

The art history of Legend of Zelda

In this Essay i will go over the history of the Art that made Legend of zelda the way that it is, and try to explain how even today the pieces still hold up despite some being 30 almost 40 years old, i will begin with the first game and make my way through each of the games where there's a major art style shift OR improvement to the style of the previous game. This will allow me to show you that the Zelda team are constantly wanting their games to be fresh and unique even if some games do share an art style they can all stand on their own merit despite the constant throughline of the universality of the character designs.

At the start of Legend of Zelda for the concept art they had out-sourced their artwork to Katsuya Terada who heavily worked on the first legend of Zelda through to Link's awakening's concept art. Many of the other pieces of concept art were sourced to an animation company that we do not know the name of, due to Nintendo outsourcing it as Yusuke Nanako said in an interview:

"I believe it was done by someone from an outside animation studio. During the Nes and SNES eras, artwork was frequently outsourced for components like game packaging and manuals. Even within the company, I think that "send it to the pros" was considered common sense when it came to illustrations." [Art & Artifacts, Legend of Zelda].

Katsuya Terada's art style for legend of zelda helped make the scale of everything for the main LOZ team to create the map and dungeons as well as the general atmosphere of the game. This would be carried over into the next game in the franchise, Zelda II: The Adventure of Link. Whereas in a link to the past the art style changes but we do know that Katsuya Terada did do some work, the majority of it was done by the Unnamed animation company as Nintendo™ doesn't have any artists who worked on the concept art for that game.

We do know that from Ocarina of Time onwards the development was all done inhouse at Nintendo™ as we know artists such as: Yoshiaki Koizumi and Yusuke Nakano.

Ocarina of time was the first time Nintendo™ did a 3D Zelda Game, and thus the Character concept art reflected such a thing, so there's bold lines, flat colours so they can be easily made by very few polys, and various poses to show how animations may be done, as well as the general vibe of the characters. This is a trend that Nintendo will carry through all their in house productions.

The way Yusuke Nakano got put onto the development of Ocarina of time was that he had shown Ocarina of Time's Character Designer, Yoshiaki Koizumi a bust shot of Link as an adult, and had proposed to do all the artwork himself which Yoshiaki Koizumi gave his blessing for Yusuke Nakano to do, As quote: "Koizumi, and I were examining the drawings we received we felt that there was something about them that didn't quite fit with what we'd had in mind" [Art & Artifacts, Legend of zelda].

Moving onto Majora's mask Nakano took over as the lead artist for this game, with much of the same visual style, however much more refined as now in the concept art there's much harsher and bolder with contrast colour within those longer stretches of shadow, there's alot more dynamic sense of style and character design too, most likely due to

Takaya Imamura's input in Major's mask as he had a hand in designing characters for Major's mask as he was also responsible for most of the bosses in A link to the past. Much like for the previous 2 in house productions of art for Legend of Zelda, this continues with Legend of Zelda: Oracle of Seasons/Oracle of Ages, both with the art done by Yusuke Nakano. This time however the Art style shifts more reminiscent of A link to the Past in terms of Character design. Which gave the game its brighter and happier tone compared to the previous 2 entries, Moving Swiftly onto the Toon Style which was developed for The Wind Waker. This art style was created using a Washi texture after Yoshiaki Haruhana's cartoonish concept art of Link [Art & artifacts, Legend of Zelda], as they thought that; "felt that a realistic-looking Zelda would be lost in the sea of many other games" [art & artifacts, Legend of Zelda] but they also dabbled in woodblock such as for the opening as: "I did the woodblock style as an experiment. The first thing I did was the battle between Ganon and Link. When I showed it to him he said "I like it!" so I ended up doing the others in the same manner". This process was started as: "rough concept in photoshop" then using the cellophane to peel away the toner. This was then later scanned back in and put a washi texture on top so it could be used in game. Some of the other pieces such as the Stained glass illustrations were done by Akira Himekawa. The toon style was used for many later games such as Phantom Hourglass, Spirit Tracks, a link to the past: Four Swords, Four Swords adventure, The Minish Cap. only retired when Twilight Princess came around.

Due to the large scale development Satoru Takizawa put the task of designing Link to Yusuke Nakano to assist the outsourced artists.[Encyclopedia, Legend of Zelda] Nakano's initial design was to make Link to be around 25 or even 30 [Art & artifact, Legend of Zelda]. But he later changed it after being told by Nintendo of America that fans wanted something more akin to Adult Link from Ocarina of Time. [art & artifact, Legend of Zelda] we do know that one particular character in Twilight Princess went through many different designs often not even resembling each other that being the character of Midna. Who other than the continuous use of a mask being the only connecting factor, so from this it's clear that they really wanted to get her specific design to be perfect.

Moving onto Skyward Sword, this meets us with Yusuke Nakano's step down from being the Illustrator instead Takumi Wada was chosen through an internal competition as Nakano "I was hoping for the younger staff to be more central in the process" {art & artifact, Legend of Zelda}. Before E3 2010. Wada and Nakano had decided that the game would have a watercolour look to the game but: "due to hardware limitations, it wasn't realized as well as we had hoped" though looking back Wada stated "using an older style Doesn't mean it can't feel mpstagic which I think is a good thing. So I personally think using the watercolour style was a good thing". [Art & Artifacts, Legend of Zelda] This goes to show that Wada and Nakano truly think that the work of the franchise is timeless and despite the changing of art styles that the Zelda franchise have gone through. There's still that universality to the designs and way they've approach the different art styles

What this all means is that the style of The Legend of Zelda has changed many times over, and has continued to change with the latest titles: Breath of the Wild, Tears of the Kingdom and Echoes of Wisdom. With all of this starting from Katsuya Terada and then

later Spearheaded by Yusuke Nakano and continuing to this day by Takumi Wada, with their works becoming timeless and memorable even years down the line. With each game letting them improve the visual style and history of the franchise, causing memorable designs that will never age and games that to this day are played by hundreds of fans worldwide, causing Zelda and Link to be household names among Nintendo's other franchises. With Zelda's artstyle being the only one to ever evolve and change yet still keep the universality of their designs.

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