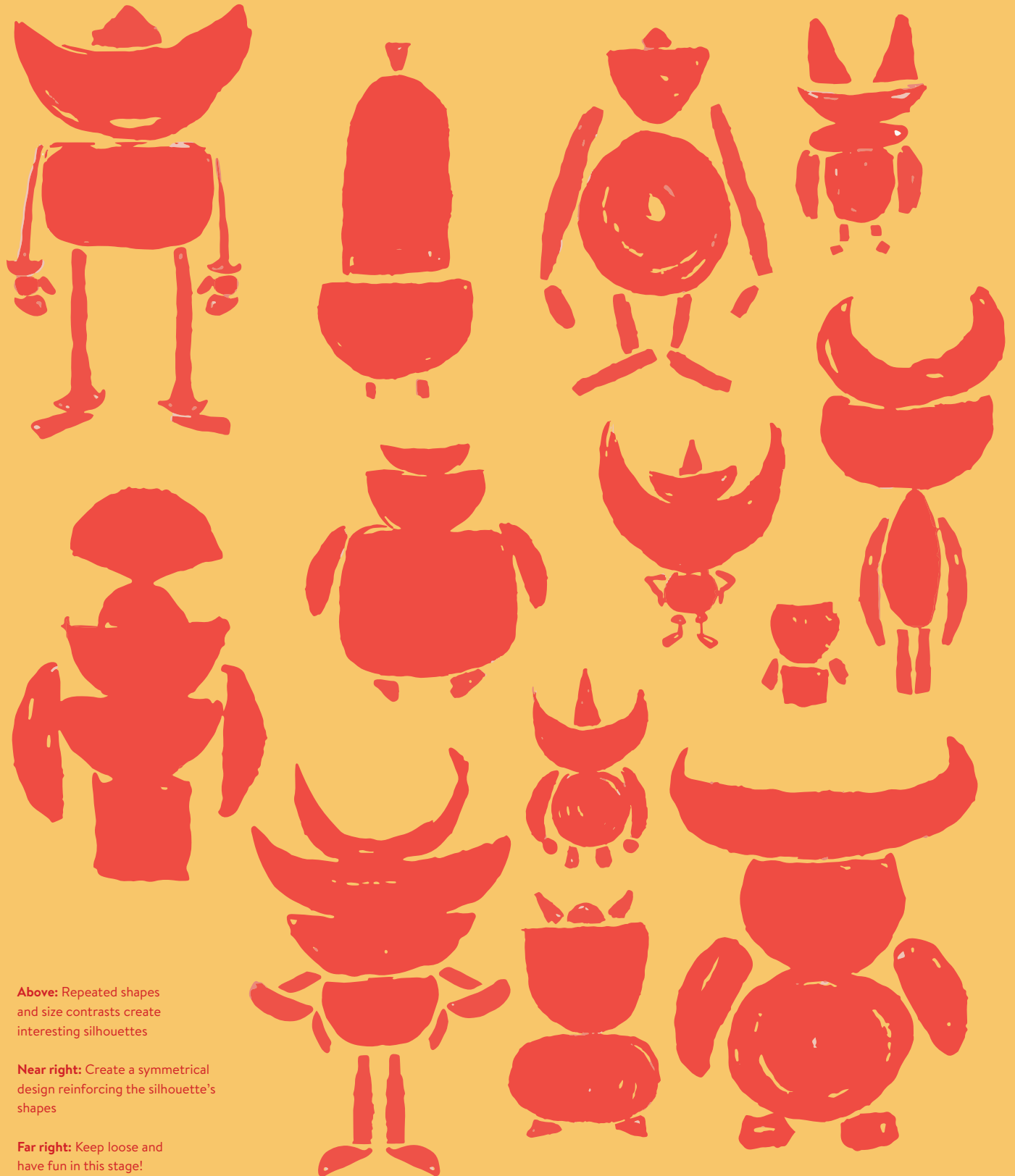
QUICK SKETCHING

Spend some time reviewing your references and the story to get into the right mind-set. Start sketching some quick ideas, keeping your lines loose. Amazing drawings are not the focus right now; just start exploring what works for this character and what doesn't.

Try to keep each sketch to one or two minutes at the most. When you are finished you can see what aspects of the sketches are appealing to you. At this point I know the one-eyed character and the reptilian characters are not the right direction for this piece, but the furry rounded characters are appealing.



BUILDING BLOCKS

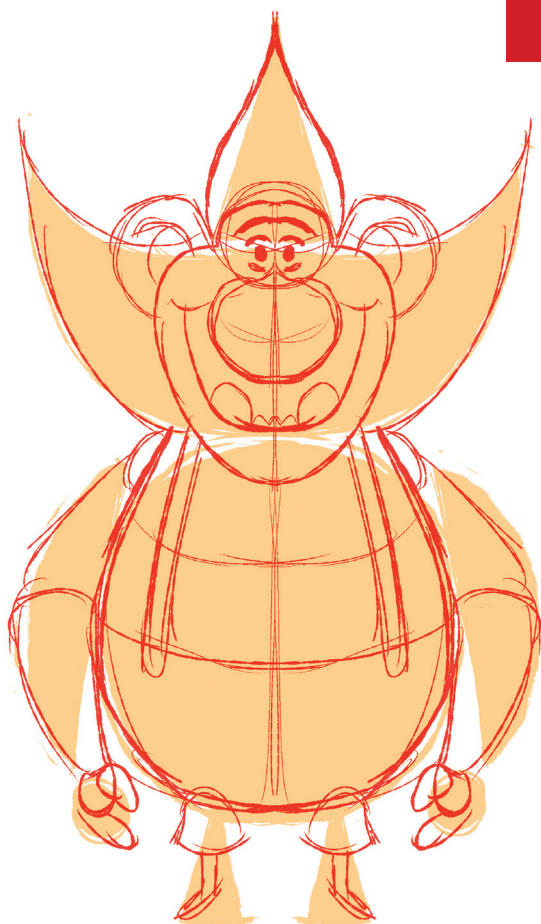


Above: Repeated shapes and size contrasts create interesting silhouettes

Near right: Create a symmetrical design reinforcing the silhouette's shapes

Far right: Keep loose and have fun in this stage!

Read the full article in issue 01



BUILDING BLOCKS

Use basic shapes as building blocks to create dozens of silhouette variations. When creating each new silhouette try to vary the shapes and their sizes to create contrast and interest. Some repetition of shapes in a character design can however create unity and balance.

Think of an iconic shape that fits the emotion you want to convey. I choose an arcing smile shape that is repeated in each design to evoke the feeling of happiness and joy.

USING SYMMETRY

Working symmetrically initially can help you zip through many ideas quickly, because you can concentrate on anatomy without having to worry about making a difficult pose work. As I design, I keep the smiling icon in my thoughts. I try to reinforce that design idea by creating

forms that turn upward and have rounded undersides. Rounder shapes will reinforce the happier, good nature of the monster despite the sharper more dangerous tips of the characters design.

It's easy to flatten your character out when drawing symmetrically. To avoid a flat image, place a perspective grid on the ground plane and draw through your forms to create a three-dimensional design.

DETAILING DESIGNS

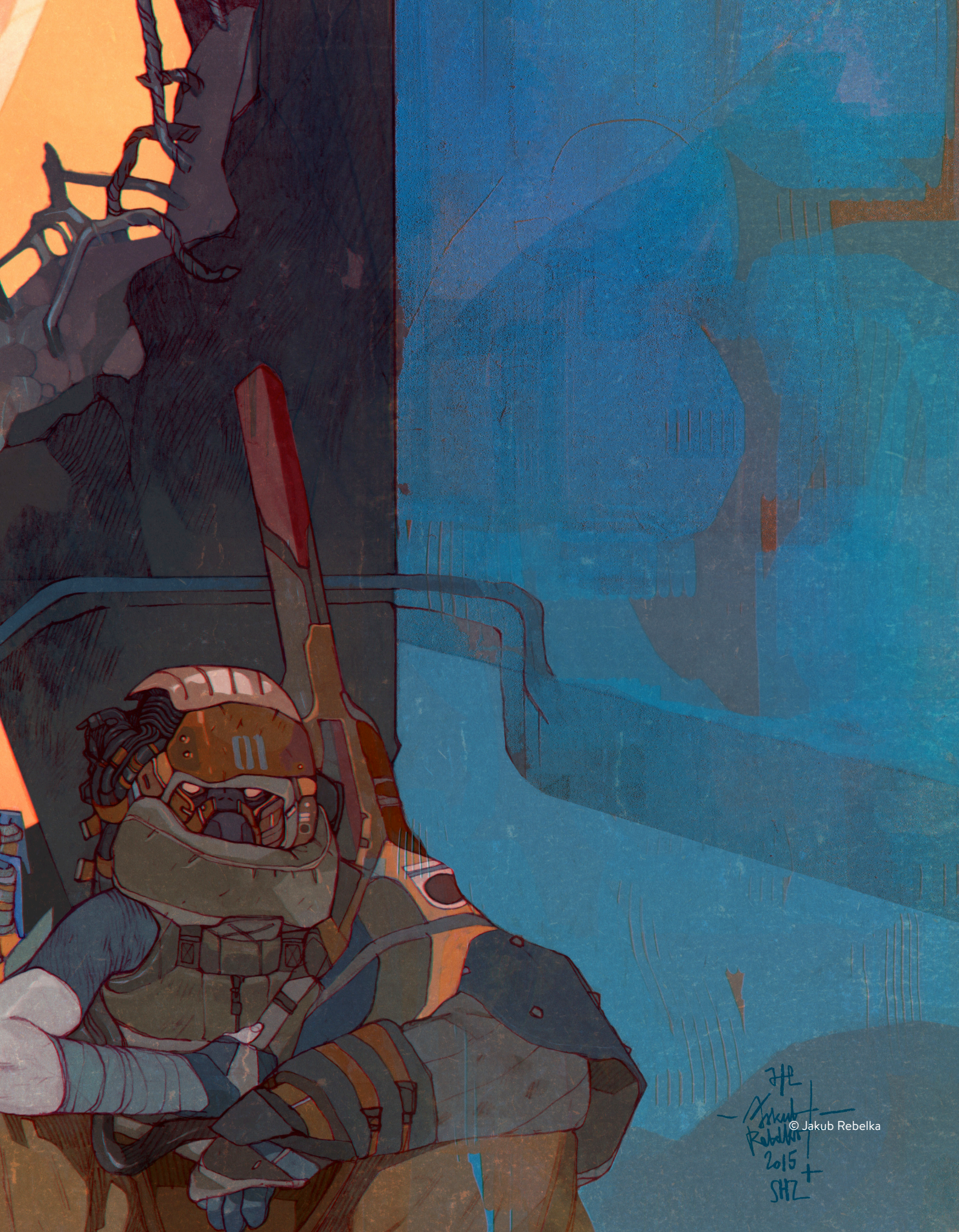
Add details to your design to create solid volumes. To add more interest, break the symmetry of the last step and add details that align with your theme. That being said, at this stage I try not to get too wrapped up in the finer details and posing. The idea of this is to quickly generate interesting design ideas and build upon those ideas in later iterations.

MACRO TO MICRO

Creating a design is easiest when you keep a hierarchy of steps in your mind. Try to remember the mantra "macro to micro." Create big dominant shapes and then back them up with smaller supporting shapes.

Start at a macro stage and get your silhouette, proportions, and gesture right, and then move on to progressively smaller details. When you get bogged down in the tiny details first, your characters overall design can suffer.



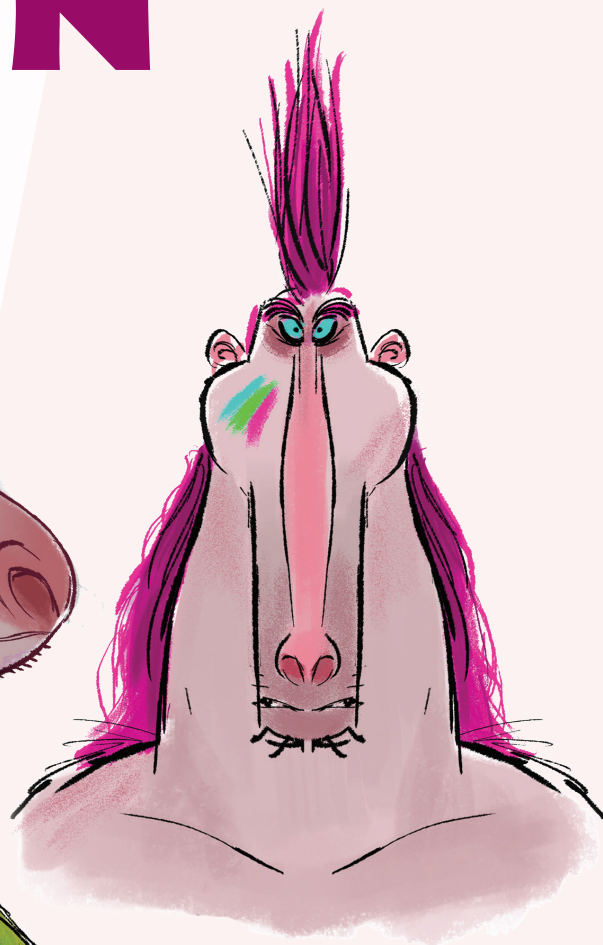


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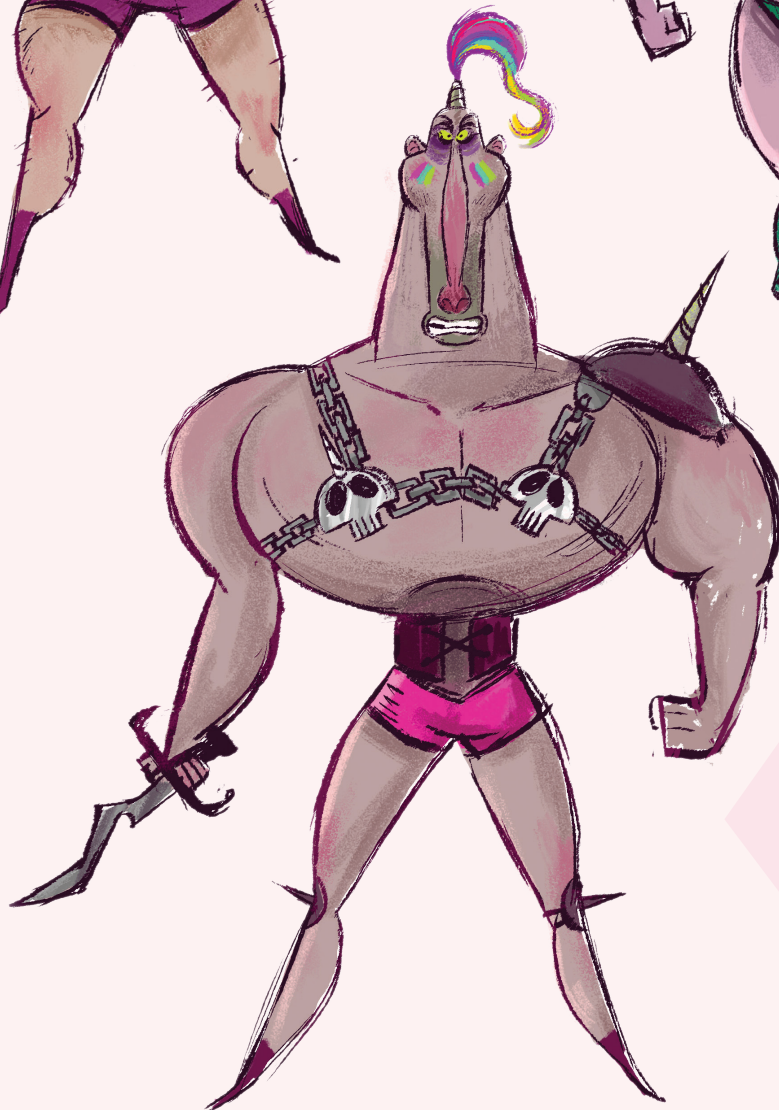
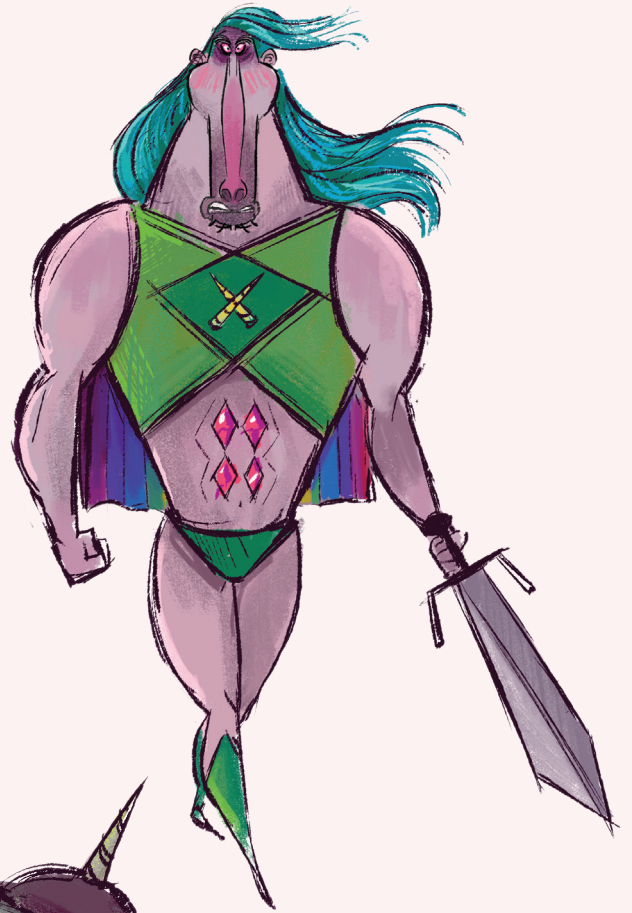
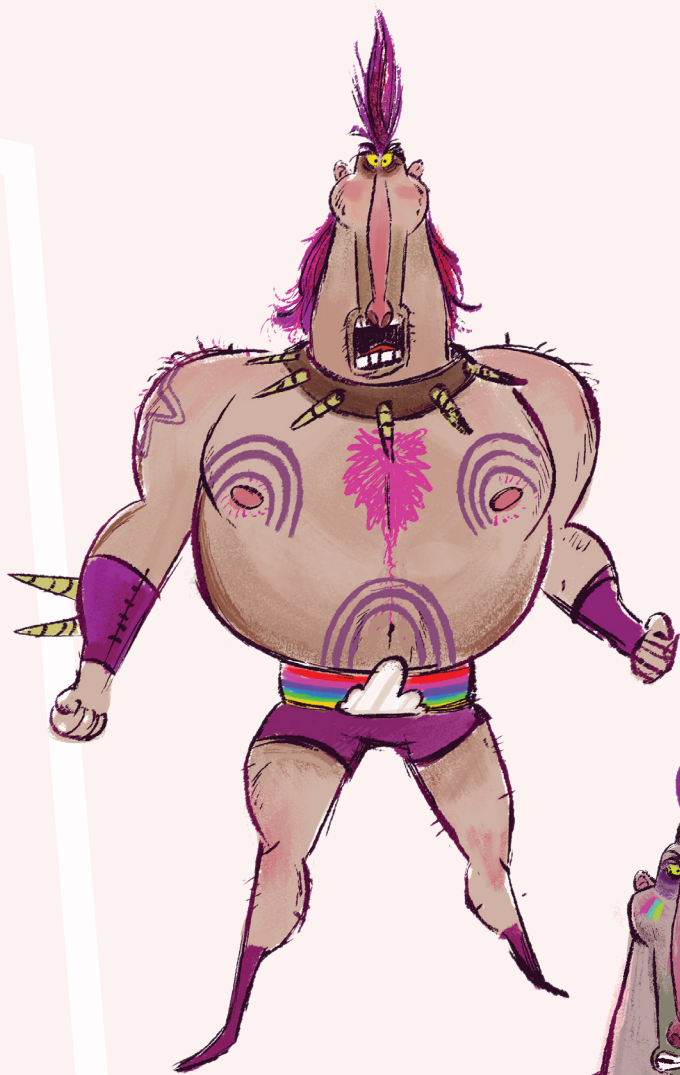
UNICORN SLAYER

For this piece I am looking to explore a character and a world that would combine an exciting fantasy world with a silly tone and sense of humor. I love exploring whole worlds and I felt like the world of the absurd Unicorn Slayer can provide me with a fun playground to explore more characters and environments in the future. Most of my process these days is done in Photoshop from the early sketches and exploration to the final design.

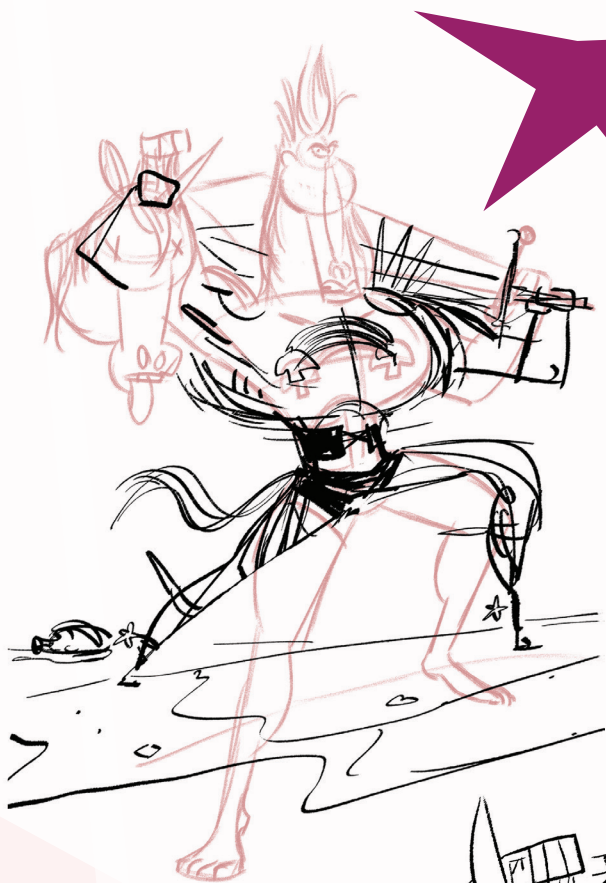


I always love to start with the face. I feel like that is where I can really find the character, so I start with exploring different shapes and facial features.



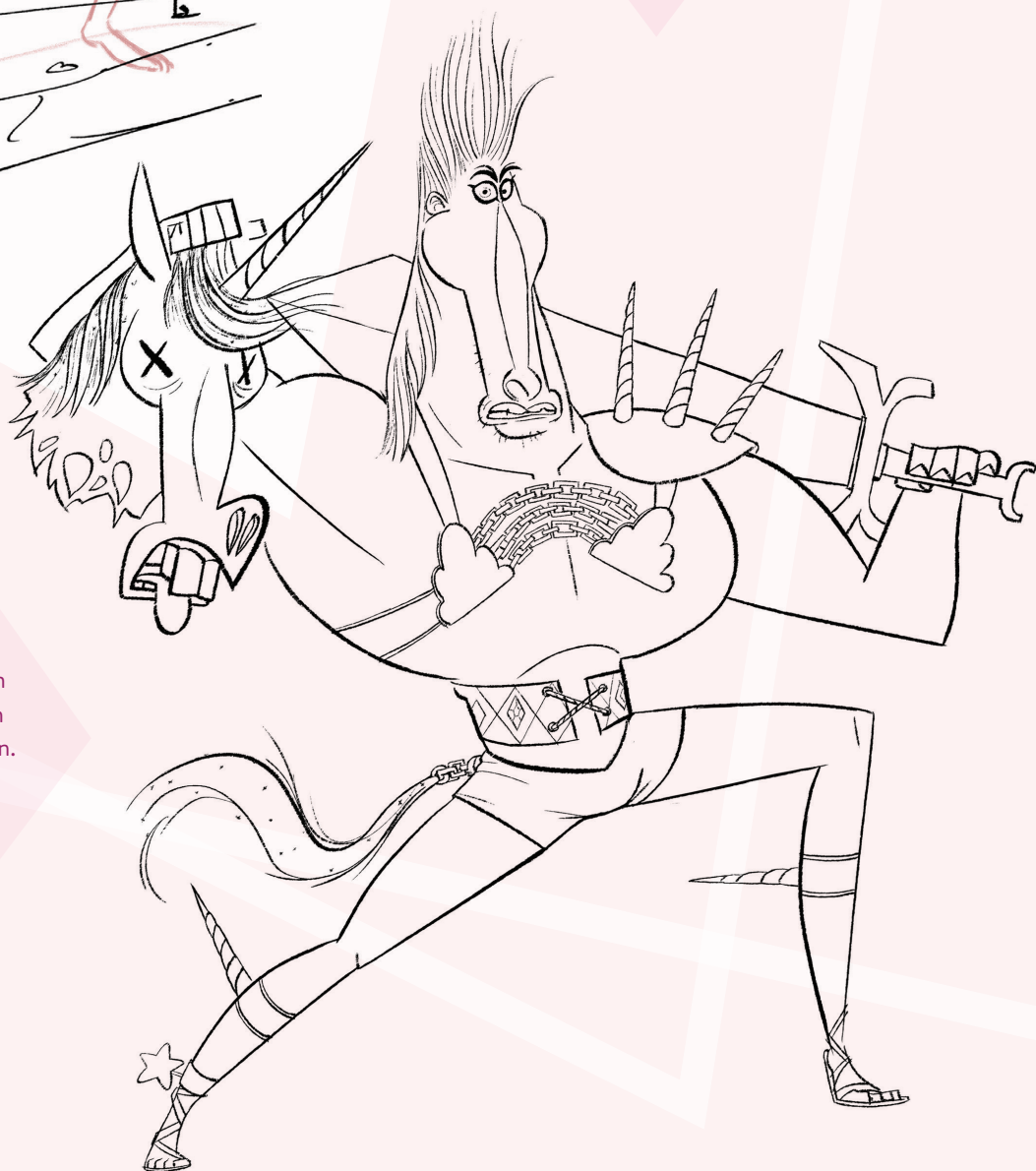


At this stage I explore some body variations. This is also a good place to start exploring different costumes that will help tell the story of this character.



The pose I chose feels too weak and static, lacking the humor and explosive energy I am after. Rethink your ideas and see if they are the strongest you can think of.

After finding the gesture I'm after, I redraw the pose with the correct shapes and design. Then I do the final line art.







AN INTERVIEW WITH AMANDA JOLLY

Meet up-and-coming Character Designer Amanda Jolly, whose quirky drawings and spirited illustrations have captured the attention of Sony Animation, Warner Animation Group and Disney TVA.





HI AMANDA, THANKS VERY MUCH FOR TAKING THE TIME TO CHAT TO US! PLEASE CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF AND WHERE YOU ARE FROM?

Thanks for having me! I'm a character designer in the animation industry and have been for several years now. However, I only started actively pursuing that career in 2009. Before that, I studied English and thought for a long time I'd be going into business. When the recession hit in 2008 though, and jobs were next to impossible to come by, my husband encouraged me to go after a career in art since it had always been my dream. I couldn't be happier that I did. Working in animation had always sounded wonderful, but I had no idea if it was "practical." Fortunately in 2009, nothing really sounded practical, so I found the courage to dive in and work hard for what I really wanted. The fact that I live and grew up in Southern California, where a ton of animation is, made the transition easier, too.

THAT'S SUCH A BRAVE MOVE! WHAT IN PARTICULAR DREW YOU TO ANIMATION?

I just had always loved it. From the time I was really little, the two things that interested me most were stories and art. I loved that

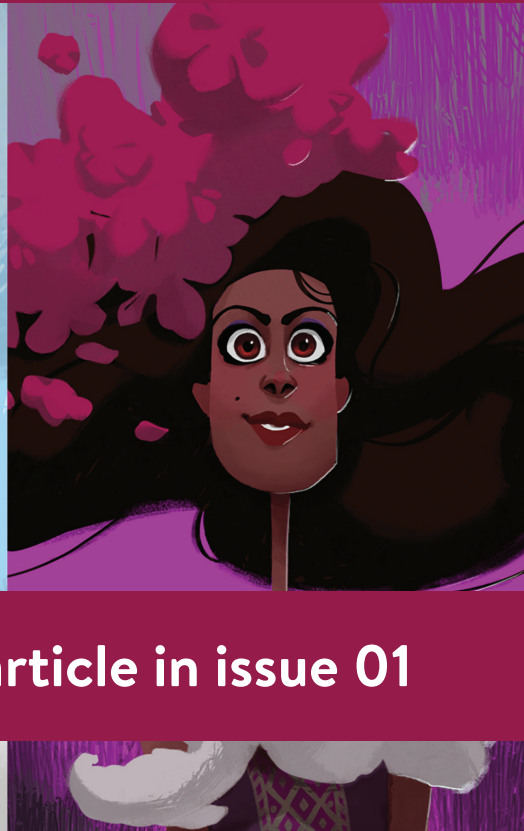
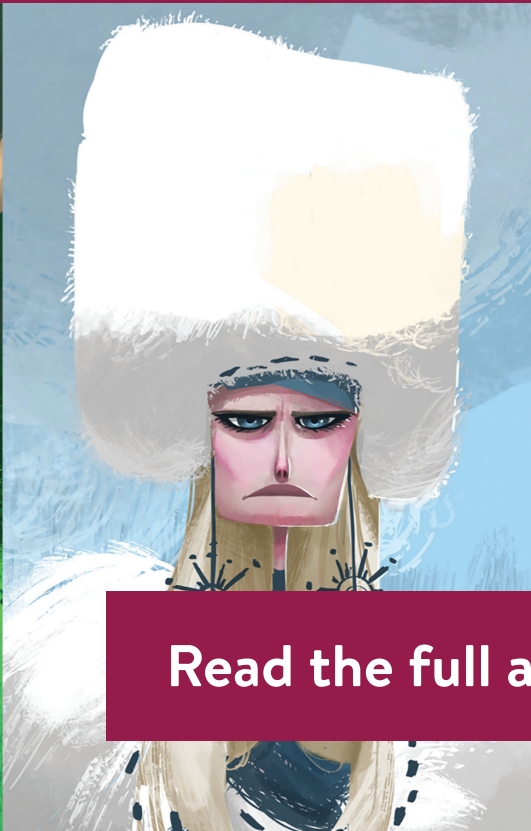
characters and worlds could look any way we imagined, and that they could be used to make us learn and feel. I remember being five years old and seeing adverts for "The Little Mermaid" and realizing for the first time that there was a medium that combined both of those interests. It was perfect. I was honestly hooked from that young of an age!

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WORKING AT WARNER ANIMATION GROUP? COULD YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT HOW YOU GOT YOUR JOB THERE AND WHAT YOU DO?

I've been at WAG for over three years now, starting on the film "Storks" when it was just a baby itself, and working on it till the very end. I landed there after leaving Sony Animation, because some friends had graciously recommended WAG take a look at me.



"STYLE IS SUCH A LIVING THING THAT GROWS WITH YOU AND YOUR TASTE"



Read the full article in issue 01

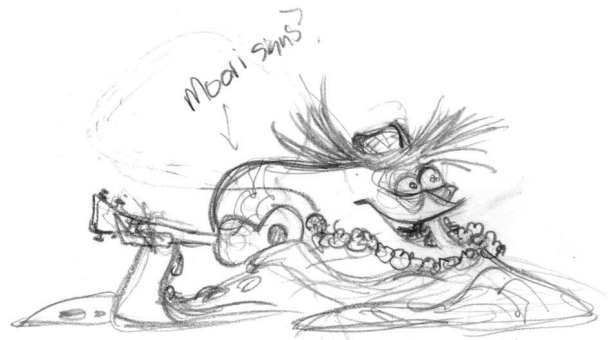
THE ART OF IMPROVISATION

BY BRETT BEAN

For this tutorial, five words were randomly pulled from a hat, and I swear some giggling from the fine folks at 3dtotal. I had to figure out a way to say it all THIS.....on paper. Octopus....Cheerful....Ukulele.....Farmer.....and the color Red.

To tell you the truth, this is pretty close to reality for a character designer. In my job I never know what I'll be asked to come up with next and sometimes the scripts change mid-way through the design process. And every once in a while some non-artist in charge will say one of his calendar's "words of the day" to sound smart and knowledgeable and throw the





design out of balance....it's a fact and something to be aware of and get used to. So this is more like a professional job than most. Part improvisation, part art: I call it Artprov.

I decided to attempt 90% traditional and 10% digital clean up if I needed it. My hope was to not only show you something I find seriously lacking in our digital age, but also push myself into new territory as well. With every new job I take on for a client, I have one rule before I say yes. "Give yourself challenges on every project." For this project, my challenge was to color in a different way than I ever have before. My tools are Copic Sketch Markers, Prisma colour pencils, a white Sigma gel pen, Blackwing Pencils, and animation paper. For the final steps I used a PC, Cintiq, and Photoshop and no special brushes.

GENERATING IDEAS

I mentally brain dump as many thoughts and ideas as I can on the subject. I'm not too worried about the end result, but more about the idea I wish to convey. I find it easiest to work on the bigger conceptual idea and then refine it in the smaller stages later. It's free forming and my favorite stage by far. No limitations, no fears, no worries. Just try and make stuff happen. It's messy and I never try to make it look finished. For me it can be nonsense, but it has to be presentable if it's for a client. They need to be able to interpret everything like I'm not there to explain it.

DESIGNING SHAPE LANGUAGES

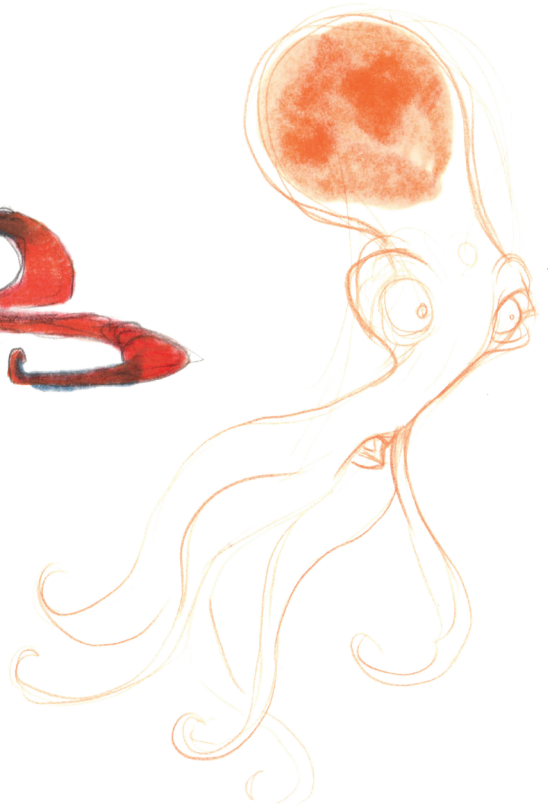
I play with ideas about shape language. In the early stages, or "Blue Sky" phase, I try to come up with ways to push the visual definition of an octopus until it breaks and you can't identify it as such. While designing I think about:

1. How stylized do I want to get, ranging from graphic shapes to volumetric design
2. Defining patterns
3. Thinking about the mouth shapes, realistic? Sitting on top? None to see? That answer will help decide how anthropomorphic the Octopus will be.
4. Finding the "point of the design" and asking myself why should someone care about this thing I'm making?

This stage helps me find the boundaries of where I want to take the overall design and how I want the audience to react.

Left hand page: All the preliminary work I did on the project together. Lots of thumbnails, lots of ideas.

This page: Thumbnails done with animation paper on a clipboard using a black wing pencil sitting on the food tray during a flight while being bumped by a screaming child....that was mine Playing with Props while pushing the gesture from floating to sitting.



EXPERIMENTING WITH TECHNIQUES

Now that I am satisfied with the process and where I want the story and design to go, I begin the personal challenge part. This is the ugly stage where I fail miserably and on purpose. My idea is to use this thin animation paper along with Copic markers that should destroy the paper. Knowing this and how many times I see my paper bleed to the other side using markers, I want this to be my advantage. Quickly drawing on one side, I then start coloring in on the back side and seeing if the effect actually works the way I want it to. The first attempt is a fail. I used too thick a paper and the bleeding through is minimal and too haphazard. But I see the potential.

USING THE COLOR BLEED

Finally the technique is coming alive. Using just the backside of the paper, letting it bleed through then adding pencils on the other side is having the effect I wanted. I can easily add some highlights and it blends better than I



expected. What I learned in doing this is: (see text on image 5_1).

I now have to plan out each stroke as the paper bleeds way more than I intended. When planning out your marker strokes, remember that your hand is pressure sensitive. It's why I also suggest using pressure sensitivity in Photoshop as it will help train your hand eye coordination. Each stroke builds on top of the other to "build up" a color effect. I couple that with some colored pencils and I have my gradient.

PLAYING WITH FACIAL FEATURES

This is the first design I finished in this method. I know it had nothing to do with the brief. This was an exercise in methodology and see if I could physically achieve the challenge I thought up mentally. I believed it finally worked in these two preliminary pieces. During this stage I determined as a designer that I had never seen the use of the octopi's amazing mouth

and beak. I knew whatever design choices I made I wanted to show that as a design choice. I also started to play with eyebrows and got more comfortable with contrasting values.

REFERING BACK TO THE BRIEF

My next stage is cultivating the best ideas into a more coherent statement. I also decided it needed to be a more colorful and cute overall idea and not play off of any references or darker tones. This stage is finally using my design skills to its capabilities. I have to make sure the idea of a cheerful ukulele playing Farm Octopus that loves Red shows up within each design. I comb over all the previous work and determine:

1. What worked (did the idea come across or did it make me laugh or smile)
2. What didn't (too depressing, nothing special to look at, etc),
3. What went too far (It doesn't even look like an octopus anymore)



Left-hand page (top): Failing on purpose to learn a thing or two. Failing on purpose is tough but easier if you know it's coming.

Left-hand page (middle): My next attempt is using a much thinner paper which means its way more fragile and susceptible to the markers

Left-hand page: Practicing technique before the final approach. Still playing and gathering ideas on how to render the final piece.

Above: Bringing it all together and deciding on where to take the character design.



Read the full article in issue 01