

THE

ILLUSTRATORS

Way

Navigating the World of Illustration

Illustration Graduate *HighLight*



Isaac Thaxton
Illustration Graduate of Fall 2022.

He lets the work speak—and it speaks volumes



Some artists command attention with their voices. Others do it with their work. **Isaac Thaxton** is firmly in the second category.

A graduate of **Nossi College of Art & Design**, Isaac is one of those extremely talented illustration alumni whose quiet presence is matched by the power and precision of his artwork. Soft-spoken and humble, he lets the work speak—and it speaks volumes.

Born in Louisiana, Isaac’s artistic path became clear while attending the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts in the Visual Arts Department. It was there, surrounded by other serious young creatives, that he realized art wasn’t just an interest—it was his calling. He knew he wanted to pursue it as a career.

That clarity brought him to Tennessee and to Nossi College of Art, where he earned his degree in Commercial Illustration. At Nossi, Isaac refined not only his technical skill but also his professional focus. His ability to combine artistic sensitivity with practical application quickly set him apart.

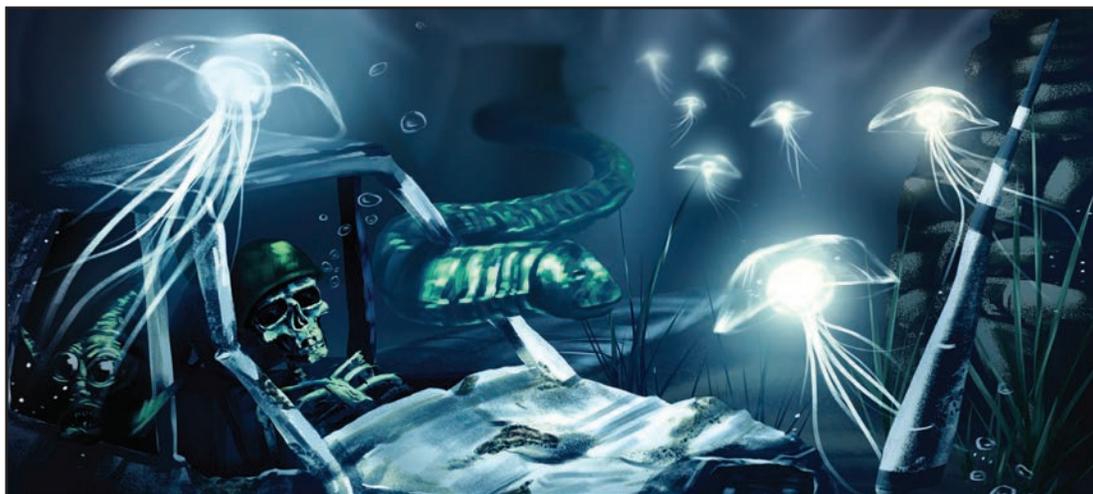
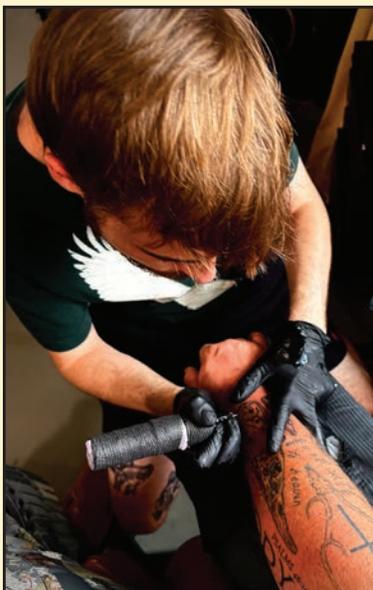
Through Nossi’s industry connections, **Kirk Denney**, Isaac was introduced to Catalyst Design Group, who was looking for someone with both an art background and the willingness to learn CAD. Isaac embraced the challenge. Today, he creates detailed color renderings of potential building and site developments—visual tools that help clients see projects before they are built. His illustrations bridge imagination and structure, transforming technical plans into compelling visual stories.

But his creative journey doesn’t stop at architectural rendering.



On weekends, Isaac pursued another demanding and deeply personal art form: **tattooing**. Mentored by fellow Nossi Illustration graduate Cydnee Cothron—who he met during his time at Nossi—he immersed himself in the world of ink. Tattooing proved to be both incredibly difficult and equally rewarding, requiring discipline, patience, and confidence. It aligned seamlessly with his love for art, while adding the profound responsibility of creating permanent art for others.

Whether rendering future developments for clients, designing intricate tattoos, or creating personal pieces, Isaac’s work reflects intention, craftsmanship, and depth. His quiet demeanor often surprises those who encounter the boldness and sophistication of his art—but that contrast is part of what makes him remarkable.



THE

ILLUSTRATORS' Way

Navigating the World of Illustration

MESSAGE From Mark



Mark Fleming
Illustration Program Director
and instructor since 2004.
mfleming@nossi.edu

The Future of Ai in Illustration:

Your Secret Weapon at Nossi College of Art in 2026, **Ai isn't replacing illustrators—it's supercharging them.** While Nossi illustration students create every piece by hand (**no Ai-generated art allowed**), the college smartly permits Ai for brainstorming, writing, research, and business tasks. This hybrid approach positions you perfectly for an industry craving authentic human work amid a flood of synthetic "slop."

Industry trends show a powerful backlash: audiences and clients are tired of generic Ai outputs and are craving raw, imperfect, emotional illustrations. Hand-drawn styles, organic textures, and imperfection are surging back, with experts noting a rise in searches for human-centered, authentic visuals. Ai excels at speed and exploration, **but it can't match your unique voice, storytelling, or soul.**



Andrew Wolthers, PE, LEED AP
Principal | Senior Project Manager • Catalyst-dg.com

Illustrator's Way is proud to spotlight a leader who is redefining what collaboration looks like between engineering, landscape architecture, and illustration: **Andrew Wolthers, Principal and Senior Project Manager at Catalyst Design Group.**

Catalyst Design Group is an innovative, multidisciplinary firm built on the combined expertise of Planning, Civil Engineering, and Landscape Architecture. Since officially opening its doors in August 2017, the firm has approached development and construction challenges with a deeply collaborative model—blending technical precision with creative problem-solving.



Andrew's journey to founding Catalyst is one of vision, leadership, and bold thinking. Originally from Silver City, New Mexico, he graduated from Northern Arizona University before moving to Nashville in 2004 with his wife—his high school sweetheart. After 13 years of managing, planning, and designing civil engineering projects, Andrew, alongside fellow principals Jack Parker, Jeff Heinze, and Phillip Piercy, launched Catalyst with a shared vision for a better, more collaborative approach to design.

In addition to serving as president of the firm, Andrew manages a wide variety of projects across Middle Tennessee and beyond.

Andrew played basketball at Northern Arizona University under coach Ben Howland, and in 2000, the 15-seeded NAU Lumberjacks nearly upset St. John's in the first round of the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Tournament, falling just short in a 61–56 thriller. That competitive drive and team-centered mindset continue to shape his leadership today.

A New Path for Illustrators

What makes Andrew's story especially relevant to Illustrator's Way is his forward-thinking decision to hire three Illustration graduates from Nossi College of Art—an unconventional move in the architectural and engineering world.



Rather than limiting his hiring to traditional technical roles, Andrew intentionally sought out creative thinkers—visual problem-solvers who could bring conceptual energy and fresh perspective to Catalyst's work. By integrating illustrators into a firm traditionally centered on engineering and landscape architecture, he is helping redefine how visual storytelling, conceptual rendering, and design communication can enhance development projects.

This integration represents something new and significant: illustrators entering professional environments historically dominated by architects and engineers. It signals a broader recognition that illustration is not merely decorative, but strategic—an essential tool for vision casting, client communication, and innovative thinking.

Andrew also serves on the Nossi College of Art Illustration Advisory Board, further strengthening the bridge between education and industry.

On weekends, Andrew can be found spending time with family or traveling with friends to sporting events around the country—a reminder that leadership is not only about professional excellence but also about building strong personal foundations.

As Catalyst continues to grow, so does the opportunity for illustrators to step into new professional spaces—thanks in part to leaders like Andrew Wolthers who are willing to challenge convention and embrace creative collaboration.



THE ILLUSTRATORS' Way

Navigating the World of Illustration

ADOBE PHOTOSHOP SHORTCUTS

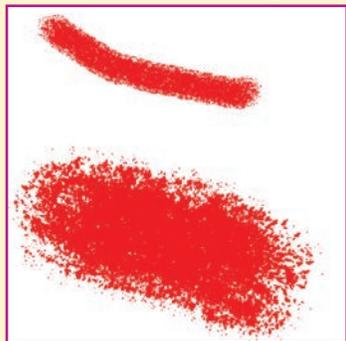


Digital Painting is a must.

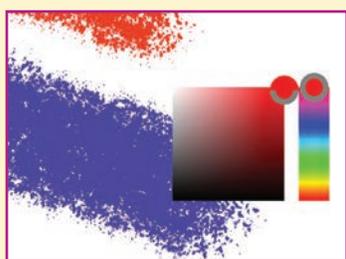
Speed up your paintings with shortcuts and quick resize options.

1. Shortcut B = Brush

2. While brackets will resize the brush, it is faster to hold **Control + Option**, then swipe left/right to resize on the fly.



3. While using a brush tool, **Command + Option + Control (Click)** to bring up the HUD (Heads Up Display).



The HUD (Heads-Up Display) in Photoshop is a, quick-access, on-screen interface that allows you to select the hue, value and saturation directly under your cursor, without moving your mouse to the panels.



Andrew Wolthers, PE, LEED AP
Principal | Senior Project Manager • Catalyst-dg.com

Questions for Andrew about employing illustrators.

What inspired you to hire illustration graduates in a civil engineering and planning firm?

We had a young lady start working with us who had graduated with a graphic design degree, but had begun her career as a CAD technician with another firm. We saw the benefit of how she approached our deliverable process and the attention to detail that someone who comes from an art/graphic design background can bring. So we decided to start broadening our outreach for new production talent into the graphic design world.

What specific value have illustrators added to Catalyst's project workflow?

In addition to their creativity, the ability to sensibly organize information into a receptive deliverable is something that engineers can sometimes overlook. We appreciate our team of professionals who approach our work with an illustration eye!

How have clients responded to having illustrators involved in the design and presentation process?

I doubt our clients really know the background of our construction staff – they just care about things being accurate and easy to understand.

In what ways do illustrators contribute differently than traditional architectural rendering specialists?

Our technicians may come from different backgrounds, including the illustrator world, but all of them undergo rigorous training in the specific AutoCAD software packages that we use to create our deliverables. In this way their illustration skills become an enhancement to their ability as a drafting technician, and makes them more well-rounded than a typical rendering specialist.

ILLUSTRATION INSTRUCTORS



Caleigh Bird
Illustration Instructor
cbird@nossi.edu



Jose Semidei
Illustration Instructor
jsemidei@nossi.edu



Mikal Barker
Illustration Instructor
mbarker@nossi.edu



Mark Fleming
Illustration Program Director
mffleming@nossi.edu



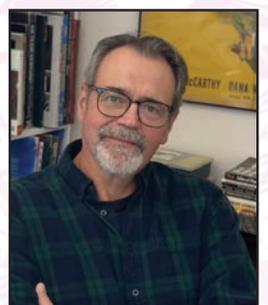
Maureen O'Brien
Illustration Instructor
mobrien@nossi.edu



Grant Tudor
Illustration Instructor
gtudor@nossi.edu



Tracy Ratliff
Illustration Instructor
tratliff@nossi.edu



Laird Ogden
Illustration Instructor
logden@nossi.edu

Our illustration instructors are the guiding forces behind every breakthrough moment in your artistic journey. With a remarkable range of expertise that bridges traditional approach and modern innovation. The foundational elegance of fine arts—precise drawing with pencil and ink, the expressive depth of painting in oils, watercolors, and beyond—while seamlessly transitioning into the dynamic world of digital tools. They excel in graphic design principles that shape compelling visuals, intricate 3D modeling, and motion graphics that bring static ideas to vibrant, flowing life. Their combined years of experience represent countless hours spent honing techniques, experimenting with new mediums, and refining their craft across these diverse disciplines. In every class, they share this wealth of knowledge with clarity and enthusiasm, breaking down complex concepts into approachable steps, demonstrating methods from both classical and cutting-edge perspectives, and providing insightful feedback that helps you grow. Whether you're sketching your first still life, layering colors digitally, rigging a 3D character, or animating a sequence, these dedicated educators create an environment where curiosity thrives, skills sharpen, and your unique voice as an illustrator emerges stronger with every lesson. **Their passion for the art form inspires confidence and creativity in every student fortunate enough to learn from them.**

THE

ILLUSTRATORS' Way

Navigating the World of Illustration

“Even in literature and art, no man who bothers about originality will ever be original: whereas if you simply try to tell the truth (without caring twopence how often it has been told before) you will, nine times out of ten, become original without ever having noticed it.”

— C.S. Lewis

INSTRUCTOR *IN-FOCUS*



Grant Tudor

3D and Animation Instructor since 2024

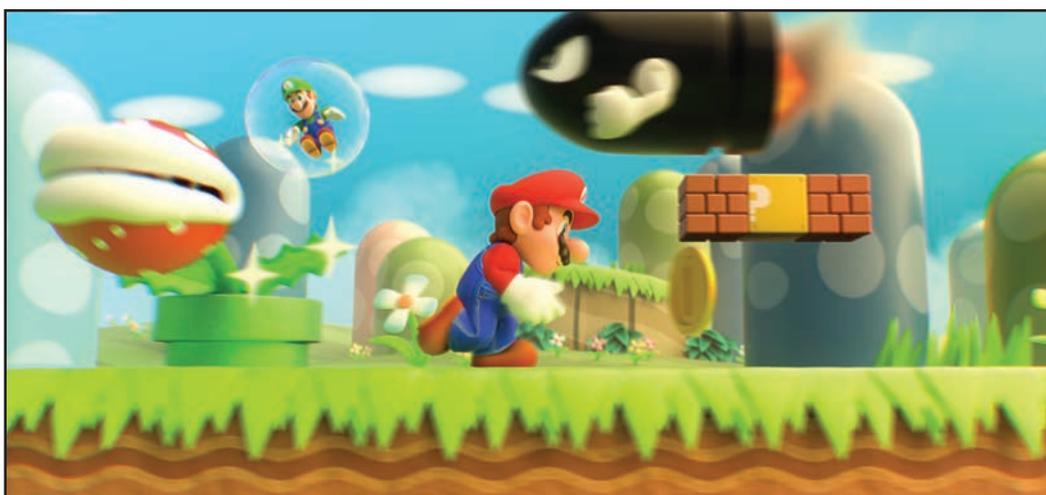
Grant has been making home videos and animations ever since he was a kid. After college, he discovered the 3D software, Blender, and downloaded it on his 2017 Macbook Pro. The program barely worked on Grant’s old high school laptop, and it caused the fan to run so fast that it sounded like an airplane engine. However, that plane eventually took off and helped him launch his new freelance business, which he named “SilverJet Animation”.

Since 2022, he has worked as a 3D artist, motion designer, and video editor, collaborating with creative studios, construction companies, museums, churches, you-tubers, and toy makers. Although most of his clients are construction companies and non-profit organizations, his first client was his friend, Cody, who hired him to make short animations for his music videos. Whatever the project, Grant has a passion for creating compelling videos that help provide clarity and value for his clients.

For the past year and a half, Grant has taught 3D, animation, and motion design courses at Nossi. He loves finding

the best ways to break down complex creative software so that they are fun and comprehensible. In his classes, students don’t just sit and listen, they get hands-on experience following along in the programs that they’re learning. Grant is passionate about empowering students to make the kind of projects that they love, that will help them break into the field they’re interested in.

He aspires to be an instructor that encourages his students to have confidence in their work and speak kindly to themselves. Grant’s reminder for those reading this is to always stay creative, and in all areas of life, enjoy the process!



THE ILLUSTRATORS' Way

Navigating the World of Illustration

SHORTCUTS

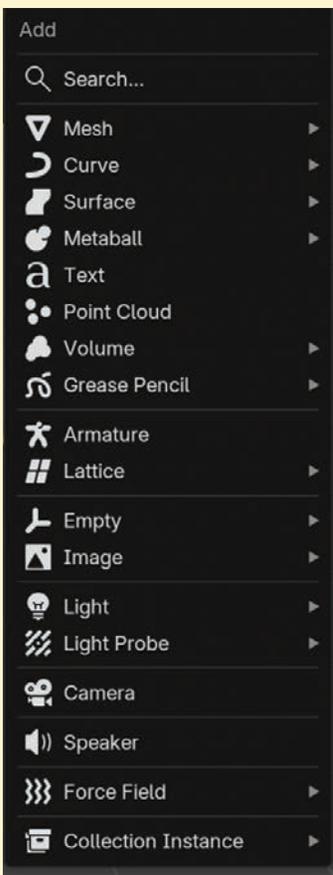


Work smarter not harder.

2 shortcuts to help speed up work flow in Blender.

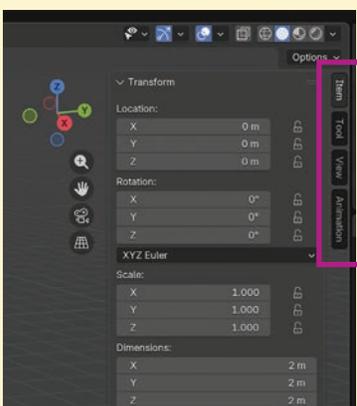
1. Shift + A. This will bring up the **ADD MENU**. So much at your fingertips.

- Allows you to add mesh, lights and so much more.



2. The letter N will opens and closes the **"N-Panel"** on the right side of the **3D Viewport** and other editors.

- This panel provides quick access to item transforms (location, rotation, scale), tool settings, view navigation, and tabs for installed add-ons.



MORE WORK EXAMPLES *Grant Tudor*



THE ILLUSTRATORS' Way

Navigating the World of Illustration

ADOBE INDESIGN SHORTCUTS



SPELL CHECKING is so important.
The time is now to be responsible for the documents you create and make sure the words are all spelled correctly.

1. Use the shortcut Com + i = Spell Check



Under search choose document then click START.

2. Pay attention to the Not in Dictionary section.



If a word is not in the dictionary like the name NOSSI but you know the name is correct then click skip.

OR

Look at the suggested corrections list select your choice it will show in the 'change to' dialog.

Work through the document. When finished click DONE.

Illustration Students Graduating *HighLight*

This section will showcase the works of graduating students during the Spring semester of 2026 featuring *Iroda Abdugofurova, Zoe Dean, Summer Elkins, Emerson Hubble,*

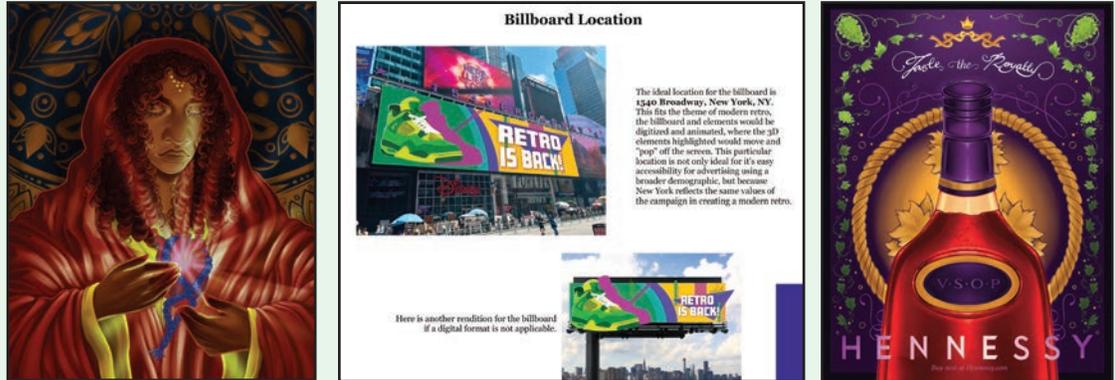
Shane McKinney, Shianne Medina, Jocelynn Price and Julieta Rocha.

Each student has their own style, vision and drive. The portfolios are looking great. Here are some samples of their work.

Iroda Abdugofurova



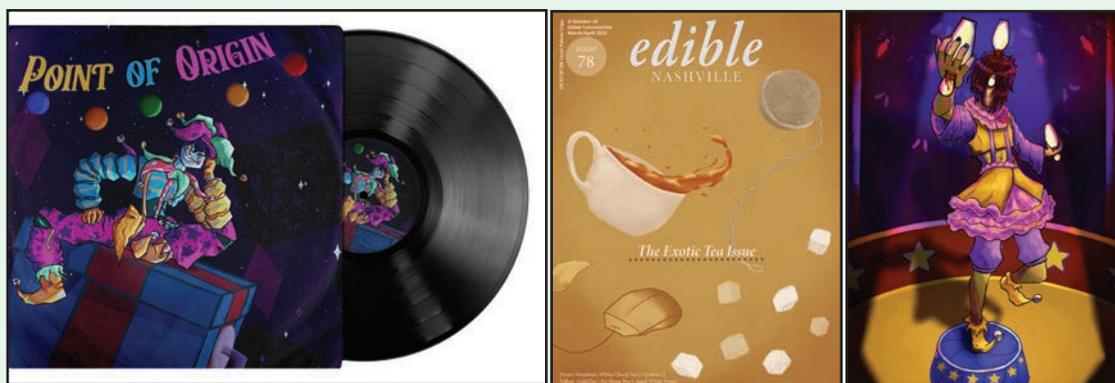
Zoe Dean



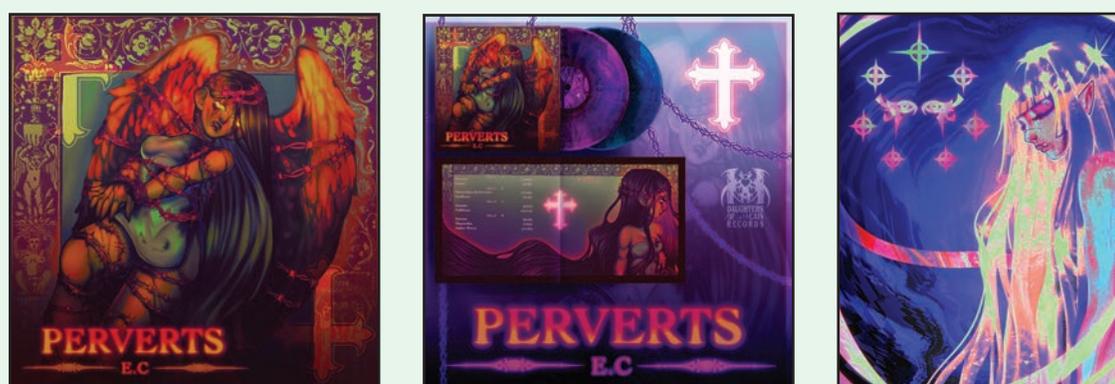
Summer Elkins



Emerson Hubble



Shane McKinney



"No masterpiece was ever created by a lazy artist."
— Salvador Dali

THE ILLUSTRATORS' Way

Navigating the World of Illustration

INSPIRATIONAL QUOTE:

When opportunities come, it's too late to prepare

John Wooden



Caleigh Bird
University of South Carolina,
BFA, MFA,
Adjunct Illustration
Instructor since 2021.
cbird@nossi.edu

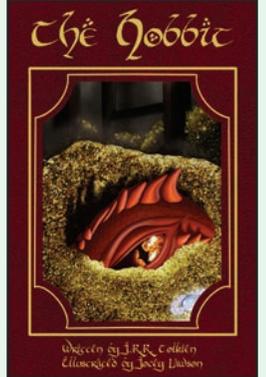
Illustration Students Graduating *HighLight*

Continued.

Shianne Medina



Jocelyne Price



Julieta Rocha



4 Crucial Items Most Oil Painters Don't Know They Need

Oil painting is a rewarding yet demanding medium, and the right accessories can make the difference between frustration and fluid creativity. While many artists focus on brushes, pigments, and canvases, there are a few overlooked tools that dramatically improve workflow, safety, and cost-effectiveness. In particular, the last two items on this list pay for themselves quickly by saving paint, reducing waste, and extending the life of every tube you purchase.

Good Neutral Lighting – Consistent, color-balanced illumination helps you judge values and hues accurately, preventing unwanted shifts in tone that can ruin a painting midway. Neutral light also reduces eye strain during long sessions.

Mahl Stick – This simple wooden or metal rod steadies your hand while you work on fine details, allowing smoother brushstrokes and cleaner edges without the tremor that often comes from holding a brush for extended periods.

Tube Wringer – By squeezing out the remaining paint from tubes, a wringer maximizes pigment usage and eliminates the costly habit of discarding partially used tubes. It's a small investment that quickly recoups its price through saved paint.

Tube Gripper – A tube gripper securely holds paint tube caps while you twist them off, preventing slippage and protecting the cap from damage. This makes opening and resealing tubes much easier and helps keep the threading clear from hard crusty paint.



GOOD NEUTRAL LIGHTING



MAHL STICK



TUBE WRINGER

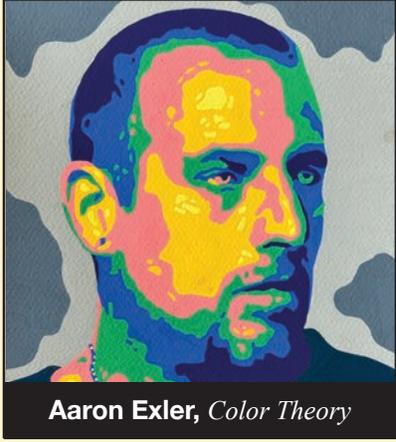


TUBE GRIPPER

THE ILLUSTRATORS' *Way*

Navigating the World of Illustration

Glance *Student Art Work This Semester*



Aaron Exler, *Color Theory*



Miles Dunn, *Color Theory*



Nick Black, *Color Theory*



Olivia Seibel, *Color Theory*



Dusty Cash, *Environments*



Daniel Sloan
Photoshop class.



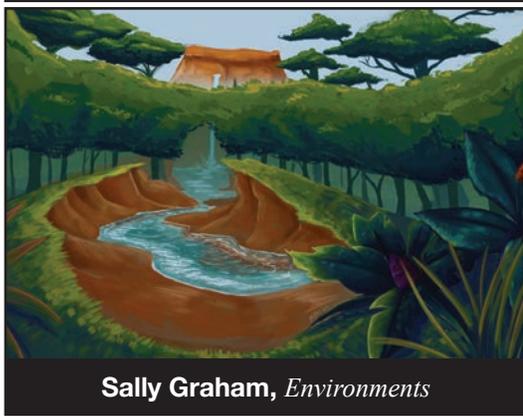
Olivia Seibel, *Photoshop*



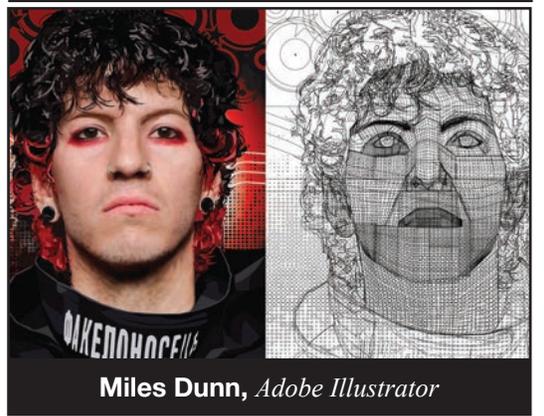
Kate Stone, *Environments*



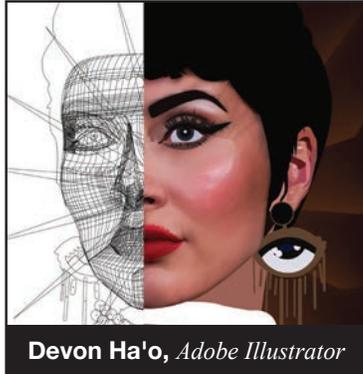
Connor Merlo, *Environments*



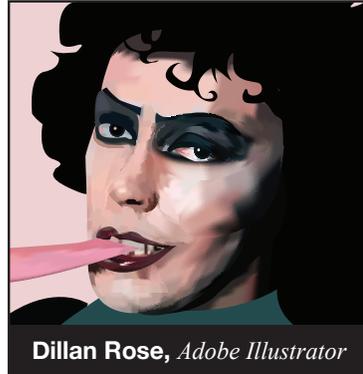
Sally Graham, *Environments*



Miles Dunn, *Adobe Illustrator*



Devon Ha'o, *Adobe Illustrator*



Dillan Rose, *Adobe Illustrator*



Alex Campsey, *Adobe Illustrator*



Sloan King, *Adobe Illustrator*



Ryan Gardenhire, *Illustrator*



Canyon Marsh, *Environments*



Sophia Silva, *Stock Illustration*



Savannah Sheffer, *Stock Illustration*



Isabella Vogley, *Stock Illustration*



THE

ILLUSTRATORS' *Way*

Navigating the World of Illustration

CHILI COOK OFF!

WINNER!



Chef Russell Ransom



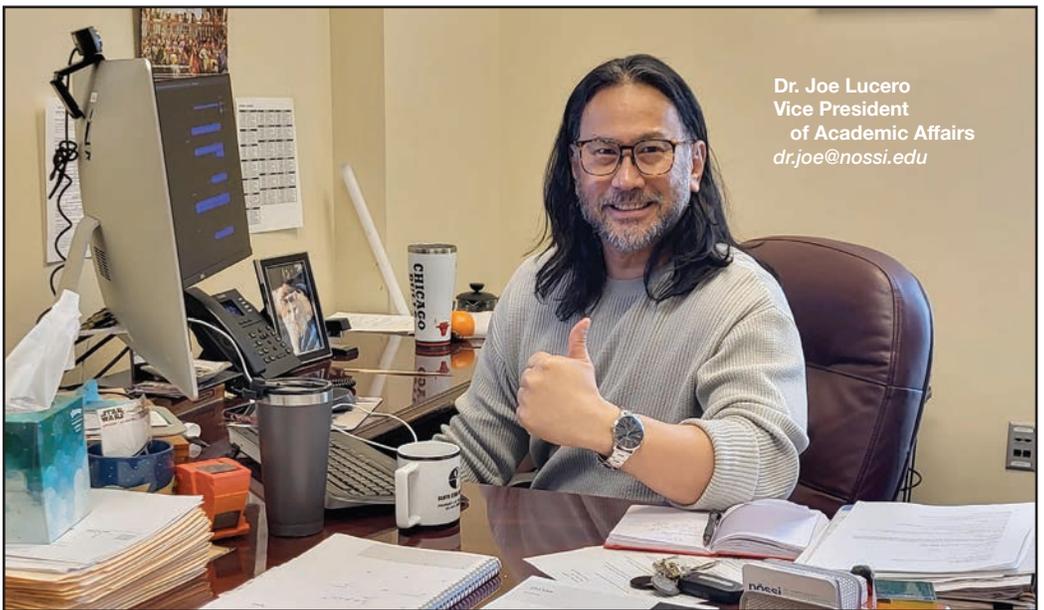
The Trained Eye: *Candid Photos*



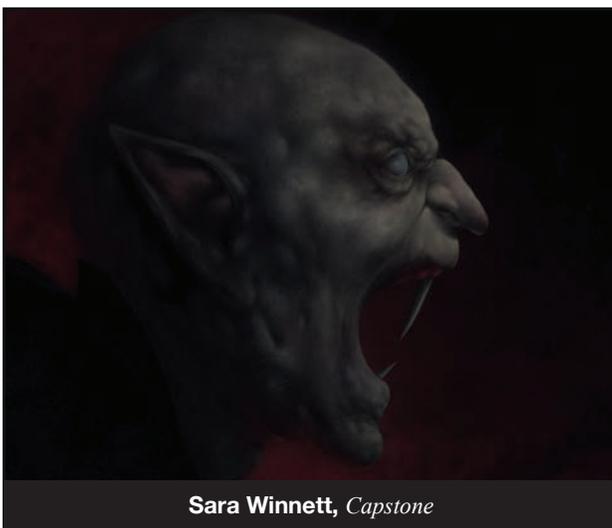
Seniors working hard on their portfolios.



Cyrus Vatandoost
President/CEO
cyrus@nossi.edu

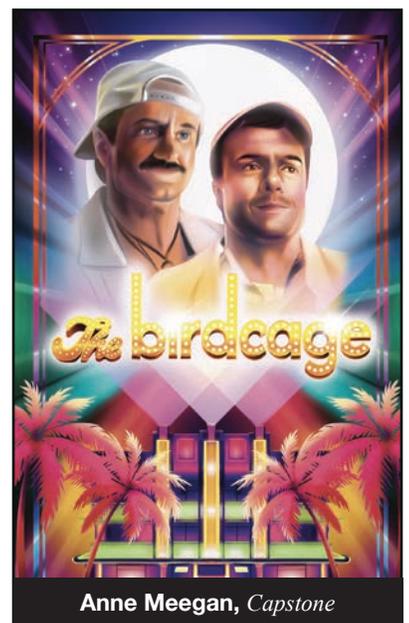


Dr. Joe Lucero
Vice President
of Academic Affairs
dr.joe@nossi.edu



Sara Winnett, Capstone

Have ideas for the newsletter?
Submit them to Mark Fleming at
mflaming@nossi.edu



Anne Meegan, Capstone