

Interview With Feifei Ruan

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Website: <https://bit.ly/2UAOn3c>



I'm a Chinese illustrator and visual storyteller based in New York City. I was born and raised in Shenzhen, China. I came to the US in 2013 to attend the MFA Visual Narrative program at School of Visual Arts. After I graduated from school, I stayed in the city and started my career as a freelance artist.

My works can be seen on book covers, magazines, websites, merchandise, and murals. My style ranges from eastern classic to science fiction and fantasy. For books, magazines and media, my clients include: Penguin Books, Harper Collins, Albert Whitman & Co, Boom!Studios, The JimHenson Co, BuzzFeed News, Tor, Variety, ElleMen, Modern Weekly, and Nautilus. For advertising, I've worked with: HCB Health, BBC Studios, School of Visual Arts, Mercedes-Benz, Fendi Baguette, and more.

What are you working on at the moment?

Besides my freelance jobs, I'm currently working on a graphic novel. Which is a gangster story, and the background is set in China in the 1940s. I'm collaborating with the writer Mark Sable, and the book will be published by Top Shelf Productions.

What does a typical working day look like?

I normally sit at the computer around 9, with a cup of coffee or Hong Kong style milk tea. Then I start the day with emails and other logical works. The creative parts come after. Sometimes when I work with European clients, I start working at 6. Because they are 5, 6 hours ahead, I try to minimize the time difference and work efficiently.

There's no typical "end time" of a day. It depends on the projects. It can be anytime after 5, or overnight. I work from my home studio, so I can easily manage my time.

What tools do you use most for your work?

For commercial works: iMac, Wacom(Intuos), and Adobe Creative Suite.

For personal sketches: iPad Pro, Chinese ink and brush.

What skills have you learnt along the way?

"Being able to change" is an important skill that I've learned. When I was in school, I used to set rules for myself, and thought that's "my style", "my voice". While it comes to commercial works, when the clients' needs collide with those "rules", I started to question myself -- what really matters?

New clients bring new products, new styles, new elements, or new color palettes -- that we've never worked on. As professional creative, we need to be flexible enough to deal with multiple tasks and meet different needs. These experiences changed my perspective, and now my new rules are: learn, adapt, and grow.

What advice would you give to a young creative?

When you are learning, try everything you can and don't be afraid to make mistakes. "The best way to learn is from experience." -- Which is especially true for this creative industry. It takes lots of practice (and failure).

And don't be shy to share your works. Post them online, submit to competitions, and bring the works to art fairs. If you want to be a professional artist, remember that marketing is equal to creativity.
