10-Week Character Concept Art Syllabus

Course Title

Designing Epic Legends – Video Game Character Illustration

Course Description

This 10-week course introduces students to the foundations and workflows of professional character concept art for games and film. Students will develop skills in anatomy, silhouette design, costume exploration, visual storytelling, rendering, and presentation while building a polished character portfolio piece.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students will:

- Design original characters with strong visual storytelling
- Apply anatomy and proportion principles to stylized and realistic figures
- Create readable silhouettes and shape language
- Develop costume, prop, and worldbuilding ideas
- Produce polished concept sheets
- Present professional-quality character art

Weekly Breakdown

Week 1 — Introduction to Character Design Fundamentals

Topics

- What is Design? What is concept art?
- Roles in games, animation, and film pipelines
- Shape language and silhouette readability
- Emotional Impact
- Understanding archetypes

First steps when receiving a brief

- Active reading and listening
- Gathering reference and anticipating roadblocks
- Asking the right questions to develop the world
- Writing down initial impressions

Homework

Create:

Three Reference boards based on an existing world or IP and new characters that could exist within the framework of those worlds. Then write down some brief thoughts on the emotional impact and roles these characters should fulfill.

- World building board
- Inspiration board
- Practical application board

Week 2 — Anatomy, Gesture, and Proportions for Character Artists

Topics

- Gesture drawing fundamentals
- Human anatomy basics
- Stylization vs realism
- Proportions
- Strong silhouettes
- Breaking down reference

Homework

Create:

- 10 black and white silhouette sketches
- 3-4 different body types
- Silhouettes should hint at story telling or world building elements

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Week 3 — Sketch workflow and idea Developement

Topics

- Develop silhouettes into workable sketches
- Understanding the production pipeline
- Adding details
- Fashion, history, and cultural reference
- Material indication
- Storytelling through clothing and accessories

Homework

Pick 3 thumbnails and design 2 sketch variations for each character thumbnail.

Should be rough quick sketches, but still readable and easy to understand. Basic structures and geometry should make sense.

Week 4 — Rough Idea to Polished Design

Topics

- Understanding the needs of production
- The transition of rough idea to polished image
- Different methods of cleanup and final image
- Why value is important

- Why rendering is important
- Time saving and efficiency

Homework

Create:

> Pick 2 sketches and take them through a clean up and development phase adding value break ups and call outs.

Week 5 — Color and Rendering Basics

Topics

- Color theory for character design
- Value hierarchy
- Lighting fundamentals
- Rendering skin, fabric, metal, and leather
- How light interacts with shapes and materials

Homework

Produce 3 color variations for your character

Deliverable

Rendered bust illustration

Week 6 — Rendering continued

Topics

- Advanced techniques:
    - Photobashing
    - Layer adjustments
    - Layer masks
    - Incorporating other tools

Homework

Continue to paint and render designs using photobashing and other techniques to push the quality of your image. Use your reference boards as a resource to start finding solutions to rendering your image.

Week 7 — Props, Weapons, and Call out Designs

Topics

- Additional props and call outs
- Shape consistency
- Creating a pitch package
- Companion creatures and sidekicks additional world building considerations

Homework

Design:

- 1 signature prop or weapon
- 1 companion or accessory set
- 3 alternate looks or options for call out of face or limbs

Week 8 — Creating Key Art

Topics

- Generate key art using characters
- Consistency in proportions
- Sell backstory and world with image
- Plan out images

Homework

Create 3 rough black and white paintings to pitch as key frames

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Week 9 — Key Frame continued

Topics

- Considerations for choosing final direction
- Strategies to complete illustration
- Painting and completion

Homework

Complete Key frame painting and finish character package.

Week 10 — Final Presentation and Critique

Topics

- Presentation skills
- Art direction feedback
- Portfolio readiness
- Career pathways in concept art

In-Class Activities

- Final critique session
- Peer review
- Discussion on industry expectations