CONCEPT ART AND CHARACTER DESIGN

When animating a character, the artist must grasp the context in which they are moving. A walking character, for example, may have to deal with wind, rain, and earthquakes physically, as well as dread, happiness, reluctance, and enthusiasm emotionally. They could be young or elderly, male or female, and they might have been harmed in some way or have abilities. All of these factors will influence how a character moves and walks.
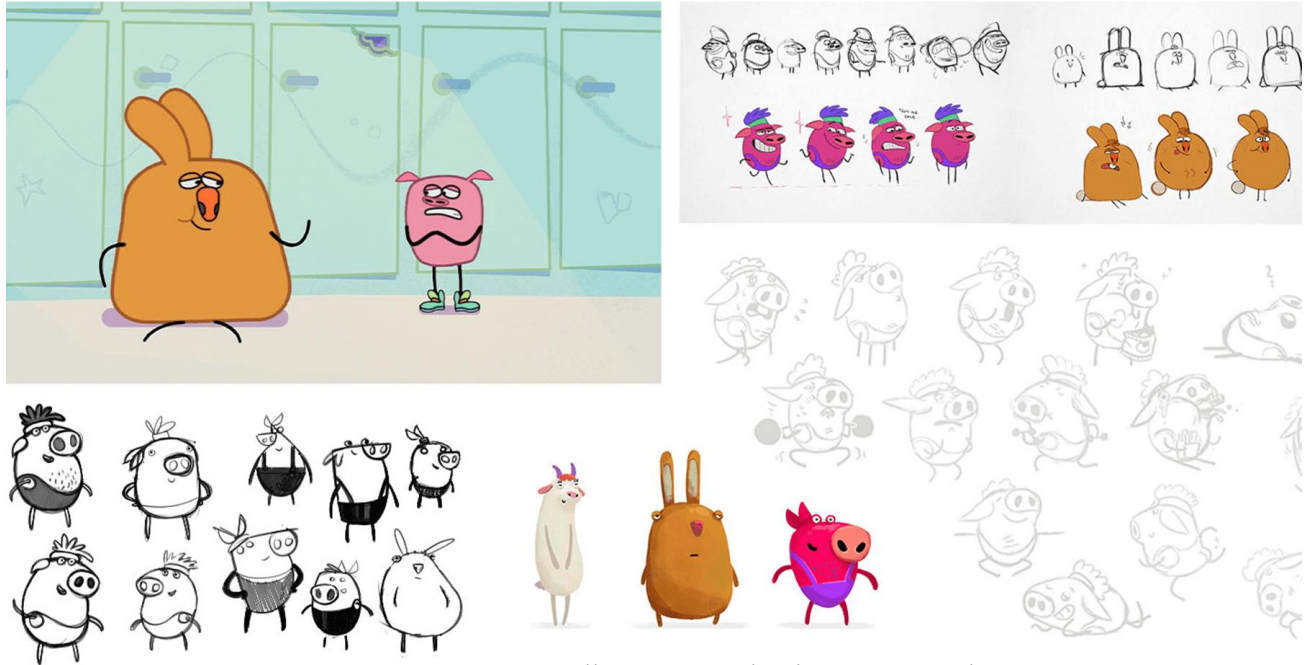
Concept Art

Image retrieved from https://studiopigeon.com/blog/what-is-concept-art/.

"Concept Art" can mean different things to different individuals. When creating a film, game, or other project that relies on visual content, the act of creating visual imagery defines the project before any full production can begin.

Producing concept art accomplishes two goals. The first is to market the project to potential clients, investors, or distributors, convincing them that it is worthwhile to invest in. Concept art, additionally, is simply a visual statement of the appearance of the project that everyone in the team is working on so that they are all on the same creative page if the production has progressed past the pitching stage.

A concept art does not have to be completed. Unless you work for a large studio like Pixar or DreamWorks, it doesn't have to be fully finished, polished artwork. A personal project just needs to have a strong "look-and-feel" to what the finished project will seem like—something that allows you to focus your mind on the aesthetic direction your film will eventually take.

Concept Art Production

Concept art should steer you in a precise direction—the colors, moods, vision, and vibe you're aiming for. The word "conception" is central to concept art. As a result, depending on your production requirements, the concept art could be as simple as rough color sketches or even rough pencil sketches. You can use watercolors, pencil shading, digital texturing, or anything else that catches the eye, and choose a significant scene or moment from your planned film to embody what it will look like.

Concept art can be addressed simply in terms of technique, but it must support the idea. There are numerous methods to it; there is no single idea that thoroughly describes what "concept art" looks like. It can be anything that communicates your inner vision to the rest of the world or the investors or distributors of your planned project.

Types of Concept Art

Numerous styles of concept art are suitable given the intricacy of an animation or video game.

Character Concept Art

Image retrieved from https://www.clipstudio.net/en/conceptart/art-style/.

Fascinating characters and monsters are essential to keep the spectator interested in any production. The concept artist must be well-versed in human and animal anatomy. They create amazing or horrifying animals with realistic body forms. They are experienced in developing complementing and opposing characters, as well as defining their behaviors and personalities.
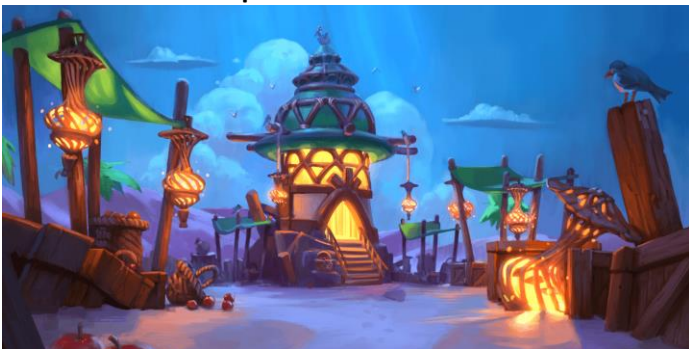
Environment Concept Art

Image retrieved from https://www.clipstudio.net/en/conceptart/art-style/.

Landscapes, buildings, cities, and natural scenery are all included. If the script requires it, the scenes can be fantasy or out of this world. A great sense of perspective, composition, and architectural design is required of the artist. They use a deep understanding of color to create a thematic impression.

Weapon and Asset Design

Every story contains appealing and inventive props. This sort of concept art concentrates on creating designs for the characters' weapons, tools, and other assets that they will utilize to carry out their actions. These are the props that make up the world in which the characters live. The artist must be quite knowledgeable about the methods utilized in industrial design.

Image retrieved from https://www.clipstudio.net/en/conceptart/art-style/.

Vehicle Design

Concept art vehicle design is related to weapon design. Traditional car and aircraft design requires the artist to be conversant with the equipment and techniques involved. Beyond that, they are frequently pushed beyond traditional design boundaries to create flying automobiles, spacecraft, and one-of-a-kind vehicles.

Image retrieved from https://www.clipstudio.net/en/conceptart/art-style/.

From a visual standpoint, an artist must recognize that concept art is the basis upon which everything else is created. The animation approaches, background styling, color decisions, and the nature of the moods and emotions you use in storytelling are all influenced by the development of good production concept art.
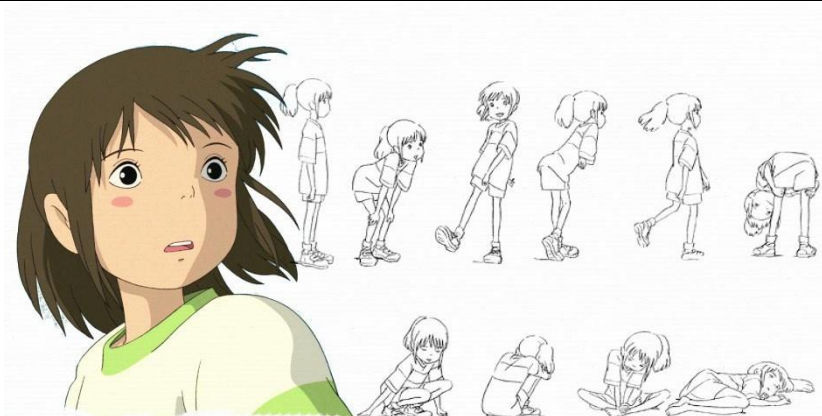
Character Design

Image retrieved from https://characterdesignreferences.com/visual-library-2/character-design-kid-girls.

With the rise of animation in the media, we're all accustomed to seeing a wide range of character designs—different shapes, sizes, and colors—created utilizing a variety of approaches. Some are charming, while others are edgy, stylistic, traditional, modern, or retro. All of them, however, are founded on similar design ideas.

When creating characters, it is recommended to begin with shapes. If you look at any character design, you will see that they can all be split down into fundamental shapes—circles, triangles, squares, and so on. When all surface features are removed, these shapes serve as the foundation for the basic design structures. These forms have psychologically symbolic connotations that decide whether they are applicable to any character's personality type.
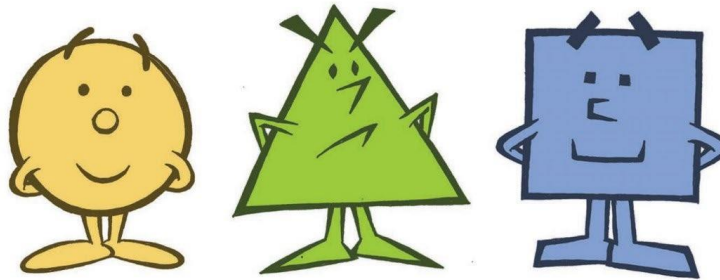

Image retrieved from White, T. (2023). Animation Masterclasses: from Pencils to Pixels.

In the example above, the first character is rounder and more welcoming or warm. The second is more triangular and more edgy or tense, whereas the square one suggests a more robust or strong character. These shapes serve as the foundation for more traditional design ideas, such as round shapes and corners representing "friendliness" and "femininity," square shapes and corners representing "masculinity" and "strength," and triangular shapes and corners representing "villains" and "bad guys." This is highlighted by the seemingly limitless number of Disney characters.

Character Structure

After defining a character's fundamental shape, the following step is to break them down or integrate them into a more specified structure in order to refine the message they represent more precisely.
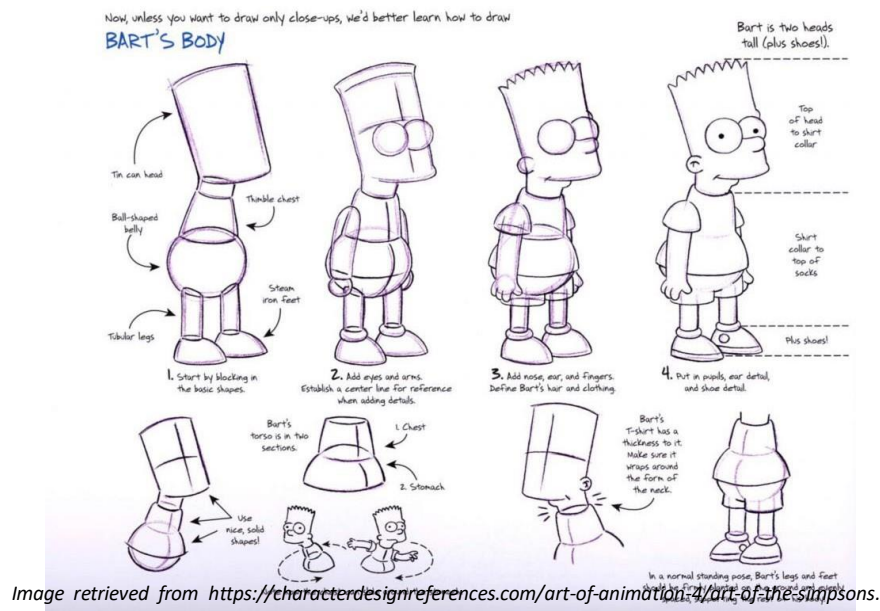

Image retrieved from https://characterdesignreferences.com/art-of-animation-4/art-of-the-simpsons.

For example, in The Simpsons, Bart's basic geometric structure consists of a sphere and a cylinder. This is the design's structural foundation.

If we continue to further develop the character, more spheres are added for the eyes and hands, as well as polished cylinders for the arms. Following that, other modifications are added, such as a sphere for the ears and fingers. Finally, the surface sketch is added, sharpening the details and giving us the familiar character.

Head Heights

"Head heights" are another important aspect of character design to understand. The head height of a character varies greatly depending on the size of the head, the age of the character, and the genre for which they are built. For example, a character's age can be specified by using the head as one unit of measurement for the remainder of the body.
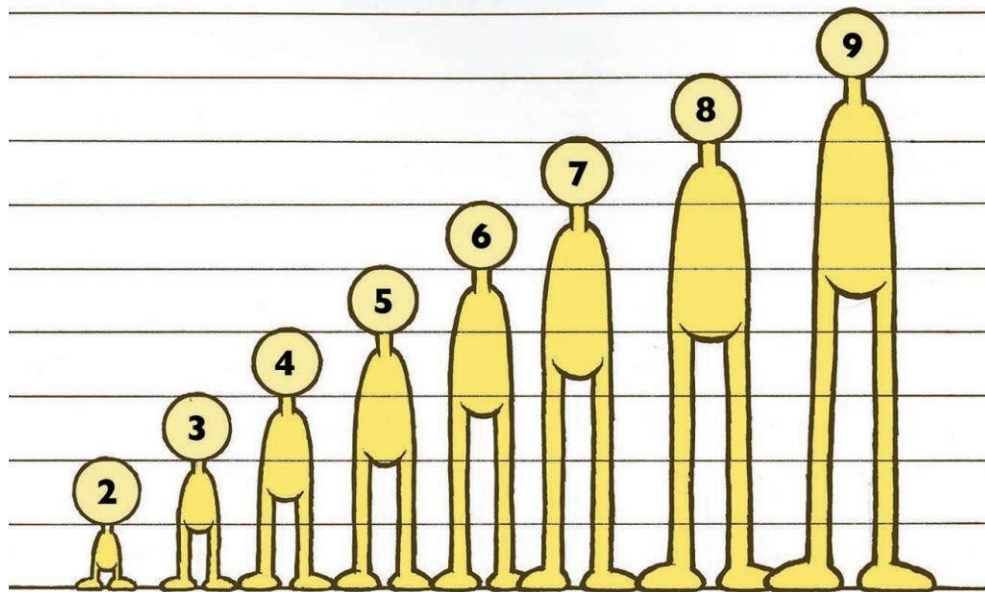

Image retrieved from White, T. (2023). Animation Masterclasses: from Pencils to Pixels.

According to the chart above, the younger a character is, the shorter their head height should be. The youngest figure on the left only has a "2-head height" design, which means that the head measurement equals the complete body measurement.

As a result, an older child may have a "3- or 4-head height" design. Then there's "5-head heights" with a teenager. Finally, a completely developed adult will often have a "7-head height" design, while some anime or science-fiction characters may reach "8-head heights" in select cases.

Silhouettes

In terms of character design, it is critical that your audience recognizes the shape and volume of your figures quickly, especially whether they are viewed in shadow or are veiled in any manner by color, lighting, or other factors. If your characters' silhouettes are very similar, it is strongly encouraged that you reconsider your design so that each silhouetted one is distinct. Otherwise, it is a poor choice of character design.

Palette

The usage of color in a character design is referred to as a palette. Selectivity is essential when it comes to color. The colors you choose can tell a narrative. Colors that are bright and flamboyant convey excitement, action, and wildness. Dark and somber hues frequently convey professionalism, firmness, and stability. Whites and washed-out colors provide a message of purity and piety but also serve as an excellent canvas for corruption.

Colors and conditions should reflect your character's personality and position. Consider who they are, what they do, and how they care for their belongings. Change your color scheme and outfit to assist in telling their narrative. You may portray who your character is and their personality with the appropriate color selection, assisting you in telling their narrative without saying a single word.

Other Design Considerations

1. **Know your target audience** – The character design's simplicity or complexity will be determined by the project's population. For example, designs for children's books and films could use brightly colored figures with simple shapes. Characters in video games for an older demographic may be more detailed and shaded.
2. **Practice world-building –** Consider the character's appearance and clothing with the world in which they live. For example, if the character lives in a science fiction setting, their design may be more robotic and metallic than if they dwell in a fanciful or rustic setting.
3. **Understand shape language** – Using simple shapes to build a character is one of the fundamentals of character creation. The shape of a person's body can convey their personality and body language. In Japan, for example, the kawaii (cute) culture emphasizes basic, round character designs.
4. **Explore the character's personality** – Knowing who your character is, their personality, hopes, dreams, and past will assist you in creating a memorable character. A character with optimistic personality traits may have a more vibrant color palette than one with pessimistic personality traits.
5. **Keep it simple** – A good character design allows viewers to easily comprehend who your character is by looking at them. Simplicity is particularly important when producing an animated character; because animators must render the character several times, a simpler character design reduces production time and expense. Mickey Mouse, for example, has a three-fingered hand to reduce production time.
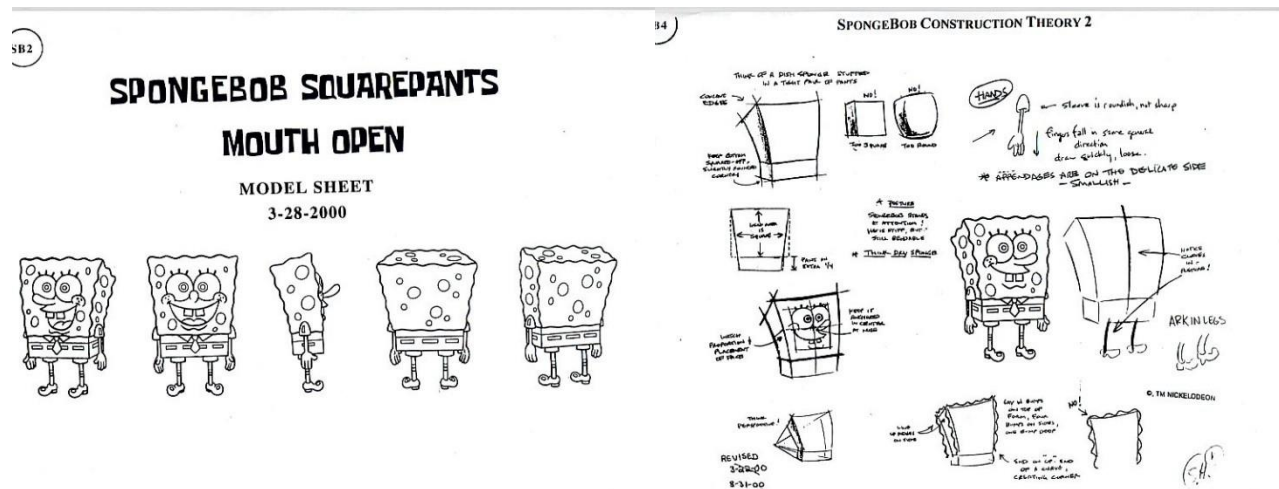
Character Model Sheet

Image retrieved from https://www.traditionalanimation.com/spongebob-squarepants-model-sheets/.

Character model sheets—also known as design sheets, character studies, or simply 'studies'—serve as a crucial reference point for animation and design teams. The original designer can supply the exact visual specs of a character to other animators using a model sheet. This assists in standardizing a character's primary gestures, style, and appearance so that the team can produce a consistent visual style.

However, it is crucial to note that character design sketches are not only for reference. They're used in pitching sessions and with storyboards and animatics, just as concept arts. As a result, they can make or ruin a production.

Model Sheet Types

When drawing characters, concept artists frequently employ a variety of different sorts of sheets:

Character Construction Sheets
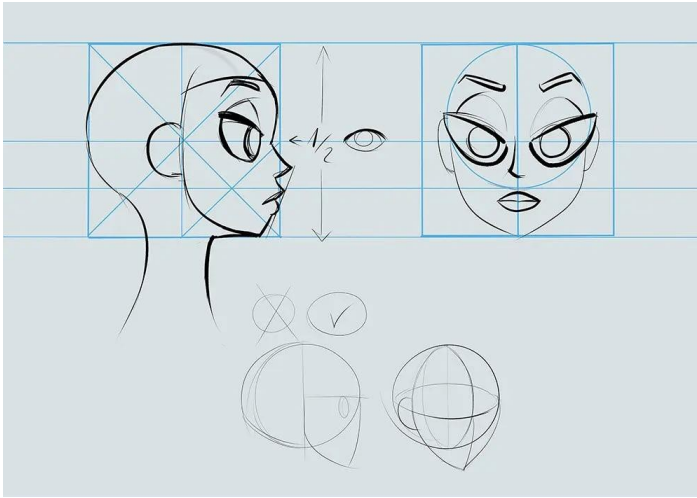
The character construction sheet's goal is to specify the general proportions of the character as well as the directions for building it. They control your character's spatial dimensions and give animators a "how-to" of its basic construction.

Character Turnarounds

Turnaround sheets provide a 360-degree picture of the character. To illustrate a character model sheet or turnaround sheet, sketch your character from three (3) to six (6) different angles. Front view, profile, back view, and three-quarter views are common angles. It ensures uniform specs from every aspect and allows animators to add more layers to their design.

Expression Sheets

A character's expression sheet should include at least the most fundamental emotions and reactions, such as joy, sadness, rage, surprise, and so on. In a larger sense, the animator refers to delving deeper into the character's psychology to establish their character and how they act. Try to include a mix of dramatic and subtle expressions in your illustrations while making an expression sheet.

Pose Sheets/Action Poses

Pose sheets, like expression sheets, demonstrate the types of gestures a character will likely make. These might be useful in providing animators with information on how a character moves based on their personality. Pose sheets enable a significantly broader range of motions to be expressed.

Color Sheets

The usefulness of a character design sheet can be increased by creating a color guide. It can be accomplished by providing a simple key to all of the color swatches used in the character and a full-color depiction of the character. It is extremely useful when passing off a design to a full team of creators because it ensures that all colors remain consistent.

All images retrieved from https://www.clipstudio.net/how-to-draw/archives/164740.

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