



by Pamela Park



Behind the Mask of a Costume Designer

Christiana Broughton, a.k.a. Aunum (the Wampanoag Native American Language word for 'dog'), is a costume designer, illustrator, animal lover, and Halloween aficionado who's eager to share her creations with the world and along the way, help others convert their concepts and visions into reality through concept art and custom costume designs.

In 2015, she graduated with a BFA from the University of West Florida, used part of her graduation money to upgrade her trusty Intuos 4 and purchase a Cintiq Companion 2 (the predecessor to the Wacom MobileStudio Pro) and launched AunumArt Custom Creations, where she manages commissioned illustrations, concept design and costume work.



A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step

As sole proprietor of the two-year old AunumArt, Christiana finds time management a big challenge. "I'm still learning how to manage both creating the art and managing the business elements. My typical day can easily run 12 – 16 hours. It's tough getting past the feeling that I'm not allowed to do anything else but work. I have super supportive family and friends which really helps. Fortunately, I really love creating art and I'm determined to make AunumArt Custom Creations my career. As a start-up solo-preneur, my finances are very tight so I try to be strategic when choosing my tools and materials. That's why my Cintiq Companion 2 was my first big purchase after college. I knew I would need that kind of power, flexibility and reliability when starting my company."



Another big challenge Aunum faces is working with her customers and translating their visions into reality, which involves managing communications, timing, pricing and prioritization. "I'm fortunate to have a lot of clients interested in my work. It's just a matter of balance – pleasing my customers while still making money."

Aunum categorizes her style as semi-realistic. Her design of Kah'la, is based on the Kahjiit cat people from the video game Skyrim. Because her work combines realism with stylized elements, Kah'la has the proportions and markings of a Tiger, a Lynx, and a human female, but with oversized, expressive eyes for more personality.



"I grew into my style through my years drawing and painting from life; traditional art instruction combined with fascination with Anime, fantasy art and cartoons.

Cartoons are the way they are to exaggerate life, to amplify what is already in our reality. I like adding that stylization to realism because I think it can make real life more interesting and easier to connect to."



Planning out the week of costume design

When designing a costume, Aunum first decides what type of creature to make –the type of animal and its personality and other characteristics. She uses her Cintiq Companion 2 not only for drawing, but as a research tool for looking up photos, researching animal anatomy, finding inspiration from other artists, viewing sculpting and casting tutorials and even shopping for her supplies.



Once she's picked the animal or collection of animal features that interest her most, she starts off with a rough sketch on her tablet which allows her to quickly draft, edit proportions, and try different colors without having to do a lot of re-work like she would on paper.

"My Wacom allows me to draft quick concepts for costumes - everything from planning out proportions by drawing over photos and mannequins, to deciding on a color scheme. Using my Cintiq Companion 2, I have the freedom to move from drafting table, to workbench, to sewing machine or to the couch when I'm at home. And when I'm on the road, my tablet makes it easy to work, display, or even play."



After she has her base concept, Aunum creates a full-body reference sheet, detailing markings, close ups on certain features, clothing, accessories (if any) and even environments.

Creating a reference sheet



Once the reference sheet is complete, she sculpts the creature's head out of clay and creates a silicone mold of the sculpture which becomes the mold for the resin cast. Aunum casts in resin because it is lightweight, sturdy and easy to adhere materials to like foam, fur, air-dry clay and other plastics.

Clay sculpt



Silicone mold



Creating a resin cast



Resin cast



Assembling the base



Base paint



Next she refines the finished resin and smooths edges, cuts open seams, clears the eye sockets - basically preparing the resin skeleton for things like foam musculature, moving jaw parts, any electronics, eyes, teeth and fur.

Creating eyes



Sewing the fur pieces



Designing the fur pattern



Ready for a shave



Throughout this process Aunum cross checks her character reference sheet to make sure the work in progress stays true to her original idea, which she says is particularly important during the airbrushing phase.

Ready for airbrush



Each stage of the process takes her about a day. She can complete a costume head and tail in about a week depending on the level of detail and the number of other commitments on her plate.

Partial husky fursuit



Follow your dreams and do what you love

"I'm proud of how far my artistic skills have developed both in the realm of drawing and costuming, and I'm proud that I'm now at the point where I can not only make quality work for myself, but my work is now in demand from other people as well. I'm excited because I get to make a living doing what I love most."

Christiana presents at Dragon Con 2017



"People are also starting to ask me for guidance on how to get started with their costume projects. I was just on a Costuming Track panel at DragonCon and it's really exciting to know I can help people with tips on casting, materials and even things to avoid. I've even had parents come

up to me to ask for advice on how they can support their own young artists."



"The most important thing I would want to share with someone just starting out in costume design is to take the time to draft out the concept for your cosplay or costume before you get started. This is a critical step in the costume creation process. Having your vision laid out in advance saves you time in the long run. Pre-planning helps flesh out details like what materials you'll need and how to structure your days and weeks. You'll be able to research your subject matter and find tutorials ahead of time. Being able to constantly refer back to an image helps to keep your ideas on track.

Just remember, have fun with your creations! Don't let a few hiccups discourage you. Everything is a learning process. You may not do it right the first time, but the more you try and work, the more your skills will develop. Never be afraid to experiment."

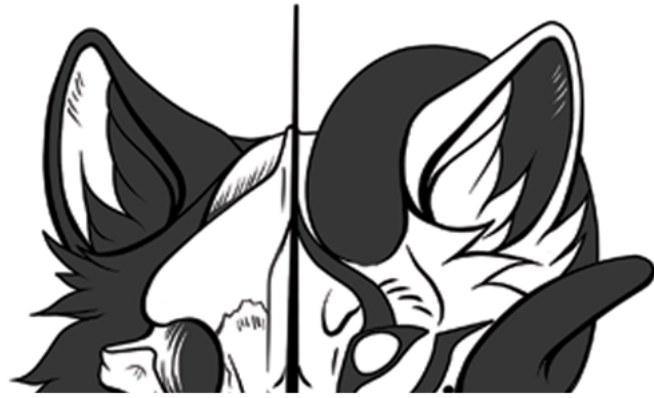
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