

Interview With Brian Britigan

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Website: <https://graphiccompetitions.com/>



I was born and raised in Iowa City, IA. After high school I moved to Seattle, where I studied both fine art and computer animation at the University of Washington. This led to a job at small game studio doing concept art and animation, while also using my nights and weekends to create work for gallery shows.

But after years of splitting my time between these two pursuits, I eventually felt worn out and began looking for a more unified approach. I've always been a fan of editorial and book illustration, and it seemed like a logical way to combine the collaborative problem-solving from my gaming background with the visual aesthetic I developed through my personal work. After moving to New Zealand for a year, I returned stateside to pursue a masters degree in illustration from the School of Visual Arts in New York City. And now three years later I'm living and working in Brooklyn as a freelance illustrator.

Much of my work features imagery drawn from my Midwestern upbringing, combining bold colors, dramatic lighting, and a strong emphasis on drawing.

What are you working on at the moment?

I'm currently working on a mix of editorial illustrations, drawings for gallery shows, and some private commissions. Some of these projects have tight deadlines while others are looser, so there's always a balancing act between putting out fires and keeping an eye on long-term goals.

What does a typical working day look like?

I always start with coffee and a to-do list for the day, which typically includes emails to send, drawings to draw, and errands to run. Each workday is a mix of actual illustration and all the other tasks that the job inevitably includes (social media, promotion, shipping, etc). I try to keep my schedule pretty flexible so I can adapt to quick deadlines at a moment's notice. I set up a small studio in my apartment, so most of my time is spent working at home with my dog for company.

I also spend a couple of days per week as a studio assistant for illustrator James McMullan, helping with theater posters, children's books, etc. It's a great opportunity to get out of the house and work on projects that I wouldn't be exposed to otherwise, and I'm always picking up new skills to apply to my own practice.

What tools do you use most for your work?

When making something for a gallery or private commission, I mostly use colored pencils on colored paper with the occasional bit of gouache or watercolor. I love the textures and color interactions that result from combining these materials. For editorial work with shorter deadlines, I use the same drawing approach but with digital tools. Most of this work is done in Procreate on an iPad Pro and finished in Photoshop on my desktop. This allows me to work quickly and easily make revisions when necessary.

What skills have you learnt along the way?

By pursuing endeavors from game design to gallery shows, I've ended up with a pretty diverse skill-set. Designing for games taught me how to communicate efficiently and work collaboratively, while creating personal work allowed me to explore my own interests and develop a creative voice without a client's constraints. Going back to school gave me a new perspective my strengths and weaknesses, and I got better at making work that feels like my own instead of just satisfying the brief. I'm now more willing to trust my instincts and judge the end result instead of the mess in the middle.

What advice would you give to a young creative?

Everything requires collaboration. Whether it's with an art director, a gallerist, or a customer, it's important to develop positive professional relationships. Be reliable, be punctual, be kind. You never know who will recommend you for the next opportunity, so do your best to leave a good impression whenever possible. It's also impossible to predict where each opportunity will lead, so say yes to as wide a variety of experiences as possible. You'll never know where your strengths lie until you're tested.
