

How do concept artists create imagined worlds?

Student ID Number: 1702266

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Tutor: Julia Lockheart

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Introduction

Concept art is an important part to worldbuilding and creating entertainment such as video games or movies. With my desire to be a concept artist in the future, I found it would be most beneficial to write my independent inquiry focusing on how concept artists create imagined worlds. This study explores different ways of communicating via visual language within concept art. Worldbuilding will play a large role within my research as concept art is a visual representation of creating ideas for worlds. I will be looking at different communication devices in which concept artists use, such as metaphors and mythologies. Furthermore, this study will delve deeper into the film, the Joker (2019) to understand the structure and theories associated with worldbuilding, exploring ecological systems in which the character is the focus but they are influenced by everything around them. Finally, I also want to understand what other artists intentions are with concept art as it is important to explore different opinions on the subject. I have conducted a survey as part of my primary research. I have asked questions to three artists: Tomas Matous, a freelance artist. Marit Gorissen, a student who is studying art and finally, Tim Kaminski. Kaminski is an experienced concept artist. This primary research will allow me to analyse the different references which artists are inspired by, this including a range of different cultural techniques, clothing and architecture. Furthermore, exploring different artists who practice in different mediums and techniques to create artwork, this allows the artist to generate new concepts outside of their own culture and understanding.

Worldbuilding

Concepts are defined as ideas, often abstract ideas; these are the “building blocks of thoughts” (Margolis, 2005). Within worldbuilding, concept art is created when these ideas require visual interpretation, this art is about communicating the abstract idea rather than creating finished artwork. However, concept art has depth beyond one idea when discussing worldbuilding as it is a connection of many different concepts to create one world.

In order to fully understand the depth of the concept world it is key having knowledge of the range of tools which concept artists manipulate, including being able to create a believable world by mixing the familiar and fantastical. According to Athens (2017) "In spite of this distinction between the familiar and the fantastical, it is only the familiar that matters. Why? Because we don't inhabit a world of fantasy, it's not familiar to us". This suggests we must learn to create worlds by using familiar concepts so that the spectator immediately connects to the everyday. Therefore, by making things familiar we can add the fantastical and these additions become normalised.

Aspects of the familiar that are manipulated as tools by concept artists are colours, sociological constructs, metaphors and myth, through this essay I will focus mainly on metaphors and myths. The colours that concept artists choose to rely on cultural association, for example, red may be used as a bad sign as a "red flashing light often means danger" (Månsson, 2017). This allows those who are less inclined to read into the details to understand further what is going on and create an inclusive viewing experience for everyone. This can be achieved through familiar constructs, such as a government or religion. This allows the audience to relate as the concept artist explores the issues within a built world the same as we would in our world. It is also important to create metaphorical experiences within created worlds to create more an impact on our own society. Being able to explore issues sensitively by allowing the main character to experience them will allow others to further understand it in our world. It is possible to see this being done well in the Joker (2019) movie, which is the subject of my case study later in this text.

Other examples of worldbuilding where these tools are used cleverly are Harry Potter and The Hobbit. The Hobbit is connected to Lord of the Rings which is also an example of being able to expand a world further than its original reach. J.K Rowling creates an immersive world by using existing mythologies to support her new imagined ones. This allows the audience to believe in them further as we are familiar with part of the world, as Hillebrant (2019) states "She pulled elements from classic mythology, such as a phoenix and centaurs, and invented myths of her own, like the

story of the Elder Wand”. This creates a familiar plane in which the audience is somewhat already familiar with, and then interjects her own conceptual world within these familiarities. This can generate a thought of believable mythology within the audience, and not stopping at mythologies. J.K Rowling also allows her character’s history match up “with our own in some ways, such as a magical war raging alongside World War II, but differs in others, with an entire book devoted to the history of Quidditch” (Hillebrant, 2019). This creates for a fantastical but realistic world in which her characters live, it also makes a world in which the audience can relate to.

Delving into mythology will be important to understand why worldbuilding is essential within every aspect of life. Concept artists should explore this term and its definition closely as “All myths serve some type of purpose” (Massman, 2015). Concept artists should always create artwork with purpose as they must communicate a message and an idea with each piece. As concept artists dissect their worlds, it is important to keep purpose intact when adding new elements. But what is essential to remember is that “Myths are like legends and history except that they are not actually true” (Massman, 2015). Although myths are not real, they are completely believable and are grounded by truths and history. Mythology is more than just stories, as Roland Barthes states “myth is a system of communication, that it is a message” (1993, p. 109). Communication is important when a concept artist is trying to explain a world to their audience via visuals, and as such, concept artists will sometimes take advantage of familiar mythologies to explore their own, just as J.K Rowling has done previously within her Harry Potter books and resulting films. As she writes about griffins, she also includes her own creations to balance the familiar with conceptual. Even though myths may not be true, what is true is that “Myths are especially important since they typically reveal what is most important to a society” (Massman, 2015). Being able to learn what is important to a society also impacts the world in which concept artists create as this will inform a lot of the governing aspects within a world, which further influences the main character and changes intentions.

With myths being a way of communication, it is possible to understand that semiotics are also an integral part of this communication, “since it is the study of a type of speech, is but one fragment of this vast science of signs” (Barthes, 1993, p. 111). The connection between semiotics and mythologies can be used to help concept artists explore creating characters or environments in which an atmosphere is communicated, For example; a griffin is a heraldic creature which is often times linked with the role of “the role of guardian of the royal treasure” (Hamburger, 2014) which allows the audience to believe that a griffin is loyal and mighty as within mythology it is said to be a guardian.

Roland Barthes’ book called *Mythologies* dissects many different mythologies and explains them thoroughly. Within his Wine and Milk exploration, Barthes states “This galvanic substance is always considered, for instance, as the most efficient of thirst-quenchers, or at least this serves as the major alibi for its consumption” (1993, p. 58). Through this simple examination it is possible to understand why myths are created; they allow the audience to give a reason to action or form, even if it is false or untrue.

Metaphors are an interesting way to deliver a message when creating worlds, as described by George Lakoff; “Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish – a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language” (2003, p. 3). Learning how to communicate in many ways is important to concept artists, so studying metaphors and its relationship to worldbuilding is important, and although concept artists are visual storytellers, learning how to create metaphors and being able to execute a visual representation of metaphors will create a more interesting world, as the audience will be able to read further into the imagery provided. Metaphors explore a more advanced way of communication, one which is just a “matter of words rather than thought or action.” (Lakoff, 2003, p. 3). Furthermore, metaphors are underlying meanings throughout everyday life, and as Lakoff states “Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.” (Lakoff, 2003, p. 3).

Metaphors are always present which makes them a constant through time. Usually, metaphors give meaning, and helps explore morals. Metaphor is a way of communication by comparison, “It forms a link between two unlike things by stating one thing is another” (Kunesh, 2006). Translating this way of comparison to visual imagery for character art can be done simply by creating personified characters with the description in mind, but it is important to remember that metaphors are also to help the artist discuss with their audience.

Every part of worldbuilding revolves around the main character and their actions, but this is also

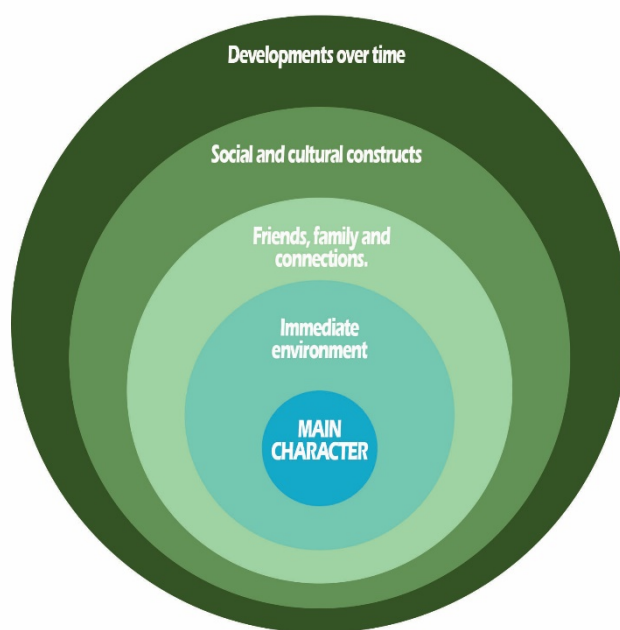


Figure 1 - The Ecological System of Worldbuilding

influenced by everything around them.

This character needs to have a reason to do its actions and every aspect of this world. It is important to delve deeper into the layering behind worldbuilding and the ecological systems theory by

Bronfenbrenner is a major part of research for understanding the psychology behind it. As Pereira states,

“As we work through this ecological

model, we will start at the centre with the main character, then work outward through each of the other layers. Keep in mind that this is a dynamic model, and no one layer exists in a vacuum.” (2019).

(See fig. 1) I created this diagram myself to show the explanation of this theory as it relates to worldbuilding and creation of characters.

Researching the ecological aspects behind world building is a good way to understand how concept artists can further build a more realistic world for their audience. In Bronfenbrenner’s theory, according to Pereira (2019) “the child is at the center of the ecosystem and the surrounding layers

have different levels of impact on that child”. Concept worlds should always be designed in layers surrounding a character so that immersion is not broken, since these different layers affect the main character differently. It’s a good idea to conceptualise the main character first whilst keeping in mind the ecosystems surrounding that character. Every part of worldbuilding revolves around the main character and their actions, but this is also influenced by everything around them. This character needs to have a reason to do its actions and therefore we build worlds, thinking about every aspect of this world. But deeper than world building, there has been an ecological systems theory devised by Urie Bronfenbrenner, studying child development and as Pereira (2019) mentions “This ecological approach to world building draws inspiration from Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory of child development”. Dissecting this theory further can help concept artists and designers to understand how “the inherent qualities of children and their environments interact to influence how they grow and develop” (Marsh, et al., 2019) and this will help concept artists and designers understand that characters are not standalone entities within a world, and to create an immersive world you require depth within the ecological and societal elements.

Joker case study



Figure 2 – Fleck with a sign

The case study for this research is the Joker (2019) movie, The Joker was created as a standalone origin story for the supervillain called Joker who is in the Batman movies, based in Gotham City.

World building is an integral part to creating a believable and immersive world, and as such “world building is essential in *any* story, even if that world seems ordinary or mundane” (Pereira, 2019). An analysis of the Joker (2019) movie allows a lot of information to be shared with us through the surrounding world which we did not previously know about this character.

The story (Joker, 2019) follows Arthur Fleck, acted by Joaquin Phoenix, working as a for hire clown. One of the first interactions that we see is Fleck posted in front of a shop, advertising it by swinging a sign around (See fig 1). The sign gets snatched by a group of teenagers, forcing Fleck to chase after them prompting a dramatic and desperate chase. Fleck follows the teenagers into an alleyway, and the teenagers proceed to attack him, breaking the stolen sign over Fleck's head, followed by beating Fleck to the ground, continuing to kick him whilst he is down (See fig 2).



Figure 3 – Fleck beaten up on floor

It is made clear that Gotham City is riddled with crime, poverty and homelessness. Fleck takes a bus ride into work and a young child and their mother sat in front of Fleck. The young child looks back at him and Fleck attempts to put a smile on the child's face (See fig 3), juxtaposing the rest of the bus which is filled with people with blank expressions. The mother soon realises that Fleck is interacting with her child and pulls her child



Figure 4 – Fleck interacting on bus

closer, this prompts Fleck's condition which is continuous bursts of uncontrollable laughter. The scene is prolonged as Fleck laughs uncontrollably and uncomfortably; this allows the viewer to witness the struggle of Fleck with his condition in conjunction to Gotham City's negative atmosphere.

As Pennington (2019) states "You can't separate the psychology of the Joker from the psychogeography of Gotham in the new comic book origins story". Colours are prominent throughout the movie, especially this scene. The running colours through the movie are red, blue and green, all three are seen within this scene. These colours are also used as the make-up on the Joker's face.



Figure 5 – Jack Nicholson as Joker

Within the middle to the end of the movie, the audience watches Fleck explore a relationship with his neighbour, starting by silently stalking her through the city as if she was prey, following into various scenes of this woman supporting Fleck through various hardships, including watching his mother fall sick and go to hospital. But by the end

we realise that was completely in his mind and none of the interaction was real. This was effective as the viewer can start to understand how alone he feels by imagining a relationship with someone who doesn't know him, after learning about this as the audience, we see how his world suddenly falls apart into psychosis.

This is clarified further towards the very end of the movie. Fleck is invited onto a TV show which had previously mocked him for his uncontrollable laughing, and he decided to appear wearing his clown makeup. Just prior to his appearance, the viewers witness as he prepares for



Figure 6 – Heath Ledger as Joker

his appearance on the TV show in his living room, drawing a gun out of his shirt and making jokes surrounding his own death.

Through this movie we see the main character, Fleck turn from a nice and caring person to one which finds joy in death. The spectator is witness as Fleck explores his world through mania, witnessing a corrupt hierarchy who have no care for its citizens. The audience also are passengers to Fleck exploring his own mental illnesses and abuse in an effective way, and as Pereira (2019) states "Your character serves as a lens to draw your readers in". This movie is a great example in exploring

a world through a character's eyes. The viewer previously knew the Joker to be a nihilistic criminal, but within this movie the audience is able to witness why he is that way and start to feel sorry for him. He is driven by abuse from other people and by the system, slowly turning manic, this movie is all about the rise of the Joker and fall of Fleck, and the producers take into account "How your character *feels* will affect how she sees and describes the world around her, which in turn will also affect your readers' perceptions of that world" (Pereira, 2019).

There has been a long list of movies in which the Joker has been portrayed by different actors, most



Figure 7 – Jared Leto as Joker

notably; Batman (1989) by Jack Nicholson (See fig 5), The Dark Knight (2008) by Heath Ledger (See fig 6), Suicide Squad (2016) by Jared Leto (See fig 7) and the most recent Joker (2019) being played by Joaquin Phoenix (See fig 8).

The most recent Joker movie displays a completely different perspective in relation to other movies starring this character, as the viewer witnesses him before his mental state breaks down into nihilistic behaviour, and the audience can form a connection with Fleck, before he turns into a villain.

As Pennington (2019) describes, "The response to the film has been schizophrenic. Lavished with praise for braving to be the most political of superhero movies". Having the political aspect throughout this production allowed the creators to visually explore a society breaking down around Fleck. The movie has also "attracted criticism for its glib portrayal of mental illness and showing sympathy for the devil". (Pennington, 2019) In the Vulture article, written by Chris Lee, (2019) he further states that there is



Figure 8 – Joaquin Phoenix as Joker

“concern that the gritty drama will inspire people who perpetrate gun violence in America”.

Although this is only a movie, it does involve itself in a lot of political topics because of how the Joker became who he is, and with how much gun violence is in America, being “On average, there is around one mass shooting for each day in America”(Lopez, 2019) the concern towards the nature of this movie is understandable, and displays how world building can link to the actual world.

Mental health and perspective are prominent in this production as the audience is watching how Fleck devolves from a normal citizen with a few issues into a nihilistic killer. It is important to explore both topics simultaneously as the producers allowed the viewer to witness mental health through the character and perspective of Fleck. It is essential to explore these issues as deeply as this movie did, as it is important to understand both perspectives to mental health, one perspective being the observer and the other being the victim. As “Depending on the point of view you use, your character’s perspective will also shape how readers see and experience the story’s world “(Pereira, 2019). Warner Bros, the producers of the Joker movie did an excellent job in giving the spectator a powerful window to see this origin story of the Joker (2019). The audience can understand how the main character was driven to his psychosis, and this allows the viewer to connect further with this character.

With most superhero movies, the producers do not usually allow the audience to connect with the villains, whereas with this movie, the viewer connects on a much more personal level with Fleck because of how he is bullied and tormented by the public, a mother whom has lied to him his whole life, work colleagues who set him up for failure and a system which gave up on him. As such, as Pereira (2019) says “The best way to give your readers a window into the world of your story is to give them a character to care about”. Through all the torment the viewer witnesses, they get a powerful window to witness this world. The character becomes much more relatable when the audience can see the paranoia, anxiety and stress which he goes through since this is what a lot of

people go through daily, even if the viewer does not understand it fully. Unfortunately, Fleck becomes unhinged and this is what leads to his nihilistic behaviour.

It is important to dissect the elements in which creates the world the viewer witnesses. These elements include the production of atmosphere via cinematography and sound design, when discussing worldbuilding we must take every aspect into consideration, this includes visuals, audio and composition. The cinematography of the movie (Joker, 2019) is impactful on narrating the story, most scenes are dull and desaturated, except for Fleck, who works as a clown. Gotham City is a much more functional world when comparing the Joker 2019 movie to any of the Batman movies, as Pennington (2019) states “The destruction of professional clown and wannabe stand-up Fleck’s personality is rooted in the dysfunctional, dirty and decaying city – best known as the fictional home of Batman”. This allows us to focus all our attention on him as he’s the most visually interesting aspect of this movie, this draws the viewer’s attention to focus on him alone, this contributes to how deeply the viewer observes this character. The audio of this movie is interesting as it fluctuates between heavy bass, which is disorientating and soft music when Fleck is in a calmer situation. This juxtaposition allows us to understand what is happening within Fleck’s mind, as it can be perceived as a depiction of his mental activity.

Through my analysis of the Joker I have learned that even in a mundane setting, it is possible to create an impressive world. Through the eyes of Fleck, the audience watches how he suffers mentally as the city around him slowly cripple him further. This case study allowed me to analyse the different techniques used in this movie, such as composition and atmosphere. The use of juxtapositions is clear throughout the movie, along with the erratic sound design. This movie is designed to make the audience feel uncomfortable and pitiful towards the main character, and although the audience knows by history what type of character the Joker is, pity is still an emotion that’s present when watching this production. The Joker character has evolved a lot over time, with many different incarnations with different actors, but they all follow the same characterised rules. It

is clear when we see Joker that it is in fact, the Joker. This means that the character is well formed to the point that the audience can recognise him, even with an ever-changing face, this displays how well formed the Joker is as a character.

Primary research analysis



Figure 9 – example of Matous' work

As I was planning this independent inquiry, I decided it will be an opportunity to explore my own personal work but also work of others.

Within this section I will be exploring the responses of artists to a select few questions

about concept art and their process. See details

in Appendix pp. 21-24. Through analysis of the influences and working processes of concept artists, I have created a range of questions which will help me analyse the influence and working processes of concept artists, to allow me to answer my research question thoroughly, through opinions of professional working artists. The three questions in which I asked artists are:

1. What influences have you used to create your concept art?
2. What is your working process of creating concept art?
3. Can you give 3 keywords which represent concept art in your opinion?

I will be dividing this part of my text into three, as I discuss each question separately, including responses and quotes of each artist. The first question I will discuss is Q1, "What influences have you used to create your concept art?"

I have gathered responses from three artists, all in different stages of their careers. Tomas Matous (See fig 8) who is a freelance artist who creates concept art when commissioned. Marit Gorissen



Figure 9 – Example of Gorissen's work

(See fig 9), an art student, studying illustration and concept art and who has been an inspiring artist to watch, and finally, Tim Kaminski (See fig 10). Kaminski is a professional concept artist who has



Figure 10 – Example of Kaminski's work

worked for clients such as Ready at Dawn and Kiz Studios, video game studios producing a variety of video games.

All three artists responded similarly to Q1. Matous replied that his influences

came from an “Already established visual library” (Matous, 2019). But that he also draws on internet sources such as Instagram. Kaminski states that he was influenced and inspired by artists, such as “Franklin Booth and Bernie Wrightson” (2019), often looking at their “inking technique” (Kaminski, 2019). Even when working digitally, artists will take inspiration from a range of medias and forms of art. Gorissen was “inspired by indie games as well as traditional mediums” (2019) in their latest concept art project work. This generates an interesting idea on how to create visual art after looking at many different inspirations, even if not in the format the artist is working in. Even though artists have a visual library, Matous for example, he will still “look for quality art from people ... and look for inspiration there” (2019). This suggests that researching a wide range of artists is key for exploring different avenues of art, even if it isn't within your interest as an artist. However, this also relates to technique. Being inspired by traditional mediums as Gorissen was, for example “watercolour, inking, dot work” (2019) even when working digitally, artists are influenced by a wide range of works, as further explored by Kaminski who likes “to mix ancient culture's clothing and architecture into other ideas I'm working with to generate new concepts” (2019). This is an interesting statement as this is part of a working process for Kaminski. Generating new concepts with old structure and clothing is a fun way of exploring idea generation as the artist is using old and familiar objects to create new unfamiliar work to create a more believable and solid piece. Through exploring this question with

other artists, I am able to understand that generating ideas with new and old, and even unfamiliar art and objects is key to creating a unique piece of work.

Realising that artists take inspiration from many sources, ranging from video games, to other artists and even different mediums to the ones that they're using is very interesting. Exploring this question with a range of artists is very beneficial as it has given me a few sources to explore in the future for my own personal work. Learning that Kaminski researches different architectural and ancient clothing from different cultures is very interesting as it is like how conceptual artists require links to the familiar when creating new work. Being able to draw inspiration from cultural aspects is a great way to link unfamiliar concepts to the familiar world in which we live in.

The second question "What is your working process of creating concept art?" explores the topic of generating the artwork itself, from start to finish. This includes sketching and idea generation by the artist.

I will start by analysing a part of Gorissen's response. She starts by saying "I gather reference wherever possible." (2019). Gathering reference is important to concept artists, and this feeds a lot of the idea generation for all artists and visual creatives, this statement may also feed from the first question to the second. Referencing is "always the first or second thing I do" (Gorissen, 2019).

Although, Gorissen will on occasion start by roughing out sketches via thumbnails to generate ideas from her imagination; "I might just need to jot down the general concept" (2019). She goes on to say, "this is when I try not to focus on the visuals of the image but purely the concept." (Gorissen, 2019). I find this interesting as concept art is all about displaying an idea visually. Although being an artist it is important to have strong artistic ability but what is more prominent with concept artists is the ability to communicate an idea through artwork. So there are usually 3 steps which artists go through when creating new artwork, those are gathering relevant references, thumbnailing ideas and finally deciding on the most appropriate concept which communicates the idea.

Kaminski states, "Sometimes I'll start in 2d and use photoshop, or procreate to sketch or paint my concept" (2019). He explores many different techniques so that it can "help any art block I may get" (Kaminski, 2019). I think this is a good thing to keep in mind as being able to work in many different formats and ways. Matous also explores different methods considering budget of the commissioner; "Use of photobashing may be required due to tight budget" (2019). It is best to be able to accommodate for the commissioner's budget if working as a freelance artist so that the artist is not being underpaid for their work, and even though photobashing is not a form of drawing; instead setting photos on top of one another to gather information and inspiration to draw from, it is still a well-practiced within art commissions to kickstart an idea or composition. Matous also has a similar perspective to Kaminski in regard to multiple processes; "I think you should be able to change your process according to what suits the situation best" (Matous, 2019). Even though it's for different reasons with Matous and Kaminski, they both practice multiple ways of working to suit their needs when creating pieces of artwork. Gorissen explores many different visual interpretations before settling on the composition and design of their subject, and their aim is to "avoid sticking to one visual interpretation ... and rather answering 'what if?'" (2019) Answering questions with art is what is important for concept artists as the concept should be able to discuss with the audience.

Exploring different methods which artists use to create is very inspiring as every artist works differently. Considering that two of these artists are professionals, it is also inspiring to realise that I work similarly to them. Practicing what other artists do can help improve my own work as exploring different techniques can enhance work quality and understanding of the tools at hand.

The final question I asked was "Can you give 3 keywords which represent concept art in your opinion?" this question was asked so that I could get a better understanding of the artists' view on concept art without needing too many words. This allowed me to even dissect their work further as it allowed for a more personal connection to be made, being able to understand what they think

concept art has allowed me to understand their work further. I also included an optional section to explain why they chose their answer.

I will start by analysing Matous' response to this question. The three words or terms which Matous picked are "Idea generation, visual communication, creating reference" (2019) Matous continued to explain why these terms represent concept art to himself. He explains "sometimes you have to be used as a generator of objects" (2019). As a concept artist you must be able to generate new and unique ideas which fit within either an already built world or one which is in creation, and within a team, the concept artist must be the one to create those unique visual ideas to make a new and immersive world, whether it be for a movie, video game or book. Visual communication is explained by Matous as being able to solve an issue of "people have abstract ideas which they may be able to put into words, but on paper it falls apart ... using the prompts from higher ups or clients and making it cohesively designed." (2019). Visual communication is the essence of concept art. Concept artists are there to communicate ideas visually with people who may not be artistically inclined.

Successfully doing this displays a good understanding of the audience and the world they are trying to create. Working alongside the client allows you to understand the world they are trying to create and for what audience, keeping those two things in mind, creating characters or environments to suit this purpose is essential. That's what concept artists are tasked with. Concept art is more than just art, it is visual language.

Gorissen lists the three words "Concise, exploratory, purpose" (2019). I found these words quite interesting, concise being one which is most interesting. Gorissen explains "leaving out unnecessary detail and information while still conveying the message" (2019). After reading this explanation, it is easy to understand why now this is a word which is linked with concept art. Being able to create a design which is not cluttered but displays its idea and purpose is important as the concept artist does not want to overload the audience with information. Kaminski's selection of words are "Problem solving, idea generation, artist" (2019). Although Kaminski did not give too much

information, it is clear to see a similar mindset between all three of these artists. All three artist's words relate heavily to the process or techniques when creating artwork, usually referring to the generation of ideas. Concept art is all about exploring an abstract idea and creating an immersive and effective system around that idea. As concept art is more about an idea than the execution, the thought behind the piece must be visible within the art. As Kaminski explains briefly; "Concept artists have to solve visual gameplay issues, visual design problems and also present a beautiful world" (2019). Problem solving is a topic which all three artists in this study mention with their keywords. As the designers, concept artists must turn ideas which usually come from not-so creative people, into beautiful concepts which are appealing to the audience but also retaining the original purpose. This means the artist must be very imaginative and unique in their approach.

Creating concept art requires much more than sticking to the native societal bounds; exploring cultures which are not native can expand the artist's independent knowledge which opens the imagination to far more interesting and unique concepts. Studying ancient cultural clothing, architecture or art techniques as Kaminski mentioned, can heavily influence an artist, even if it doesn't relate completely to the subject which the artist is creating. Idea generation is an integral part of being a concept artist so research and inspiration should have no bounds. Whilst sticking to the initial idea, a concept artist could produce many designs which could fit a brief or prompt given. Being a generator of ideas is what concept artists are hired for. Being able to explore an idea and generate unique and cohesive concepts which the audience understands is what is required from a concept artist. Furthermore, having the ability to identify and filter out the unnecessary details to focus on what is most important is a fundamental skill for concept artists.

As my independent inquiry had to be done within an arranged time; I was not able to gather a larger group of responses. I reached out to 20 artists in total and received these 3 responses. This primary analysis is just the beginning of a much wider study which has yet to be explored, which would

include many more responses from a wide range of artists. With more responses and analysis, there would be a more apparent pattern or a clearer mindset shared within artists.

Conclusion

My independent inquiry has designed around the question “how do concept artists create imagined worlds?”. Through this inquiry I focused on researching worldbuilding and what makes worldbuilding effective, for example researching the tools in which concept artists use to create effective and immersive worlds. The tools which I studied in depth were mythologies and metaphors. It was also important for me to investigate ecological aspects behind worldbuilding which allow the artist to create a familiar world in which the audience can be immersed and the blending between the familiar and the fantastical to create a world which the audience understands. With this knowledge I did a case study about the Joker (2019) movie. I also gathered primary research by questioning artists and concept artists about their practices and what they believe concept art means. I used the perspectives of three different artists, one being a student, another being a freelance artist and the last being a professional concept artist. Through analysing their answers. I could get a further understanding of concept art through the opinions of those which are experienced within the profession.

After researching all of these aspects, I have a greater understanding and depth of knowledge for worldbuilding and concept art. Dissecting the ways in which concept artists communicate was the main focus of my independent inquiry as that is the key to producing concept art. Concept art is about sharing an idea or message with the audience successfully. The focus of concept art is the concept, which is designing an idea visually. I have also realised the importance of creating a concept which has aspects of the familiar. This allows the audience to understand the familiar but be intrigued by the fantastical. I have a better understanding of what concept art means, as it is more than just creating one thing, it is a multi-layered idea which revolves usually around one focus point. Using concepts as building blocks, we can begin to understand the multi-layered exploration of

concept art and worldbuilding. Returning to the ecological systems to understand how one aspect affects all the others. The artist will have to consider the impact of an event created within the world and how this would affect the main character; how this may change their thoughts, attitude or appearance. The main character is dynamic within a world; meaning it does not stay the same. Concept artists create characters to explore their created ecological systems through a perspective of a single being, and the audience witnesses the effect of this.

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Appendix

Tomas Matous

So usually that depends on what concept art that is. If it's anywhere near the work that I usually do (castles, medieval high fantasy or similar) then I like to go off my already established visual library first. When not, I tend to look for quality art from people for which it is their main niche and look for inspiration there. But even with the first approach i mentioned, after making the first step and after I have a sketch to work with, I look for references anyways, just to make sure I am constantly pushing myself further, even in professional work. I use Pinterest most often to look for influences or references for the subject that I may currently need. Specific clients require a different approach. Process sometimes also needs to be constructed around budget limitations. Meaning sometimes I have to skip certain parts of progress just so that there's enough time to create a product that the client asked for. Maybe there isn't enough time for thumbnail idea generation or iterations. Maybe use of photobashing may be required due to tight budget, or the style that the client asked for. As a freelancer, I think you should be able to change your process according to what suits the situation best. Ideal process would look somewhat like this : Thumbnails for figuring out composition (if client agrees then)> sketch out idea (if client agrees then)>block in colors on throw on some photos>send the client to check>finalize.

More realistic process may look something like this thought. ask the client as many questions as you can > sketch out his idea>agrees >use whatever way to fit into the budget and come up with fairly finished product>send it out or you may end already with the sketch phase, because often times a sketch already communicates a concept well enough. Three terms to represent concept art would be Idea generation, visual communication, creating reference. Idea generation is fairly obvious I would think, sometimes you have to be used as a generator of objects, characters, stories or places that would fit into a certain universe. You should be person with the best ability to do that in the team, as a concept artist. Visual communication. Sometimes people have abstract ideas which they may be

able to put into words, but on paper it falls apart. Concept art is here to solve that issue for them.

Using the prompt from higher ups or clients and making it cohesively designed and bending it around design and color theories is another of our tasks.

Creating reference, because we are fast, efficient and have amazing visual libraries, other team members may and often do lack those qualities, therefore a concept art of a character may be required before the 3D artist models it out. We also use references for creation of our pieces, but the sort of reference we use to create concept art would be too abstract for someone like 3D artist.

Marit Gorissen

What influences have you used to create your concept art?

I get influenced by a ton of places, most notably Artstation (of course), but for my most recent project I was inspired by indie games as well as traditional mediums to create my concept art. This included things like watercolour, inking, dot work as well as contemporary games. I did not have a specific artist in mind when I worked on this project.

What is your working process of creating concept art?

I gather reference wherever possible. This is always the first or second thing I do. If it's not the first thing I do, I might just need to jot down the general concept on a piece of paper first. This is when I try not to focus on the visuals of the image but purely the concept (i.e. a ghost with a vacuum cleaner). I will then start to generate as many variations as possible, trying to avoid sticking to one visual interpretation of a ghost (or whatever I was creating) and rather answering 'what if?'. The point here is to create as many answers to the questions that pop in my head. Usually I'll need to go through a bunch of these until my brain is warmed up at which point the weirdest (and the best)

ideas happen. At this stage I will start to then pick a few concepts I enjoy that I can push further. Depending on the purpose of the concept art piece I will explore different aspects of the image. For example, I might work on shapes and silhouette, then move into colour and composition. The decisions I make are usually based on a few arguments I create for myself that I can use to explain why a certain variant might work and another might not. I usually also ask feedback at this stage. Then comes the challenge of tying everything together in a style sheet or a 'finished' piece that I can show and get direct feedback on. Here's when I look at my decision making and keep my studies at hand to help me with the 'final' piece. I try to remember the purpose of the piece.

Can you give 3 keywords which represent concept art in your opinion?

Concise, exploratory, (with) purpose

Concise – leaving out unnecessary detail and information while still conveying the message. For me this is one of the main parts of concept art: instead of focusing on creating beautiful illustrations, conveying a theme or an art style.

Exploratory – exploring different solutions in a visual way, trying to tackle different aspects one at a time. For example exploring light, value, contrast, composition, shapes or silhouette and figuring out how these different decisions yield varying results and impact the overall feel of the image or piece.

(with) purpose – serving a goal or purpose. For me, concept art is all about finding the right solution for a specific application. No solution is wrong: it's just unsuited for that specific purpose. When creating concept art, you must always keep your restraints and requirements in mind because these will lead you to the purpose and goal of your concept art. They will allow you to generate questions about your situation that will help you to make the right decisions.

Tim Kaminski

What influences have you used to create your concept art?

Franklin Booth and Bernie Wrightson have been some influences lately, their inking technique really intrigues and inspires me. Also, I like to mix ancient culture's clothing and architecture into other ideas I'm working with to generate new concepts.

What is your working process of creating concept art?

I have a number of processes I use to start. Sometimes I'll start in 2d and use Photoshop, or Procreate to sketch or paint my concept, other times I'll start with 3d and model out basic forms in Blender, or use zbrush to do digital sculpts or a combination of all if them or just a few. Having so many starting points seems to help any art block I might get.

Can you give 3 keywords which represent concept art in your opinion?

Problem solving, idea generation, artist

If you would like, you can expand on the reasons why you chose those 3 keywords.

Concept artists have to solve visual gameplay issues, visual design problems and also present a beautiful world.