

## What is Concept Art? (Blog Post – Ron Burgess MA)

In short - The primary goal of conceptual art is to create and convey a visual impression of a design, idea, and/mood for use within video games, films or animation – primarily before it's developed into a final production. Its aim often revolves around conveying a rounded design vision, acting as a foundation for others to build upon until the product is in its final stages. Within this blog post I'll explore just how necessary concept art is within modern entertainment production.



Figure 1 - Rapunzel's tower - Tangled (2010) - Art by Scott Watanabe

So what is the main reason concept art is necessary? With the high costs of production, the extensive amount of hours and budgeting that goes into the nearly limitless visual entertainment – a slip up in design could at best set you back a set number of weeks and at worse cost hundreds if not thousands of pounds to rectify. Concept art acts as a cheap investment both in hours and in currency and allows for the creation of a blue print, a general concept, mood and style for everyone to work with. Allowing for the visual demonstration of work process, colour pallets and design motifs, concept art is key for focusing a team into a single artistic vision – ironing out the visual kinks and ensuring there are less problems down the line.



Figure 2 - USS Vengeance Crashing - Star Trek Into Darkness - Art by James Clyne

Concept art at its roots is being able to 'show your workings'. To explore and solidifying a vague setting or brief in a way that's visually accessible to not only other design team members, but those outside the team that are involved in the process – such as a board of investors, or a PR team. Often art in this category is for showing the bigger picture to those that aren't part of the creative process- those that hold the purse strings, or producers – its far more cost effective to include an element of eye candy to explain and visualise the descriptions; much speedier than getting a modeller or artists to create something. Ultimately, the purpose is to reduce the margin for error and therefor reduce time, cost and mistakes. Concept art is often the unsung hero of design, with flashy, polished illustrations being more prevalent – without showing the tens, if not hundreds of design drawings that went into making the final piece. Crucially concept art is an iterative process, hitting the bull's eye is extremely rare.

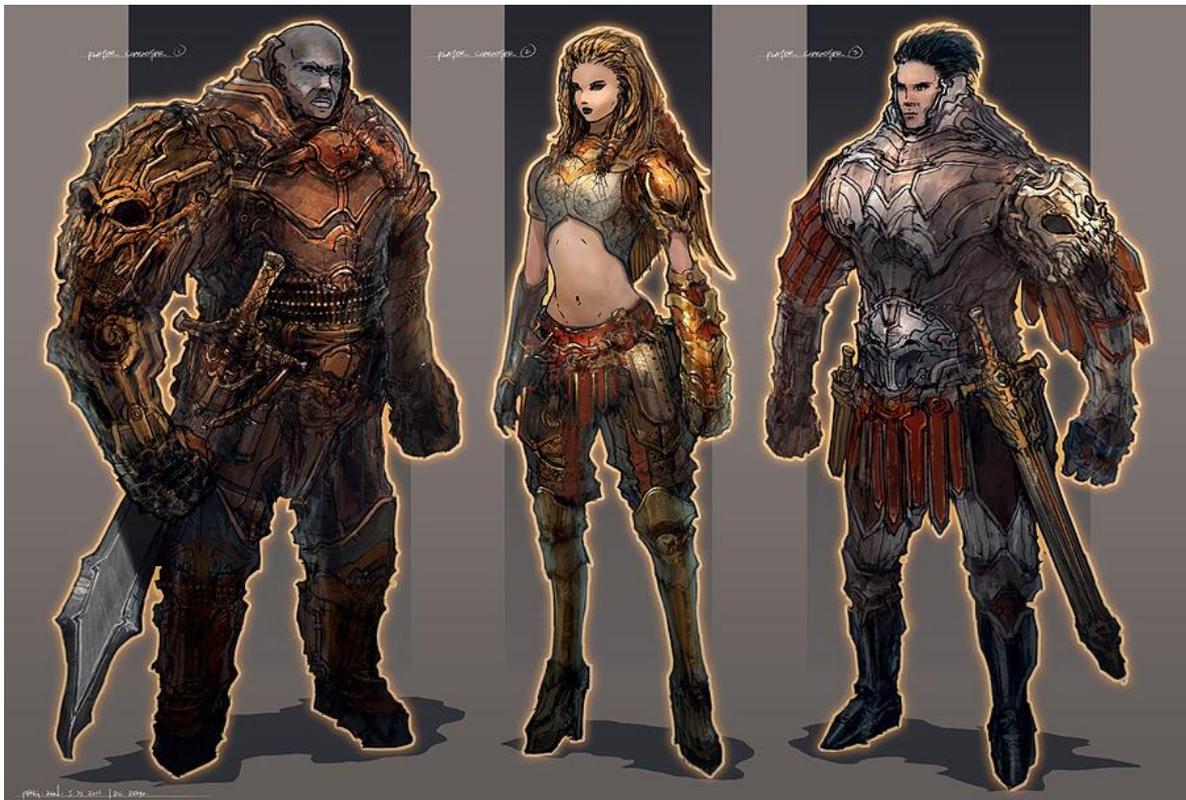


Figure 3 - Feng Zhu Design - Concept Character Example

A final key point is that concept art is not illustration. Though the two are intrinsically linked, often overlapping or referencing each other – the key term ‘Concept’ defines them as completely different outcomes. Concept art is messy, quick and practical used to explain and show the design, its process and help with understanding – while Illustration is the process of creating a highly polished piece of artwork, often for advertising processes. There is little purpose in having an highly polished and intricately painted image, only for the design and mood to be flawed. This is where the rougher, looser and dissecting process of concept art comes in, where its design merit will quickly overlook artistic flaws or inaccuracies.



Figure 4 - Fantasy Market - Sandara - Digipen Singapore

In conclusion – concept art is the process of creating quick design solutions to a brief – working out the mood, appearance or function of objects, props vehicles, environments and characters. It’s rough, quick, exploratory and not illustration.