



MASTERS OF  
*Sketching*

Abigail Larson & Christina Mrozik

# Abigail Larson



Freelance illustrator  
[abigaillarson.com](http://abigaillarson.com)



# Story Time with The Goblins

I am a big fan of lush, Victorian interiors, and have therefore chosen this for the setting for my project here, which will portray a young woman reading to some goblins. I will explain my steps and choices as I go through the process, building up the scene from scratch.

## TOOLS

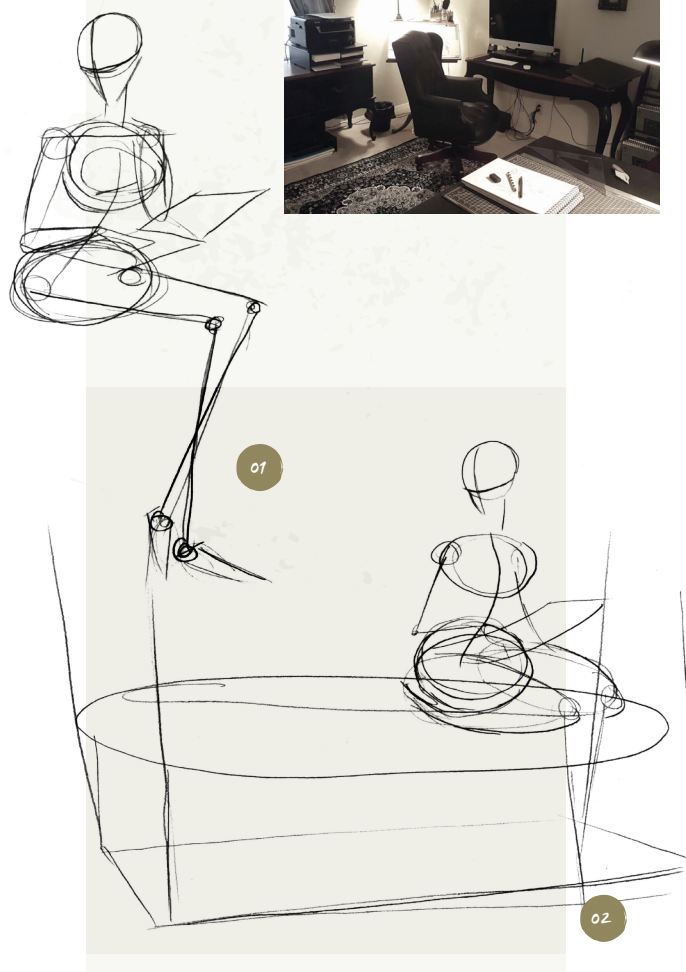
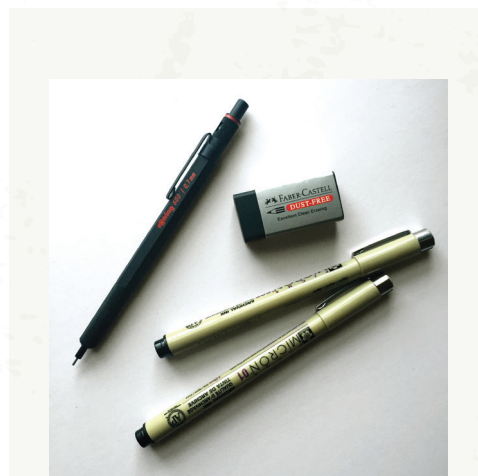
I use Rotring mechanical pencils and Faber-Castell erasers. I sketch on Canson drawing paper, and paint on Arches hot-press watercolor paper. The rest is done in Adobe Photoshop! In terms of my studio, my illustrations tend to convey a certain feeling of dark serenity, and I try to bring some of that into my surroundings by finding furniture that looks elegant but is still functional, and decorations that inspire me but are not too distracting.

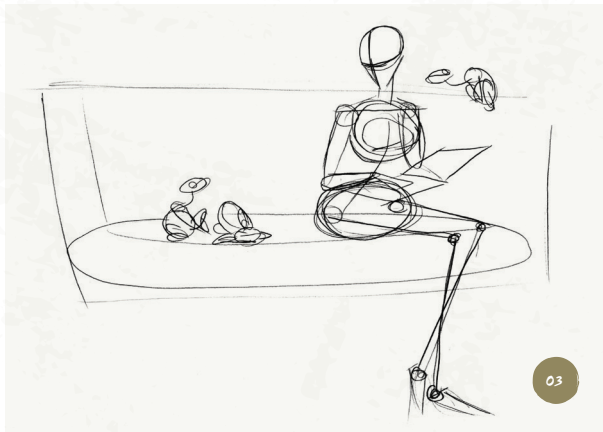
## 01: THE FIGURE'S POSE

I can visualize what I want this scene to look like, but I need to start with a single point of reference. Often when sketching a scene I produce several rough thumbnails to work out the composition, but in this case I will just go where it takes me. I start with the main subject; I use basic shapes for the head, chest, and hips, and use lines to lightly draw in her pose. These guides will act as the foundation for her figure. The guides on the face, shoulders, and hips are important in this first stage because I will need to know in which direction the character is looking and how she is turned.

## 02: GROUNDING THE FIGURE

Now that I have sketched the pose, I erase some of the lines and add new shapes. I keep everything very light and loose because it makes for easier erasing later on. I already know the character will be seated on a fancy sofa, but instead of going straight to the details I first use rectangles, ovals, and lines to guide where the shapes for the carved backpiece will go and how high I want the legs. I use a rectangle underneath the sofa to show me where the feet of the sofa will touch the ground.





### 03: EXTRA SUBJECTS

The girl will be interacting with the goblins, reading them a story, so before working out more details I place the goblins in the scene so that they are the focus of her attention and gaze. I also erase a lot of the previous lines so that I can prepare for the next step, which is to define the shapes – especially the carved legs of the sofa – and also further refine the female character.

### 04: ADDING DEFINITION

Staying loose and light with my lines, I add more definition to the sofa and the girl. Since I want the sofa to be ornate and carved, I use lots of curved lines to map out where I need to draw the details in. It is important to get the “skeleton” of the drawing correct early on to avoid having to redraw



complicated details again if the placement is off. Building furniture in a setting is mostly a matter of geometry and perspective. It does not have to be perfect, especially with whimsical and fantasy settings, and it is okay to exaggerate things to your taste. The key is to make it believable, which you can achieve by obeying at least a few of the laws of physics!

### 05: DEFINING THE SUBJECT

Carrying on from step 04, I continue to add definition to the subject. Most of these elements will change several times throughout my sketching process; this method of development helps me become comfortable with the shapes and find the best look. I also start to add definition to her dress and body – I want to work out how the fabric falls.

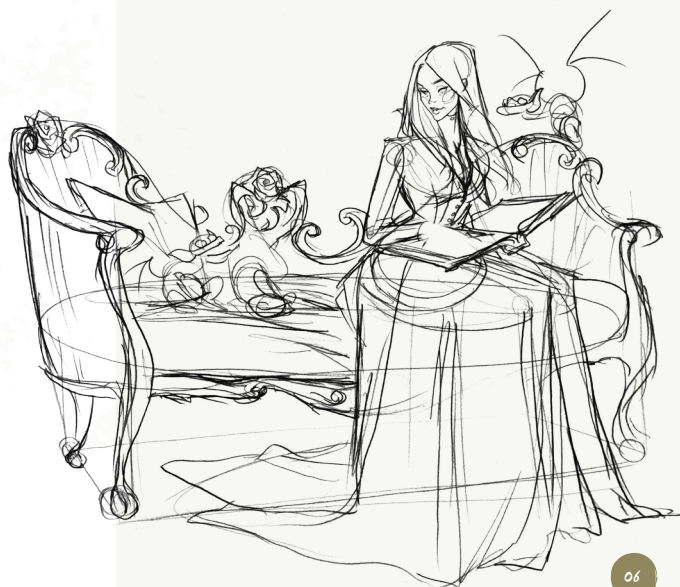


## 06: ADDING DETAILS

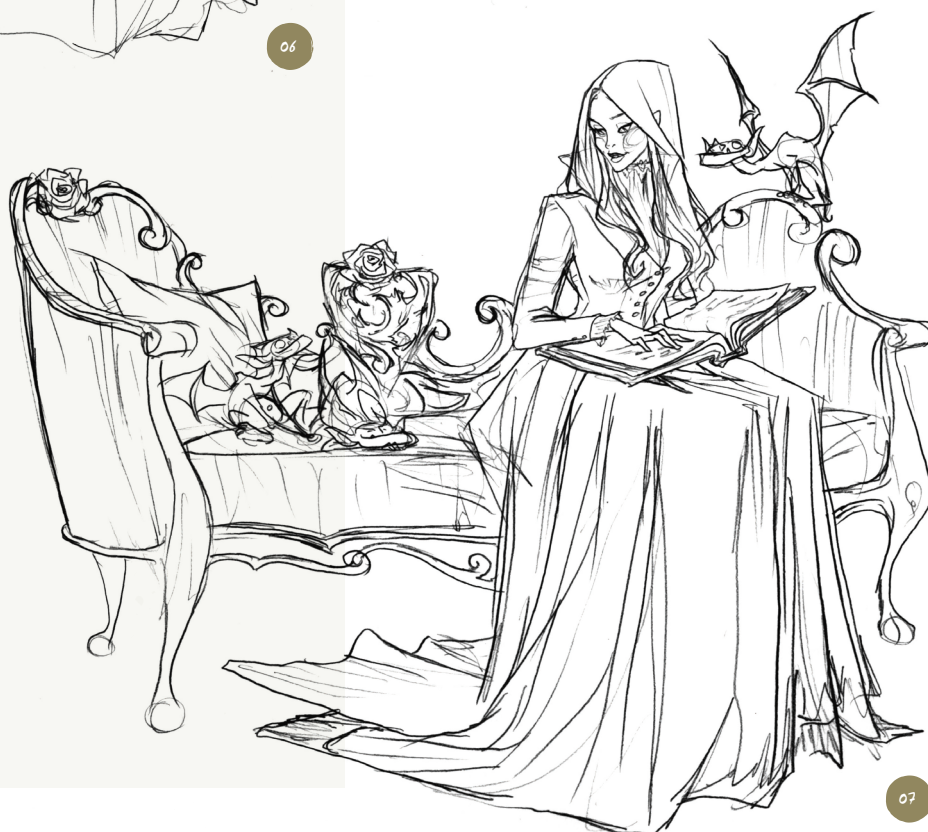
This is where the character starts to come to life, but it takes several attempts to get it right. At this point I erase a lot of the guidelines so I have a clean surface on which I can draw her facial features, as well as put in place the carved details of the sofa. I add in the placement of the goblins' wings and try to figure out the scrollwork on the sofa. I further refine the girl's arms and torso, in addition to lightly drawing in her hair and face, although I will likely erase these and go over them again later.

## 07: FINDING THE RIGHT LINES

This is the tricky part of the sketch – finding which lines to keep and which to erase. I remove all of the skeletal guidelines which gives me a clear look at her figure and the shape of the sofa to make sure everything appears how I want it to. I tend to be quite messy with my lines and often go a bit overboard agonizing over the correct placement, but this time I am quite happy with the way everything is coming together.



"I TEND TO BE QUITE MESSY WITH MY LINES AND OFTEN GO A BIT OVERBOARD AGONIZING OVER THE CORRECT PLACEMENT"





### 08: BACKGROUND ELEMENTS

Now I can start to add in the background; I do this very lightly as I may want to slightly adjust these elements at some point. The important part is to add them in a way that looks plausible for the perspective of the sofa but that also looks elegant and complements the subject.

Quite a bit of this step depends on the size of the paper, and where I place the subject. I like to start small for my full illustrations so that I can clearly see where everything is placed – similar to zooming out on a computer. If you focus too much on one area early on, you might end up running off the page.

### 09: SMALL ADJUSTMENTS

There is not a whole lot of difference between images 08 and 09, just a few minor adjustments. I mostly clean up certain areas, redraw a few elements, and add extra details. I can use this time to tweak the facial features, the hair, and decide what her dress will look like. It takes a few tries to get the bodice and cuffs how I want them, and I also need to work on her skirt a bit more.

### 10: REDRAWING

I like to stop at this point and step away from my sketch. It is important to give yourself a break and







focus on something else so that you can come back with fresh eyes to spot any mistakes you might otherwise miss. I want to completely rework what I have so far, so I erase just about everything, then carefully go back over where my lines were and redraw each element exactly how I want it this time, free from excess lines.

### 11: FINAL TOUCHES ON THE SUBJECT

I go a lot slower in this step and am careful to get the small details just how I want them. Wrinkles in the sofa cushion, folds in the dress, the little goblins and their poses, the pillow, the carving on the sofa frame – all these elements are honed to a good stopping point so that I can move on to the rest of the illustration.

### 12: STARTING THE BACKGROUND

Now I can look at the rest of the blank paper and see where I want to go with the background. There are already some guide marks for a big window and where the floor meets the walls, but I want to draw it with a little more accuracy. First I erase the previous background lines, and sketch in the straight, solid areas such as the window and floor.

### > Pro tip < Breaking the rules

As artists we are notorious rule-breakers – but do not forget that in order to break a rule, you first have to learn it! Do not underestimate the importance of rigorous practice in your subject; it will help you down the road and save you from becoming frustrated with a drawing that does not look quite right. If you have trouble drawing hands, take time to sketch at least ten hands in various positions every day and soon you will be able to draw them faster and with more accuracy.



### 13: DEFINING THE BACKGROUND

When I draw floors I use a ruler to make a grid. This not only comes in handy for patterned areas, but also acts as a guide for other geometric shapes (such as furniture) and where to place them later on. For this sketch, I want the floor to be floorboards, so in place of a grid I just mark the lines for the wooden planks. I also use this step as an opportunity to define the windows and baseboard.

### 14: DETAILS IN THE BACKGROUND

Now I can have a little more fun decorating the room. As the scene is set in a Victorian manor, I want to add some dramatic window treatments. I design gathered valances and swooping drawn curtains with sheer panels underneath. To me, dressing a window is as essential as dressing a character – especially if it is a feminine room. The sweeping curves of the curtains help to take away the harshness of the straight geometric shapes that built the room. They also add interest to the room, and because they are so versatile there is a lot of room to customize them to my taste. The same goes for styles of furniture and objects that decorate the space. As long as they are properly grounded and do not overpower the composition, they can add a lot of narrative to the illustration.

### 15: FINAL DETAILS

Continuing with the curtains, I add swags to the sides and erase the lines of the panes that do not show under the sheer panels. This takes a little bit of extra time as I adjust their size and the drape. I have to think carefully about where the tension points are in the drapery, which dictates how the fabric falls. I also draw in the folds of the fabric, and add in some more details such as a candelabrum, a side table, and some extra books on the floor. The idea is to keep the viewer's eye moving around the illustration, but not to distract them completely from the subject.







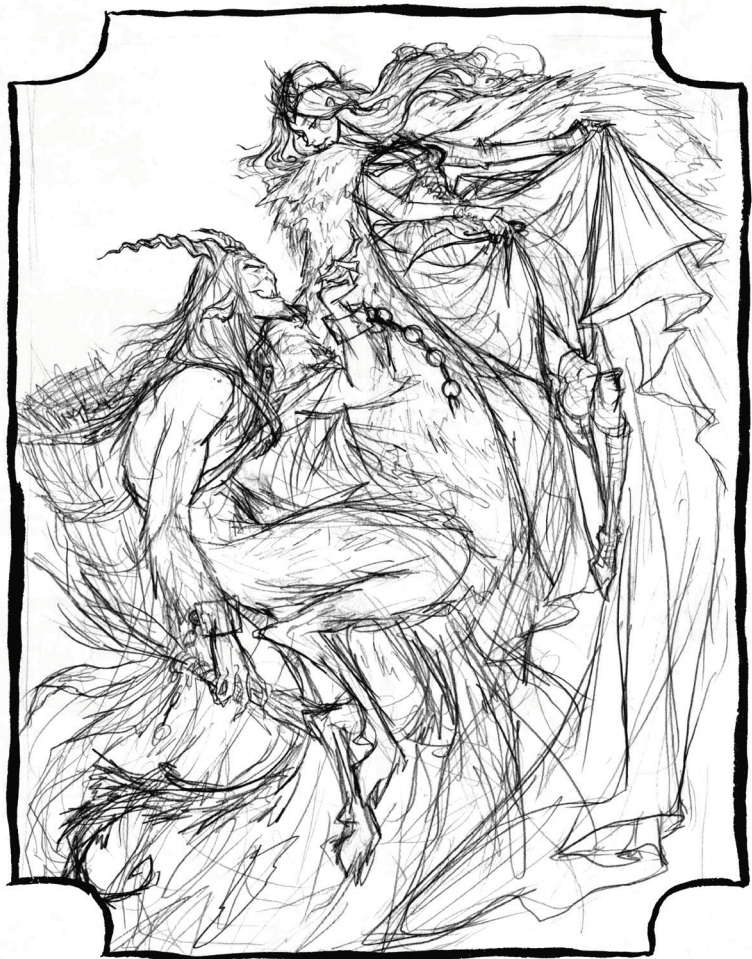


# Showcase Gallery

ABIGAIL LARSON

Abigail Larson is a freelance illustrator based in Richmond, Virginia. She specializes in mostly macabre and gothic subjects, and is heavily inspired by the literary works of Edgar Allan Poe, H. P. Lovecraft, and Mary Shelley, as well as the artwork of artists such as Arthur Rackham, Edward Gorey, Don Bluth, and Maurice Sendak. She has always been an avid reader and artist.

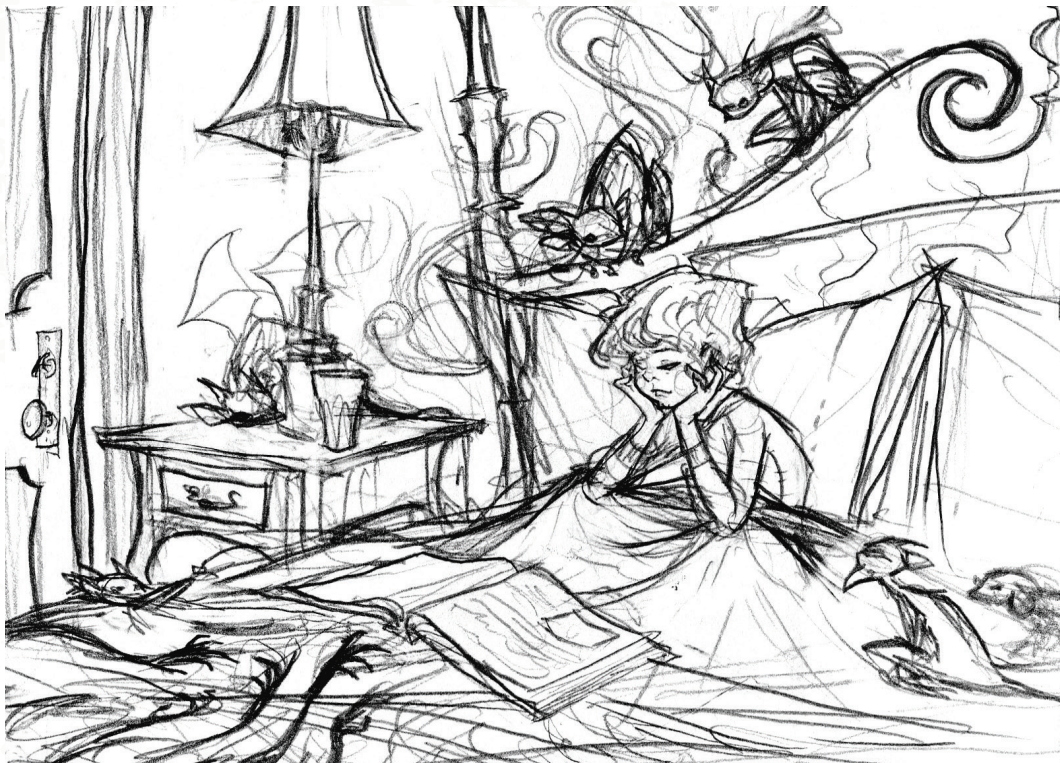
Abigail was accepted into Virginia Commonwealth University's Illustration department after high school. She was trained classically in anatomy, perspective, color theory, typography, graphic design, and oil painting, and learned all the rules in illustration and design so that she could break them all once she graduated! After graduating, she had her first solo exhibition at the Edgar Allan Poe Museum in Richmond, and after that continued to develop her style and brand. Her work has been featured in galleries throughout the US and Europe, and she has been published in numerous anthologies, magazines, and other media. She has created illustrations for children's books, young-adult novels, advertisements, stage design, comics, and videogames. Sketching is a huge part of her process, and it is the step that takes the longest. It is also the most relaxing part because the drawings can be as loose and messy as she needs them to be before moving on to the more meticulous step of inking.

















# Christina Mrozik



Artist  
Illustrator  
[christinamrozik.com](http://christinamrozik.com)



# Swan in pencil

The goal of sketching is to encourage spontaneity and play. I do not usually sketch with a particular purpose in mind but rather use it as an exercise to help loosen my hands and my thoughts.

## TOOLS

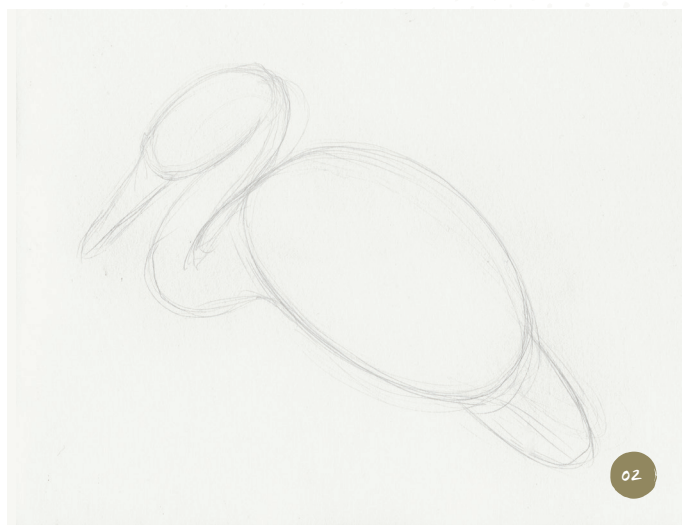
For any sketch, it is important to use paper and pencils you feel comfortable with. I personally prefer a thicker, smoother paper such as Legion's Stonehenge or Folio Bright White papers; I think I make better sketches if they are produced on better paper. I prefer to use mechanical pencils with 0.5 mm leads – I keep 2H, HB, and 2B pencils at my desk.

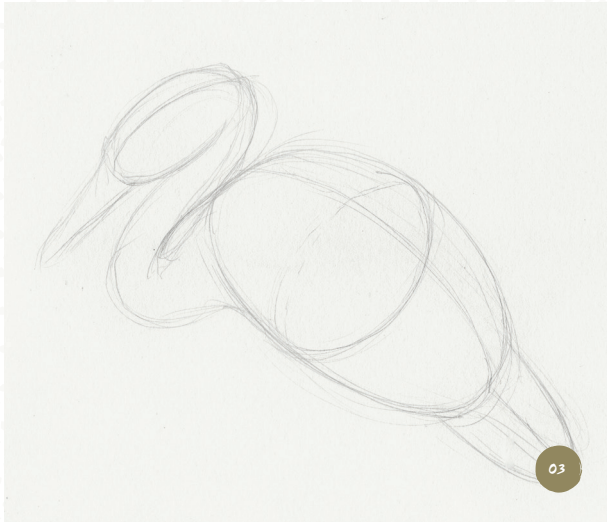
## 01: SIMPLE SHAPES

I start with a couple of simple shapes, usually just loose circles of varying size. I draw these very lightly so that later I can cover them with more refined lines and shading. I start with a 2H pencil because it allows me to map out the piece while maintaining a lightness that can easily be covered with a darker tone.

## 02: A BIRD

Once my shapes are on the paper, I think about what they look like and how they could fit together. To me, in this moment, these two circles remind me of a long-necked bird. To help portray this idea I add a few shapes: a triangle at the front to signify a beak, a long U shape to show a neck, and a rounded square at the bottom where the tail feathers will go.





### 03: PERSPECTIVE

The next thing to consider is perspective – where is the top of the head? To help define this, I draw some circular lines to give definition to the roundness of the form. I estimate that the top of the body will be about a third of the way down the form, so I add an arched line from the top of the shoulders down to the tail. About halfway down the body I draw a perpendicular circle, which helps add depth to the body while also providing a guide for where to add the wings later. From here I will be able to map in the shapes of the feathers and find the right location for the eyes.

### 04: DETAILS

Having drawn hundreds of birds, I have an idea of how the feathers are laid, but even now I sometimes find it helpful to look up photographic references. When looking at references I try not to copy the image exactly, but rather evaluate it and look for patterns, shapes, and textures that I can carry over into my piece. I do this because if I can learn the pattern of a particular form rather than an exact duplication of it, I can more easily bend and tweak it to fit into whatever I am drawing, giving me more room to experiment with form.



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05

When drawing a wing, the top feathers on the shoulder are smaller scallop shapes; about halfway down, the middle part of the wing transitions into two tiers of larger long and skinny rectangles. The tail has one pronounced rectangle in the center, and smaller ones to each side, creating the appearance that they are layering behind that central feather.

### 05: CREATIVE PLAY

The sketch feels a bit stiff so I will go back in with some wild lines and lots of movement to try to bring some life back into it. Because sketching is a place for creative play, I tend to let the process become a bit messy. Sometimes stray lines can lead to wonderful accidents – new ideas come to light and add to the narrative of the sketch. Let your brain and hands go a little crazy and add some lines that do not make sense or elements that do not belong; from there you can brainstorm ways to make them fit. This is not a final rendered piece; it is simply a platform for developing ideas.

### > Pro tip < Creativity

If you are struggling to figure out what you would like the shapes to be, or how to come up with creative ideas that feel like your own, I have a recommendation. When I was first discovering how to create my style, I produced two simple lists: “What I like” and “What I dislike.” On the Like list, I wrote down everything I enjoyed about art – what I enjoyed drawing, my favorite subject matter, where I preferred to work, the mediums I was drawn to, and so on. On the Dislike list, I wrote down all the things I felt drained my creativity or put me in a bad mood.



### 06: DESIGN CHOICES

Now I refine the new lines. I ask myself questions to help me make better design choices: What do those new shapes look like and how will I define them? I have what looks like an additional wing on the right, so I add the same scalloped feather pattern from step 04. On the left, the round shape looks like a second head, so I add a beak and turn it into another face. In the bottom area it looks as if flowers are blooming out of the bird, so I will transform these into peonies.

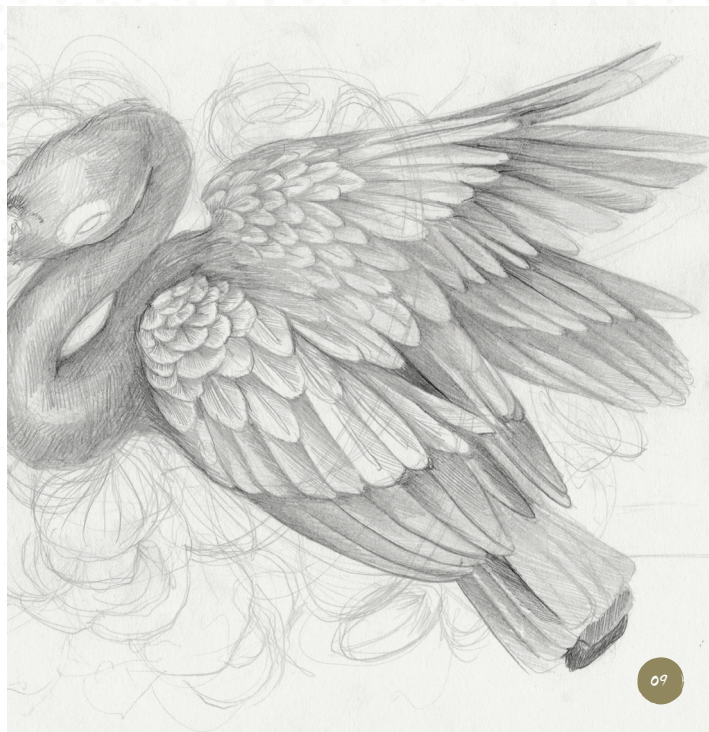
Now that the full idea is on paper, it is time to carry out a check. I find rotating the drawing or looking at it in a mirror useful because I can find the best angle to view it from and see if there are any places to add or subtract information. It is a great tool for seeing the overall form. This sketch looks balanced as it is so I can move on to shading in the next step.

### 07: SHADING

As I am sketching and not making a fully rendered graphite drawing, I leave those loose extra lines and do not worry about making everything perfect. I begin shading with the 2H pencil by blocking in the areas I eventually want to read as dark. This bird looks like some sort of swan, or goose, so I shade in the neck and







feather tips. This will eventually create the look of a large block of pattern on the feathers. There are a lot of lines when shading with a mechanical pencil because of the sharper point; if you want to achieve a softer feel, you can angle the pencil on its side and it will shade more evenly.

#### 08: DARK FEATHERS

Next I add a darker layer of shading to further define and darken the feathers using an HB pencil; I add a little more definition to the edges of them by laying down a darker tone on the top-left edge and blending it into the lighter tone over the span of an inch. This creates the appearance of a shadow below the tier of feathers directly above. It also helps create more separation and depth between the two rows. On the neck, I build up a darker tone along the edges of the S-shaped curve, pushing those edges back in space and creating the illusion of roundedness, where the lighter center appears to come forward in space.

#### 09: LIGHT FEATHERS

To help separate each of the smaller, scallop-shaped feathers on the top of the wing, I use the HB pencil to add a darker tone to the top of each scallop, kissing the bottom curved line of the feather shape above. I also add a bit of feather texture by arranging my lines in a radial pattern like a sunburst. This will imitate the feather's veins. The directionality of a line can be very useful for hinting towards detail without putting in too much time or work.





“DEPENDING ON  
HOW MANY DASHES  
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FEATHERS WILL READ  
DIFFERENTLY”

#### 10: DEFINITION

Now that the details are starting to take form, I bring in the first really dark tones to help add definition. With the 2B pencil I darken the innermost edges where the feathers meet and graduate those lines to the lighter shade already in place. Adding this dark tone creates more depth between the feathers.

#### 11: THE FACE

Now it is time to detail the face; starting with the eye I draw a small circle within the pupil which will be left white – this will be the little sparkle in the eye that brings the bird to life. I fill in the surrounding almond shape with black. Immediately surrounding the eye I add little horizontal dashes, resembling small loose feathers. Depending on how many dashes you add, the color of the feathers will read differently: less dashes equals white feathers, more dashes equals dark feathers. I add more of the denser marks near the nose, bottom of





the face, and back of the head. Because I want the beak to appear light, I just give it a simple outline, detailing only the nostril and darkening the knob above the beak.

### 12: THE SKULL

I want to be a bit more playful and love drawing skeletons, so I turn the second head into a skull. To do this, I draw and enlarge the circle where the eye would go

and fill it with gradated shading. Then I draw a simple thin white rim around the eye, shading only the outside edge to help it pop. If I wanted this to be a perfect skull I could research references, but for now I am happy with a rough approximation. With the 2H pencil I add a few light lines along the back of the skull, nose, and top of the beak; these rough pockets of indentation will imitate the indents of a skull.

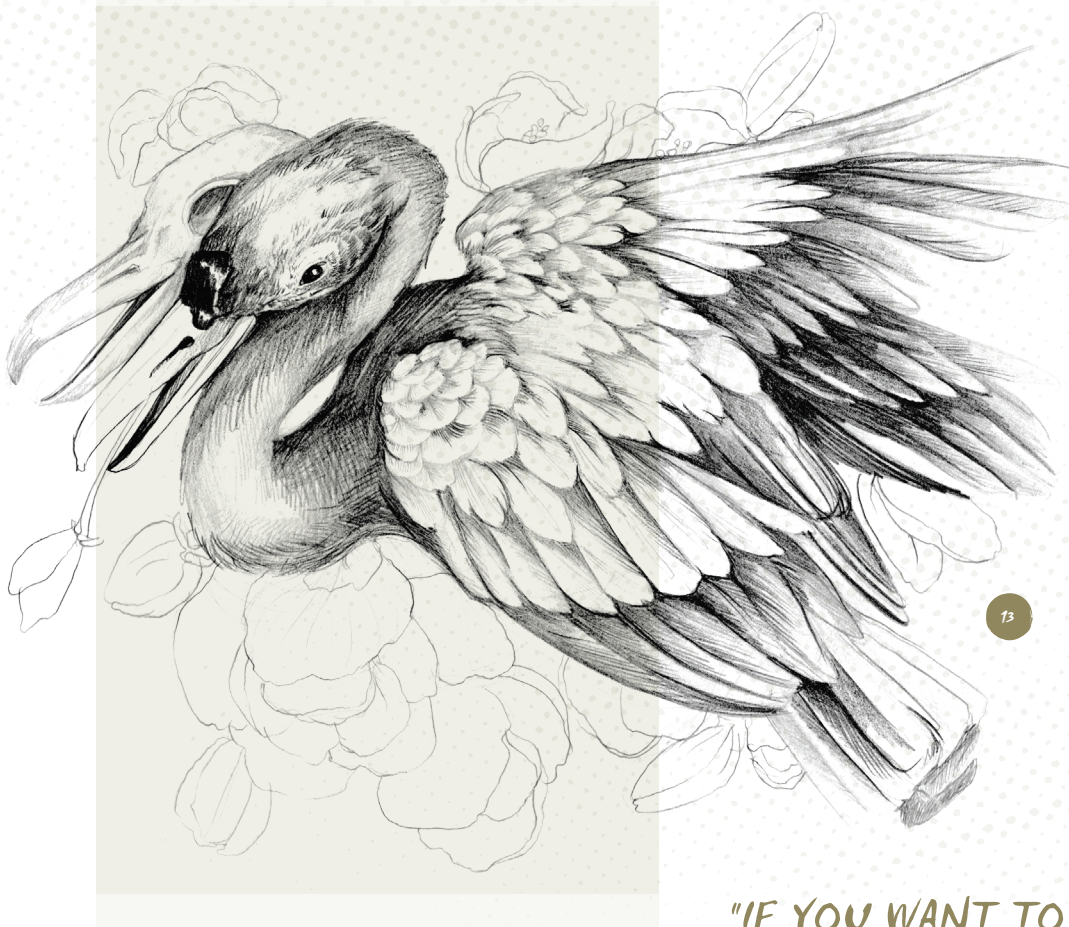


### 13: FLOWERS

Now it is time to bring the flowers to life. I start by outlining their forms, adding a simple line or two up the center of the petal to help define their curvy shape. Since petals have lots of bends and folds, I can depict their form by adding little digits and wavy lines to their outlines, giving them a more natural, organic feel. If you put a skinny crescent shape next to a larger petal, it creates the illusion that you can see inside and outside the petal at the same time. I really like the loose feel these add to the sketch, so I will leave the flowers as outlines.

### 14: TENSION

I want to add more movement and tension, so with the eraser I remove a few thin lines moving in a circular motion, following the lines from my sketch in step 05. I want these lines to read as grass strands wrapping around, so I outline these new marks and add some shading beneath them. This creates more separation of values while the shadow helps the grass look like it is popping forward. Often, if you want to make one part of the drawing appear lighter, you need to darken everything surrounding it.



"IF YOU WANT TO MAKE ONE PART OF THE DRAWING APPEAR LIGHTER, YOU NEED TO DARKEN EVERYTHING SURROUNDING IT"





### 15: CURIOSITY

This is typically where I stop with a sketch: I have an idea, a form, some interesting unplanned narrative moments, and the sketch has a nice loose feel to it; but I am curious as to how the piece would look with a darker background. If I ever wanted to render this as a painting, it would be good for me to know the different ways it will read depending on the value behind it. Bringing out a 4B pencil (not a mechanical), I start shading in everything behind the feathers and flower buds as darkly as I can.





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**16: FINISHED**

Making the background dark has really made the image pop out from the page; it looks as if the swan is sitting on top of the drawing rather than existing inside it. As a final touch I add a little more shading in the creases of the feathers and the base of the neck. This creates the feeling that she is coming out of the shadows. At this point there are plenty of ways I could play with my sketch. I could test out soft coloring with watercolors or pastels, or even cut the image up and arrange the pieces to make a different composition. However, I think the swan is perfect the way she is so I will leave her as you can see here.







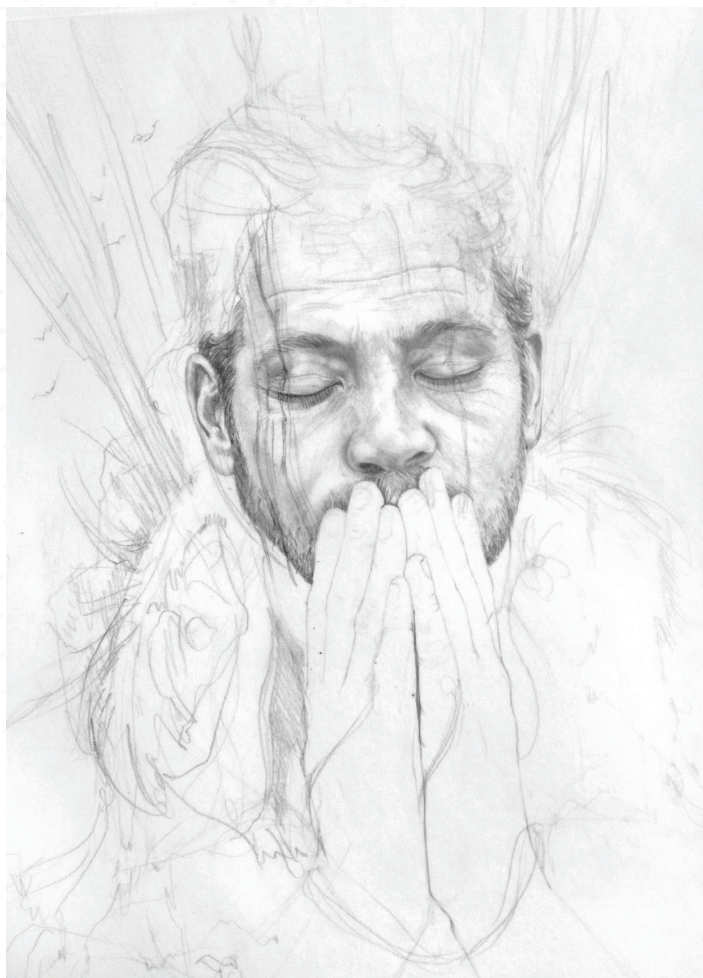


# Showcase Gallery

CHRISTINA MROZIK

Christina Mrozik has spent the majority of her life observing the natural world and the types of relationships that form within it. Having grown up on the Grand River in Grand Rapids, Michigan, she was inspired by its habitats from an early age. Blending the external world with her own understanding of the complexities of human relationships has led to her distinctive style, in which flora and fauna play a significant role, representing the simultaneous, and often opposing, matters of the human heart. Christina graduated with a BFA in Illustration from Grand Valley State University in 2009 and has since been traveling and chasing any artistic opportunity that presents itself. In 2012 she moved to Maine to help illustrate the *Mesoamérica Resiste Poster* with the Beehive Design Collective. It was here she learned how to better use art as a tool for social and political justice. In 2014 she rented a small farmhouse with fellow illustrator Zoe Keller. They released a book of collaborative drawings titled *Intricacies*. This book was an exploration of finding wonder in all things small and the importance of carving out quiet spaces for healing. In 2015 Christina moved to Portland, Oregon, and at the time of writing is chasing new opportunities in the gallery world, participating in a community of artists where people can share ideas and create together.

Christina uses sketching as a tool for play. Usually she comes to the table with a pencil and just sees what happens. Having an outlet for wonder and mystery is an essential part of creating as it allows new ways of seeing the world to bloom, and often reveals the hidden thoughts that are already there.





Christina Mrozik



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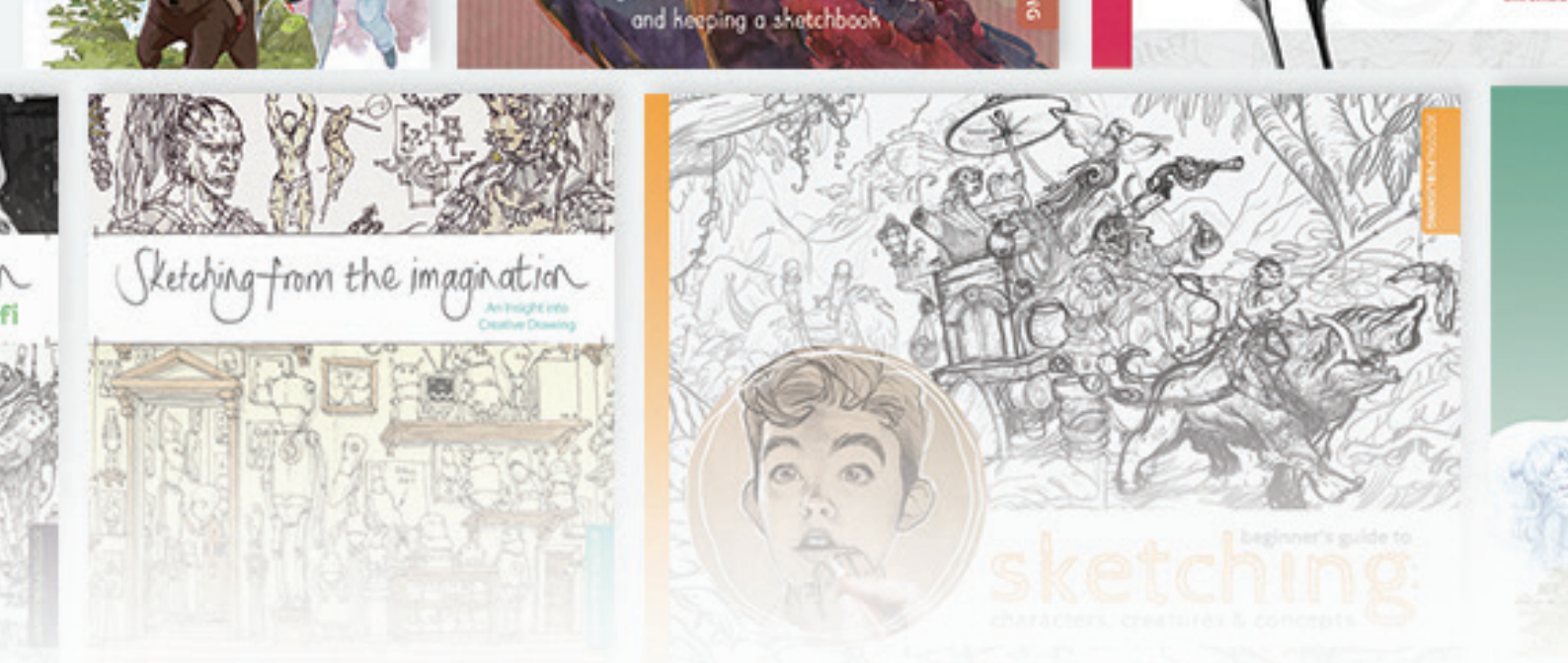












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