

CGI Artist, Mina De La O

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[Claudia Marks]: First off: How are you keeping busy during this very strange time in the world?

[Mina De La O]: Isolation is making me think about humanity a lot, about nature and about other things that relate to us and to our social interactions. I am also finding myself exploring a more emotional images and an abstract range of ideas. Recently, I've discovered inspiration in concepts such as fragility, artificial nature, and loneliness.

[CM]: Tell me about your background, where are you from and where did you go to school?

[MD]: I born in Setubal, Portugal, my dad is a mechanical engineer and he designed several factories in Lisbon between the 70's and 80's. When I was 2 years old my family moved back to Bilbao and I spend most of my life there until I moved to London.

I first studied towards a Fine Arts degree in Bilbao at the UPV. Afterwards, I won a scholarship to study abroad and I moved to London in 2000 to do a master's degree in painting at Wimbledon School of Arts. After I finished, I realized I was very interested in digital art so I ended up doing a second MA at the London College of Printing to specialize in digital design.

I've been living in London ever since. Here in London there are a lot of interesting things culturally and in the art and design world.

[CM]: What was your first job ever?

[MD]: My first job ever was in a bar near my flat, I didn't last very long on the job; I am a very clumsy person. I broke many glasses in a short period of time...

[CM]: How did you start creating in 3D with CGI?

[MD]: I always wanted to combine my painting ideas with sculptural ideas and I had always made paintings and drawings that were closer to three dimensional objects. I found I needed a tool that helped me to move around my paintings and to create depth. I was thinking a lot about the idea of making three-dimensional paintings for a while. I also needed a full time job at that point, so I was looking for a place that I could work while doing something related to my artwork as well. I managed to get a position at Me Company, a small design boutique that makes a lot of high impact imagery in CGI. Their work includes a lot of famous music covers for artist such as Björk and Erasure. I was able to manage working with 3D Studio Max and Photoshop and I did a decent job with the projects I was assigned. It was in that time at MeCo where I really learned how to make real-deal CGI artworks, most of my 3D skill came from this

experience. I worked as a 3D designer for them almost 5 years, then I moved into The Mill to work in VFX for ads. I've been at The Mill now for over 13 over years now. Currently, I work as the Creative Director on commercials and design projects but still do illustrations and digital works on my spare time.

[CM]: What advice do you have for 3D artists that are just starting out?

[MD]: I think these days 3D is a much wider world than when I started. It's also much easier to learn the skills online with any software from your own bedroom and there are lots of easily accessible tutorials and assets to learn from. If you really want to become a 3D artist there is no reason why you couldn't be self-taught. That said, there are pros and cons to learning 3D. You really need to invest fair amount of time to master it, as it is not something you immediately and intuitively create with like using a brush and paint. You can get lost in learning all the new tools that come out and the various techniques of making things... and then likely even forget why you are learning to use the software on the first place.

To me, 3D is a tool to visualize and produce my creative ideas - it's not a box of ideas by itself. My advice it is not to get lost in the technology and to think about what you want to make with it. Ideas should always come first, then decide what tool you might want to try to explore to make your idea come to life. Most of the time I start my concepts by using pen and paper, then I might sketch something more complex with Photoshop and then I decide whether I need to jump into using 3D, photography or other medium.

[CM]: Do you do any other kind of crafting or artwork in your spare time?

[MD]: I draw a lot, I draw just to be able to think. My digital work is more conceptual and abstract, it's where I can respond better to specific briefs or generic concepts. My hand drawings are more about intimate stories. Most of my drawings are memories and symbols of things that surround me and my vision on them.

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[CM]: Who are some artists you admire? Who do you look towards for inspiration?

[MD]: There are so many amazing artists out there. I feel it is unfair to only mention one or two, the list is too long. Generally speaking I admire artists who don't need to make a massive statement about their work. Good art moves you on its own.

To me, art is a moment of encounter between you and the artwork you are experiencing; adding extra stories and other artifacts before you approach the art is only diluting the moment. I don't mind reading about it afterwards, but I like to experience first by my own senses and feelings.

For my personal work, inspiration is frankly very eclectic, I collect weird objects, books, films... It can go from European classic painters, architecture, folklore art, manga, films, lighting, art installations, illustrations, botanical books, vintage antiques... Pretty much anything visually and acoustically interesting can bring me ideas.

[CM]: What image of yours in our collection is your favorite?

[MD]: Always the last one.

[CM]: What music or podcast is currently on heavy rotation for you?

[MD]: I found myself recently listening a lot to a Spotify playlist called Dark and Gothic, including some songs from The Cure, Joy Division and Bauhaus – a bit moody and nostalgic. In the mornings normally I jump to a playlist I made titled "To Work" that includes HVOB, Grimes, and Le Matos. I also like playing Brian Eno on the background if I am doing something that needs a bit more concentration. I also love piano from Yaron Herman if I am drawing on a Sunday.

[CM]: What TV show or Movie do you think everyone should see?

[MD]: I have a habit of checking out the latest blockbuster, especially if there are tons of VFX in the film. The films that resonate more with me are movies that are less easy to digest. I loved Shoplifters by Hirokazu Kore-Eda and Roma by Alfonso Cuaron. Indeed, they are not happy movies, but they are amazing conversations about love and social conventions with beautiful photography along.