KILLER PORTFOLIO TIPS

PRESENTS

ARTSTATION
KILLER PORTFOLIO TIPS

20
PAGES OF ADVICE
FROM LEADING
PRO ARTISTS!

ALSO INSIDE ➤ THE BENEFITS OF ONLINE CHALLENGES ➤ HOW TO GET YOUR DREAM JOB ➤ GET MORE FROM YOUR ARTSTATION ACCOUNT
Welcome

We’re extremely proud to partner with our friends at ArtStation! What I love about ArtStation is the huge number of fantastic artists that showcase their art within its online pages. It’s my first port of call when I’m on the lookout for new talent to feature in ImagineFX. This issue we’ve joined forces to offer advice to help make your art career a more successful one.

In this supplement you’ll get insight into why you should join online challenges, a tips feature on improving your portfolio, an insightful guide into what a recruiter wants from you (and what you need to prep for an interview!) and guidance on getting more out of your ArtStation portfolio. Enjoy!

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Editor of ImagineFX

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Blacksmith
Here’s Rodrigo Gonçalves’ entry for the recent Ancient Civilizations: Lost & Found Challenge.

Keiko and Char (Detail)
Layna Lazar came first in 2016’s 3D Character Art Challenge, and her entry was turned into a figurine!
Challenge yourself!

ArtStation challenges are now bigger than ever, offering a great chance to push yourself and maybe even impress your future boss!

Who can remember the online art forum challenges of old? The weekly, or daily, art briefs that gave burgeoning artists fantastical (sometimes farcical!) themes to fire up the imagination, and the motivation to regularly create art. They were fun, and spoke of a community of artists exploring the possibilities of sci-fi and fantasy art together, spurred on by positive crits and passionate admins.

Nowadays, online art challenges have grown up, along with the artists who used to enter them. ArtStation is at the forefront of these exciting changes and is partnering with legendary institutions such as ILM, gathering unprecedented numbers of entries of exceptional quality. ArtStation co-founder Leo Teo, who pushed online contests a decade ago with CG Challenges, ditched forums for bespoke platforms. Now positive crits still exist, but they’re more likely to come from an art director of one of your favourite films than an enthusiastic admin. Yesterday’s prizes of community kudos have been replaced with the potential of getting your foot in the door to your dream job.

ArtStation magazine editor Sierra Mon is keen to stress that it’s still about the camaraderie between artists. The stakes are higher, but the spirit of this new breed of challenge hasn’t changed much from the old days. “There’s an incredible community associated with our challenges,” says Sierra. “Unlike others where people are just competing for prizes, a lot of the time the prizes in ArtStation are a secondary bonus.

A CHANCE TO HELP OTHERS

“What we see during the process is artists getting engaged in challenging themselves,” she continues. “They’re there to learn and improve, it’s a great chance to network, meet other artists, and there’s a sense they’re all →
artists, from top pro to brand new beginners, throwing themselves at the challenge and trying to level up their game as much as possible,” he says.

And so ArtStation challenges can be taken two ways. You can use them as an exercise in adding to your arsenal of art skills and getting inspired to push your personal art. Or you can see, quite accurately, if you have what it takes to work at digital art as a career. Getting a nice comment from an art director about your composition is one thing, but in this new breed of challenges, you’ve got the chance to show them that you’re a team player, able to work to tight deadlines, produce high-quality work and react effectively to feedback.

“Being provided with a goal and deadlines that are concrete really mirrors the environment that a working artist operates in,” says Randall. “That’s why ArtStation partnering with ILM to host that Star Wars challenge was such encouraging and helping each other. That’s what makes these challenges more than just a skills competition.”

This may be true, but there must be extra motivation when Raphael Lacoste and Sparth are the people looking over your offerings! In ArtStation’s recent challenge Ancient Civilizations: Lost & Found, these two iconic art directors were joined by Hi-Rez’s Randall Mackey to scrutinise the entries.

And for those reading this who feel they may not yet be good enough to enter these huge competitions, Randall suggests that no matter your level, now is always the time to enter if you’re serious about your art. “The best part for me was seeing the different levels of artists, from top pro to brand new beginners, throwing themselves at the challenge and trying to level up their game as much as possible,” he says.

And so ArtStation challenges can be taken two ways. You can use them as an exercise in adding to your arsenal of art skills and getting inspired to push your personal art. Or you can see, quite accurately, if you have what it takes to work at digital art as a career. Getting a nice comment from an art director about your composition is one thing, but in this new breed of challenges, you’ve got the chance to show them that you’re a team player, able to work to tight deadlines, produce high-quality work and react effectively to feedback.

“Being provided with a goal and deadlines that are concrete really mirrors the environment that a working artist operates in,” says Randall. “That’s why ArtStation partnering with ILM to host that Star Wars challenge was such
a big deal. Out of 4,000 or so entrants, only 200 or so made it to the end stages. And that can be an eye-opener to someone just exploring whether or not this is a career for them.”

AN EVOLUTION OF SKILLS
For the established professionals who are linked with these challenges, the benefits are also two-fold. “We were thrilled about this competition as it helped us find new talent that we weren’t yet aware of,” says ILM’s creative director David Nakabayashi. “Most importantly, it gave us the opportunity to remotely mentor people (whether they knew it or not) and help them evolve. There’s nothing more exciting than being able to participate in this important, creative community.”

For Adam Varga, the second place winner of ArtStation’s 2D Environment Art Challenge The Journey, the natural evolution of online competitions should be welcomed by artists. “I feel like challenges are getting more elaborate, which is a good thing,” Adam tells us.

“With ArtStation usership rising there’s so much more content to go through. The judges now like to see that not only can you make a polished image, but that you understand the pipeline to incorporate concepts into final production. It’s good for the industry as a whole and pushes the artists.”

**ATLANTIS**
Leon Tukker envisioned people building their towns among the pillars of a lost civilisation, in his entry to the Ancient Civilizations: Lost & Found challenge.

**SPACE JOURNEY**
Ivan Smirnov used 3D tools to help him design the main figure, in his third-placed entry to 2016’s 2D Character Art Challenge.
Killer portfolio tips

If you want that dream art job, you’ll need to show off your work in the best possible light. We asked industry pros for their portfolio advice.

ArtStation is the leading online platform for showcasing your art. It's used by professional creatives working in the entertainment industries, and developing artists looking to boost their skills and make new contacts.

Once your portfolio work is on the site, not only is it shared with a vibrant community of fellow artists with whom you can connect with and learn from, it’s also seen by potential recruiters looking to hire for their next film, video game, TV or other exciting creative projects.

If you’re familiar with ArtStation, you’ll already know how many talented artists share their work on a daily basis. So how can you make your portfolio stand out? We’ve compiled some of our top portfolio tips from our industry experts, to help you make your portfolio the best it can be, ensuring you get noticed and maybe even hired!

1 ONLY INCLUDE YOUR BEST WORK
While you may think that displaying a large selection of your art might show the variety of tasks you’ve tackled, you’re much better off narrowing it down to a smaller selection of your strongest work. Your portfolio should be representative of your work as an artist, and of the quality of material that you’d produce for a prospective employer or client.

When you’re evaluating which pieces to include, no single piece should be visibly stronger than any other. Choose to display just a handful of masterpieces rather than a large selection of mediocre work. Remember: quality over quantity.

“A portfolio should be a collection of an artist’s best works. They should represent the craft of the artist”
Jakub Rebelka,
freelance illustrator
2 KEEP THE PRESENTATION CLEAN
Put yourself in the place of a recruiter. They review dozens of portfolios, so need to see your art clearly and quickly. All your work should be labelled and presented in an easy-to-read way. Avoid making them flip or click through dozens of pages. The navigation should be concise and logical. Companies aren’t hiring you for your web design skills. To help, you can quickly create a sleek and customisable portfolio website with the ArtStation Pro website builder.

“When I look at a portfolio I want to see quality and a professional presentation”
Satoshi Arakawa, Daybreak Games

3 CUSTOMISE YOUR PORTFOLIO FOR THE JOB
If your dream job is to work at a specific company, study its visual style and then demonstrate that you can replicate it, through a selection of art pieces. This will show that you’re a good fit for its creative team. Your portfolio should show that you understand its world, but that you can also bring something new to the table.

“You need to know where you want to work and your portfolio should represent that desire. You need to show that you can replicate that company’s style” Robert Hodri, id Software
4. NEVER STOP IMPROVING YOUR WORK
There's no level of skill attained where you're “good enough” and should stop practising. So be innovative and push yourself to try something new. This industry is so competitive and the competition will only heighten. Your portfolio isn’t something that should ever be called “finished”. Instead, it needs to continue to grow.

“Art is an endless stair that I’ll climb until I drop. I’ll never be content with my work and I’m happy with that knowledge”
James Cain, full-time digital sculptor

5. AVOID INCLUDING TOO MANY UNFINISHED PIECES
A portfolio featuring lots of works-in-progress might indicate to recruiters that you can’t finish a project within a given timeframe. Make a point of revisiting your unfinished artwork and completing it, to show what you’re fully capable of producing. If you’re having trouble finishing work then try to set yourself some deadlines. Painting to a specific timeframe is key to becoming successful at professional level.

“Finish your projects. You’ll take what you’ve learned and put that knowledge towards new ones”
Layna Lazar, 3D character designer
6 KEEP YOUR PORTFOLIO UPDATED
Your portfolio should always be current and show what you’re capable of doing now. It’s fine to display some of your old favourites if you think they’re still part of your best work, but if you’re continually growing as an artist, you’ll no doubt have some exciting new art to show – and recruiters want to see it! Even if you’ve worked as a professional for some time and want to show some of your older work from big productions, you should also include more recent work.

“I delete my worst works, and relocate the rest to leave the best ones always on the top” Pablo Carpio, freelance concept artist

7 MAKE YOUR PORTFOLIO ACCESSIBLE AND AVAILABLE
To maximise the chances of having your portfolio seen by potential recruiters, make sure that it can be found easily. What good is an amazing portfolio that nobody sees? Include a link to it in your resume and post it across your social media channels. Putting your portfolio on ArtStation makes it more readily accessible to other artists and potential recruiters for browsing.

“The more you work and post, the more you’ll get noticed by the community, art directors and clients, and of course, you’re also getting better all the time!” Milan Nikolic, concept artist
8 BE CONSISTENT
This should apply to the quality and style of your art, and the level of skill on show. This doesn't mean all your work should look the same, but it should have a sense of homogeneity. One of the pinnacles of being recognised as an artist is when somebody can look at an artwork and identify it as yours without seeing your name.

“If you try to get many different kinds of jobs by posting everything you’ve ever painted, it’s going to expose your weakness, too”
Tan Zhi Hui, concept artist and illustrator
9 SHOWCASE YOUR STRENGTHS
While this might seem like a no-brainer, you’ll be surprised how many portfolios are filled with a jumble of work. Even though in practice it’s always fun to experiment and try different things out, your portfolio should demonstrate what you can do very well. Identify the projects and assignments that you excel at and be sure to highlight them in the presentation of your work. For example, if you’re a character artist and you’re particularly good at painting hair, make sure to emphasise that in your portfolio.

“Never show work you’re not proud of”
Bastien Grivet, art director and concept artist

10 INCLUDE WORK IN YOUR PORTFOLIO THAT YOU LOVE DOING
Remember that you’ll likely be hired to do work based on what recruiters saw and liked in your portfolio. Make sure that this is the type of art you’re happy producing day in, day out. You’re better off developing the skills for future projects at a company you’re keen to work for, rather than finding a job that you’re proficient at, but don’t love. And bear in mind that you might be working on these projects for a long time, so you’ll want to be doing something that won’t tire you out!

“Keep doing what you love to do. Be aware of the competition, but try not to let that influence you. Treat your practice tasks like play and it won’t feel like work. This is one of the most important thing for longevity as an artist”
Alex Figini, senior artist, BioWare

Get a pro account today! www.artstation.com/pro
How to get your dream art job today!

Superstar AAA games recruiter Alejandro Rodriguez reveals his winning resume and interview tips to get you ahead of the pack

What should my resume say?
Many applicant-tracking systems enable recruiters to find keywords and apply other filters to a studio’s database. Some firms sort applications depending on previously selected filters, so tailor your resume to the company that you wish to work for. Ask yourself if your resume reads like the job description?

If not, study the job description and personalise your resume to it. Make sure the recruiter doesn’t have to make a leap of faith to understand if you’d be a good fit for the role.

What should I put in my resume for the time I spent working on my portfolio?
I can understand why the “How long did X take you?” can be off-putting, but you should answer truthfully. The person interviewing you wants to quantify how long it will take to complete the work that will be assigned to you.

Focus on efficiency, understanding the tools at your disposal, and ways to shorten your development time without sacrificing quality.

How do you narrow down applicants?
One trait that’s always exciting to a studio is if the artist is always growing and hungry for improvement. I look for candidates who can hit the art style and work well with our culture, and if they have a voice and creativity. I’m also a big fan for candidates that show an understanding of the fundamentals.

What are the deciding factors in choosing the best candidate?
Can their personality fit the studio culture? Can they do what the position will ask of them? Art is generally a collaborative process, so how would they be a valuable addition to the team and be able to add a helpful opinion to the critique and development pipeline?

What mistakes do you regularly see?
The biggest mistake an artist can make is to plateau, or not continue to grow. If it’s clear that you’ve plateaued with the amount of rising talent out there, you’ll most likely be passed up. Work hard and you’ll be rewarded.

“Make sure the recruiter doesn’t have to make a leap of faith to know if you’d be a good fit for the role”
A lack of basic understanding of fundamentals, bad presentation, and artists who don’t act like professionals never helps. Furthermore, recruiters and art leads have to review a large number of candidates in a short amount of time, so we urge you to focus on your best work and enable us to understand your artistic purpose.

How can a candidate impress you in their interview or portfolio?
Have passion, heart and enthusiasm! If you show an employer how interested you are in what they’re creating, it goes a long way. Show an employer that’s where you want to be and that’s exactly what you want to be doing.

What questions can candidates expect to be asked during the interview?
You can be sure that if you’ve made it...

WHAT A RECRUITER WANTS FROM YOU...

- **Art fundamentals**
  Shape, colour, line, design: does the artist’s work follow the general rules of art?

- **Technical execution: 3D**
  Polygon distribution, texture map usage: does it look like it can fit the targeted specs? If it’s fan art, will it fit into the product that it hopes to pay homage to?

- **Technical execution: 2D**
  Is the work clear? Does it fit within the world it’s supposed to be in? Is it done with the thought of it being handed to someone else down the pipeline? For example, does a beauty shot have a guide for a 3D artist?

- **Overall presentation**
  Sometimes great art suffers from bad presentation choices.

- **Overall vision**
  Does the artist show direction and passion for what type of art they want to follow?

- **Passion for their craft**
  Does the artist push themselves in their work?

- **Can they finish projects?**
  Does the artist know how to successfully complete a project?

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**KITE CITY**
An environment concept for Guild Wars 2, created by Ruan Jia.

**NEW LION’S ARCH**
Concept art by Theo Prins, painted for Guild Wars 2.

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**PAUSE FOR THOUGHT**
3D views of a sci-fi character design concept by Gareth Beedie.
past the initial calls and art test, then the studio isn’t too concerned with your actual art skills. Once you’re invited into a studio for an interview, the team will need to determine if you’re a good fit and will want to make sure you’re not impossible to work with.

Sometimes studios will try to throw questions at you that will raise the pressure and back you into a corner, but remember that they aren’t trying to be deliberately mean – it’s mostly to see how you handle yourself in tough situations. So keep your cool!

Here are some questions that you should expect during the interview. What got you into art? What’s your process? What part of the process is your favourite? Least favourite? Do you like to collaborate with other disciplines or are you a solitary artist? Where do you see yourself in five years? Do you work on personal art? What projects

Have you enjoyed the most? Do you know “X” software?

How much does a degree in the field count for getting hired?
In truth, it’s all about your talent and your ability to work with a team. Hiring managers don’t worry too much about a degree when it comes to considering candidates for art roles.

However, you should heed the words of digital sculptor Jon Troy Nickel, for he brings up the main reason for you to have a degree. “The bottom line is that most Visas require professionals to have degrees or the equivalent relevant experience: three years of relevant experience per one year of lacking education. So even if you’re a great artist, and if you’ve done five years of freelancing, or even seven years in-house at a local studio, but you don’t have a degree, then your chances to enter the US, for example, are greatly reduced for a standard H1B Visa.”

Should candidates ask questions?
An interview is a two-way street. Not only is the studio trying to find out if you’re a good fit, but the candidate should also figure out if the studio is right for them. The candidate should be inspired to ask all kinds of questions. What are the present and future plans of
the studio? Can you describe the studio culture, process and day-to-day responsibilities? What are the benefits of working at the studio, such as any opportunities to learn new software?

The candidate should do their homework before an interview. Write down questions, research the studio and what it produces... anything, really! Get excited about the possibility of working there, and the rest will follow.

**How much does location really matter?**

Relocation expenses come out of the company budget and are a cost that can be averted. Therefore, studios usually want to hire local people. Few studios have the budget to relocate large numbers of people into their company.

But the cost can be justified if the team believes in the candidate. If this candidate can help the team like no one else can, then relocation becomes a necessity. So yes, if the candidate is crazy good and a great team fit, then a studio will gladly relocate this person!

**What would be your advice for people with social phobia?**

The creative world is home to some of the most quirky and weirdest people you’ll ever know, and that’s a great thing! We’re all human and have some social anxieties, phobias and other quirks that hinder us from interacting with others at our best. When speaking to a recruiter, just be yourself and don’t let your phobias define you. Be sure to find an inclusive team that will accept you for your talent and personality.

**Apart from obvious HR violations, what’s a sure way to fail the interview?**

- Overconfidence, where the skills don’t match the attitude. This is known as the Dunning–Kruger effect.
- Inability to learn tools and workflows.
- Inability to take on feedback.
- A blatant lack of humility.
- A negative outlook. It’s absolutely fine to have negative experiences, but don’t allow those experiences to shape who you are as a person.

“Once you’re invited into a studio for an interview, the team will need to determine if you’re a good fit”
Get the most from your ArtStation account

You’ve created an ArtStation account – now what? Follow these tips and tricks from the site’s team to make your work stand out...

1 MAKE SURE THAT THERE’S A WAY FOR PEOPLE TO CONTACT YOU
Believe it or not, we often see accounts where artists forget to make it easy to contact them. ArtStation enables you to add ways for people to connect with you, such as a public email address and social networks (Facebook and LinkedIn). It’s also important to set your Hiring preferences, because this goes into the Artist Search engine and enables companies to find you. Note that ArtStation doesn’t publicise the email you use to sign up, to prevent spam.

2 UPLOAD A HEADER IMAGE TO YOUR PROFILE
The header image serves as a good way for people to quickly gauge your art style. It also provides an image that’s shared on social media, so for example, when people share your profile on Facebook, it’ll use the header image as the preview image. If one doesn’t exist, it’ll use the first image in your portfolio and this can lead to odd results! We give advice on the website on how to get a thinner image for the profile header.

3 CREATE A WEBSITE WITH A PRO ACCOUNT
Lots of artists set up a website, but then abandon it. However, they’re happy to post new work to their ArtStation page. Upgrading to an ArtStation Pro account gives you a website builder, where you can create your own portfolio website that’s separate from the ArtStation community. And when you update your ArtStation page, your Pro website is updated, too! You’ll get domain name support, premium themes, customisation options and lots more. You’ll find more details at www.artstation.com/pro.
4 MAKE SURE YOUR PROFILE OR RESUME IS COMPLETE
Artists tend to be very visual and assume that their portfolio speaks for itself. Well, it doesn’t. You need to provide more complete information about yourself. The two main reasons why you want to do this are:

- Employers will read your profile/resume.
- What you put in your resume becomes searchable. So if you list Maya and Nuke as software proficiencies and matte painting as a skill, companies using the Artist Search feature will be able to find you.

When you complete your profile, you appear in the ArtStation search engine and means you can be found easily, as shown here. You may be missing out on a lot of potential work if you haven’t filled out your profile.

“You may be missing out on a lot of potential work if you haven’t filled out your profile”

5 USE YOUR REAL NAME
We recommend that you use your real name rather than an alias. Unless you’ve already found fame, like Sparth, using an alias or artist name just makes you look pretentious or, perhaps even worse, a fake user. We see a number of these accounts with a weird name and no information provided about the artist, and it just doesn’t inspire confidence.

6 INCLUDE THE BREAKDOWNs BEHIND YOUR ART
ArtStation enables you to add many assets to a project. You can upload images, animated GIFs, video from YouTube or Vimeo, Marmoset Viewer files and Sketchfab 3D embeds. Projects with multiple assets are, on average, 54 per cent more popular than projects with a single image. People are interested in seeing how you produced your work. So do yourself a favour and include the WIP shots and breakdowns when publishing your work, like Ben Regimbal has for his Downtown Life image (below).
7 CROP THUMBNAILS CLEVERLY
The thumbnail that appears on the walls of art will encourage people to view your work. Some artists just upload their work and forget to create a decent crop of the artwork. By default, ArtStation will create a square thumbnail by cropping a square from the centre of your image. Check that this works for your image, and if it doesn’t, decide on the crop yourself and ensure that it shows off your work in the best possible way. You can also upload a custom 400x400 square thumbnail.

Don’t be cheeky like this artist (right). The ArtStation team moderates the Trending wall and noticed that this artist created an inappropriate thumbnail. Be professional in how you present your work.

8 SHARE ON SOCIAL NETWORKS
ArtStation is built to be a central portfolio that publishes to other popular social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. When you publish your work on ArtStation, it’ll pop up a dialog box asking you to automatically publish the work to Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn – and you should! By publishing your work to other social networks, you gain more visibility among your peers and potential employers.

Here’s a tip: Make sure to add the link back to the ArtStation project in the share description. Many artists on Facebook are also on ArtStation, and if they click back and Like the project on ArtStation, it’ll help the artwork’s popularity and trending progress.

“By publishing your work to other social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, you gain more visibility among your peers and potential employers”

9 DON’T DUMP ALL YOUR WORK IN A SINGLE PROJECT
Some artists on ArtStation make the mistake of placing a collection of different works into a single project, which then appears as a single square on the main ArtStation wall.

A project should be considered as a single artwork, so you should post breakdowns for that single artwork instead. Then, by posting more artworks, it gives more of your work the chance to trend, appear on people’s activity feeds and to be shared on social media. It also makes your profile look more impressive, because it visibly contains a larger body of work.
10 CONSIDER CATEGORISING YOUR WORK INTO ALBUMS
If you have different art styles, you may want to put them into Albums (folders). ArtStation enables you to create albums where you can put your work. So for example, one album can just be for sketches, while another album can be set aside for finished concepts.

11 POST NEW WORK REGULARLY
The ArtStation team recommends you post new work regularly. While it’s natural to want to do a massive art drop, it means you only have one shot at reaching people. Sometimes that may be necessary, for example on the release of a film you’ve worked on, but in general, posting work regularly helps to increase your follower base and boosts the chance of being seen by potential employers.

12 FOLLOW OTHER ARTISTS
ArtStation operates as a social network and offers a good chance for you to build a community with other artists. Artists often call upon people they know when their studio is hiring, so it’s a good idea to establish those connections. Follow other artists that you like. They’ll get the notifications and may follow you back, too. Don’t be one of those artists who just comes to ArtStation to post work but doesn’t engage – artists can tell easily by seeing how many people you follow.

13 PROVIDE INTELLIGENT FEEDBACK TO FELLOW ARTISTS
Giving constructive and positive feedback to other artists you encounter online is a great way to show your presence in the community. Other artists will read your comments, follow you back and may engage with you. Use ArtStation as the place to post art and host your portfolios, and cultivate the relationships through other means.

But don’t spam the comments. For example, the worst thing you can do is to post, “Hey this looks great! Check out my artwork at [link]”. The team bans accounts that spam comments, and it also makes you look like a jerk. And nobody likes jerks!
ArtStation already offers members an easy way to set up a portfolio website for free. Artwork that you post to ArtStation shows on your website automatically.

However, Pro members benefit from a supercharged account that includes custom domain names, password-protected pages, Pro themes and more, for just $6 a month. See below for all the reasons why you should go Pro!

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“OMG this is so easy to use!”
— Raphael Lacoste
Art director, Ubisoft

“ArtStation Pro helped me increase my network with new clients!”
— Antoine Collignon
Concept designer

“Very cool! It’s like a dream come true for every artist!”
— Jakub Różalski
Concept artist and illustrator

“It’s just so damn pretty “cries””
— Corey Hill
Environment artist

VISIT WWW.ARTSTATION.COM/PRO TODAY!