Going North Book Illustrations

Caitlin Armstrong

The main concept behind my body of work has been based on an original fantasy story that I am currently writing and aim to develop into a printed Graphic Novel. The developing story, Going North, follows the journey of Tarrent as he tries to get home to warn his family of imminent danger and along the way has several misfortunes and adventures. The influences for the story stems from my love of reading fantasy novels. Several characters and creatures throughout the story —such as the Wyverns, Satyrs, Dryads and Merfolk— are inspired by mythological creatures across several cultures and histories, especially Greek and Celtic myth. These influences, paired with similar inspirations from existing artists' works assisted me in creating Going North storyline and graphic illustrations.

The artists that influenced my final artworks were Simon Stalenhag, Felicie Haymoz, Beatrix Potter, Marishka Kleyman, Tony DiTerlizzi and several graphic novel content creators. All of which carry a similar theme of fantasy and semi-realism in varying degrees. Whilst Stalenhag, Haymoz and Kleyman's works influenced my art style throughout my final artworks, Potter and Diterlizzi's humanoid creatures heavily influenced what I was creating. I believe these influences are evident within my body of work, particularly in character design, environmental design and in the shading techniques that allowed me to add form and shape to my final practicals.

The storyline of Going North centres around Tarrent's (the Main Character) loyalty to his family. However, the intended message behind the story stems from my love of creating and my loyalty towards my own friends and family. Going North is a recent, unfinished creation in a long line of stories that coincide with one another. The decision to adapt it into a graphic novel has proved to be a new and interesting challenge to me. The focus of this practical was to create concept art that I could then use to develop for my graphic novel and be comfortable in my personal art style.

As a starting point, I outlined/scaffolded the main plots points of the story, which I then branched out into smaller story arcs that provide character development and direction to the story. From having a physical version of these plot points, I was then able to determine and highlight which would be the most defining scenes to illustrate and tell the story in five Final practical pieces.

The Finals —both individually and as a body of work— have been successful, however there is room for improvement. These artworks are the first time I have worked entirely digitally. I had never experimented with creating environments or backgrounds digitally. Fortunately, through extensive research, I was able to mimic a real environment with my digital art style within a way that provided depth, encouraged dynamic composition, and promoted an interesting scene to then place characters into.

The backgrounds were immensely successful through the characteristics, I would like to improve the lack of natural undergrowth in the forest scenes (Practicals 1, 3 & 5), the rigidness/lack of life in the town scene (Practical 4) and the boxy sharp lines of the cliffs (Practical 3).

I lacked experience in digitally creating backgrounds but the same cannot be said for characters and humans. I had previously been using the Procreate app/ program to design basic visual representations of characters within my original stories. Whilst developing my work I researched tips and techniques to improve my use of anatomy, foreshortening, clothing details and where shadows fell in relation to light sources.

My most successful character work in my practicals would be in final 1, 2 and 4, as the shading techniques I used created a 3D affect that added shape and form, also made them fit into in their background environment. The final two artworks lacked form, and at that time I was struggling with the technique I was using to shade their hair. Final 5 fell flat as the shading isn't dark enough, even though it matches the lighting. Fortunately, I believe the problems in my final's 2 and 5 could be easily rectified with time, research, and further experience.

I believe that my best artwork is illustrated in practical 3. This is due to a larger canvas, and as a centre piece, I put extra effort and detail into completing it. To ensure I avoided the shortcomings of finals 2 and 5, I put extra care into the ratio of shadows to highlights, and how the glow of the Wyverns affected the surroundings, and the resulting shadows of their glow, as well as the highlights in the hair. I believe final 3 to be the best representation of my development, as the style of my art doesn't change, but the dynamics of poses (drawing inspiration from poses used by Marishka Kleyman), use of composition (inspired by the works of Stalenhag and Potter), and overall skill improved over the course of the assessment.

The intent of this body of work, was to create and showcase an original idea that is quite close to my heart. I've spent countless hours shaping the worldscape and characters that reside within. Going North, is one of many work-in-progress stories that I have developed in my spare time. I took the opportunity to use this this personal project as a way of continuing to develop this worldscape and its stories with a new, academic approach.

I believe that my body of work has met my intentions of digitally designing a series of visual illustrations and concept art to accompany my progressing fantasy novel. The final art pieces demonstrate the development of my skills and knowledge, and effectively illustrate a fraction of the story line in five small scenes. Through experimenting with different mediums, styles, and techniques, I was able to further define and develop my personal art style. These newfound, refined, and improved skills were applied to my work, and I will continue to further develop these skills as I continue to build on the foundations of Going North, the graphic novel.