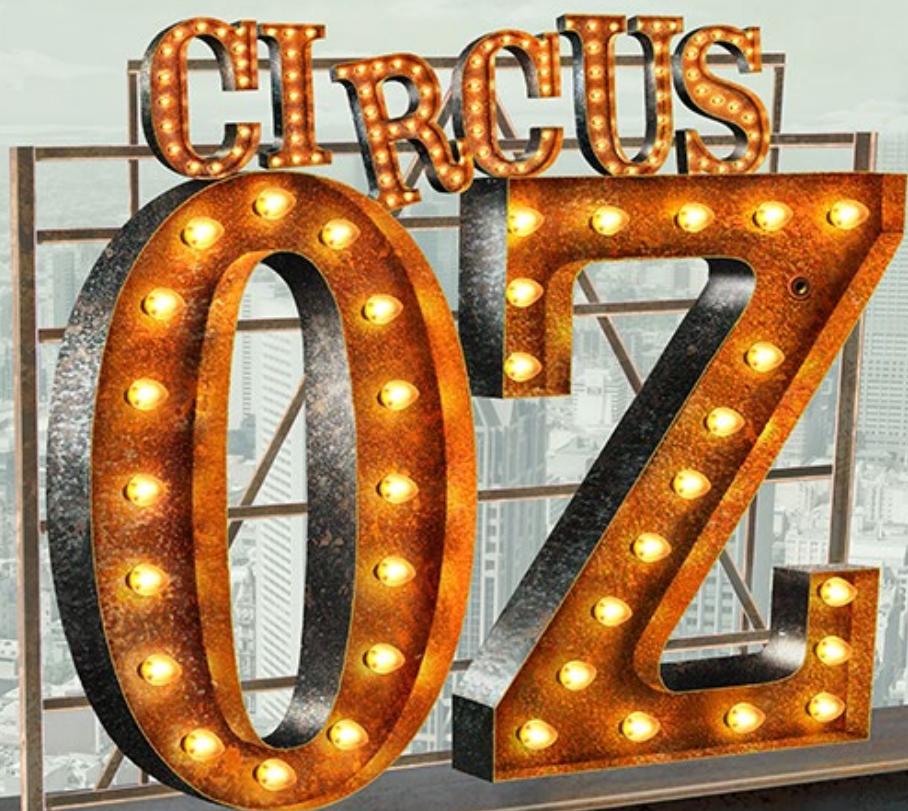


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Anita Xhafer

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Anita Xhafer

With a photorealistic style, Anita's work has lended itself to food and beverage illustration so beautifully. From the good ol' days of real airbrushes to Photoshop versions, we learn more about her career and education.

Outline: We would love to hear of your education and career path.

Anita: I started off at RMIT where I learned a whole lot of technical stuff which was good. Soon though, I'd had enough of that and sought greener pastures - literally! I mean literally because I went to Preston Institutes' new campus out at Bundoora and we had cows watching us through the windows. The whole place was much more modern in outlook.

Outline: What attracts you to working in such a realistic way? Have you always created art in a detailed way?

Anita: I've always been attracted to realism, I love some

of the old masters like Caravaggio etc. I love solidity I think. I do get carried away with details sometimes because I can't help myself - perfection is totally illusive, but I try. Besides, it's the little details that convey reality best, the way light falls on things can describe objects beautifully.

Outline: You've worked in the industry for some time - we'd love to hear of your experiences as the industry has changed; and your overview of the market for illustrators currently.

Anita: Yes I've been around for some time! And yes of course things have changed a lot, for a start the industry is a lot less wanky! People are much nicer these days, and all





the nasty receptionists have been put out to pasture, mercifully. (I'm talking way back now.) Having said that though, there have been plenty of people who have helped me along the way too, people who gave me work when I first went freelance. (Thanks Ken).

I do think things are different now, I think in some ways my education was a lot more comprehensive, we were taught not only techniques but we were taught to observe too, the basics really, and I'm not sure if that happens now.

Outline: What tools/techniques and programs do you use to create your work? Could you talk us through the process?

Anita: I used to use all the stock-standard tools, that is, illustration boards various paints etc., and of course my trusty old airbrush, I went through a number of those. These days it's all on the computer of course, and it's like having the biggest art store in the world at your fingertips, I love it. And best of all I don't have to clear the desk when I'm juggling jobs. (That used to be such a task). And of course the INTERNET - the best invention ever. I don't have to go driving all over Melbourne delivering jobs, taking them back to the studio to do the inevitable amendments and then taking them back again and so on. A click of the button, and the job is delivered. Conversely, people ask for more amendments because they are so much easier to do on the computer.

I mostly use Photoshop (and a bit of Painter). I use Photoshop more like a painting tool really. There are probably things I do that could be done in other ways, but whatever works is fine by me. I have a large Wacom tablet, plus a Cintiq. Most of it is done in Photoshop directly,

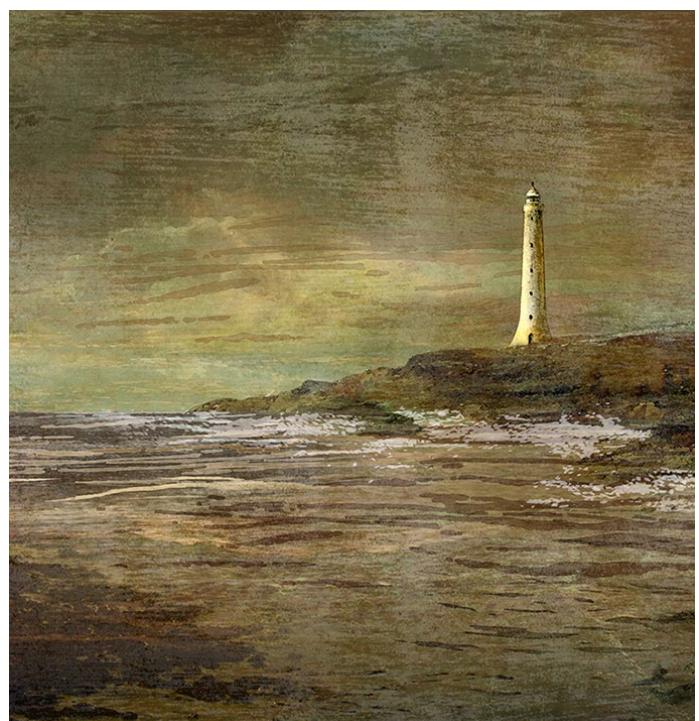
rather than scanning in drawings and such. And don't we all love 'layers', making changes has never been easier. I have a huge catalogue of visual reference on my computer which I constantly use and add to. My techniques haven't changed much from the old 'airbrush' days, it's just that I'm doing it on the computer now. Somebody once told me that an illustrator is only as good as their reference, and I think that's very true.

Outline: You've created quite a bit of work for food and beverage clients. Why do these clients choose to work with illustrators over photographers? What sort of skills do you bring to these projects?

Anita: Packaging has provided me with plenty of work over the years, no doubt because I'm primarily a 'realist'. I'm probably cheaper than a photographer too! Besides, a photographer can't photograph things that are out of season which isn't a problem for an illustrator - we can make up whatever we like.

Outline: Could you tell us about some of your favourite projects you have worked on?

Anita: It's not all packaging though, I recently did a series of posters for Borrow Box. They were great fun, the themes included UFO's stealing cows, giant bean stalks and fairies, giant octopuses, raging stallions etc. Other poster and billboard work I've done has included depictions of cats in surreal surroundings for feline pain relief! I enjoy my work immensely, no matter how small or big the jobs are, everything is always a challenge. There is no such thing as a 'formula', and I'm constantly having to think up new ways of doing every single job, no matter how many times



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I've drawn an apple, every job is totally different. And thank god for that.

Outline: Do you have a studio, and if so can you tell us about the set up and materials you use?

Anita: I work at home these days, and my doggies love me for it. I work in a messy studio in the front room. I've got a 27" iMac, a Wacom tablet, a scanner and a camera to take reference photos with. I don't have a problem with working by myself at all.

Outline: Who are your favourite illustrators/and or inspirational places/people/galleries etc?

Anita: I wouldn't know where to start with who has influenced my work - everything I've ever seen really. Where to start - back to the old masters I think, or any work that seeks to give substance to the chaotic images that confront our senses constantly. To me it's all about making the intangible tangible. So before I get too airy-fairy, goodbye for now. ☺

