

Features

Tablet Creators

Infinite artistry at your fingertips

By Evan Davies | Posted: Feb 28th, 2011



Jorge Colombo | Painter

If you ever find yourself in New York City, perhaps grabbing a hot dog at 45th and Broadway, look around and you might see artist Jorge Colombo quietly sketching city life. His work – bold, vibrant and somewhat playful – has even graced the cover of *The New Yorker*.

A former paint-and-canvas type, Colombo now paints on an iPad. And while portability is certainly a plus, it's the tablet's risk-taking quality that most appeals to him. "It makes you slightly braver," he says. "You can try things that are going to be easier to undo if you make a mistake. If I'm doing a painting and decide I want to paint the sky green to see how it feels, I can easily paint it and then just undo, undo, undo."

A minimalist in some respects, Colombo prefers not to use a stylus, opting for a finger instead, and works strictly with the Brushes app. The iPad itself is envisioned as simply a plastic rectangle upon which he works. "It feels a little bit like a child drawing on a fogged-up window," he says. "The technology, sophisticated as it may be, still feels invisible."

But while the iPad might seem invisible, it also affords him a new way to present his work. Using Brushes, he's able to export a QuickTime file containing every brush stroke he's done – essentially a movie documenting his process. In other words, you can see every brush stroke made; how the painting came to be.

"I try to deliver those elements now in a planned way of some sort so that there's a progression that's entertaining," says Colombo. "Given the fact that people are expecting so much more out of interactive images, it seems like a timely thing to do to work on images that progress before your eyes."



Alex McLeod | Visual Artist

Wander through the fantastical landscapes created by Toronto-based visual artist Alex McLeod and you'll pass haunting, crystalline mountains, sugar-coated marshmallow clouds and glass-like forests. Empty worlds frozen in time that have even garnered the attention of Kanye West. And all digitally rendered.

These astoundingly detailed 3D environments have been McLeod's central focus for the last four years, and have followed him through a series of evolving mediums and creative technologies. From paint-and-canvas work to completely digital, McLeod is now painting on his tablet.

His switch to digital came after a chance encounter last year with a fellow artist he met at the Ontario College of Art & Design who came into their digital painting lab showing off the SculptMaster 3D app on his iPhone. "I was familiar with similar programs for desktop computers, where you sculpt and push and pull polygons, but not like this – where you can create using your finger."

The next week he had an iPhone; an iPad soon followed.

"I use it to draw the landforms – mountains, rocks," says McLeod, who also uses his tablet in his job as a graphic designer, drawing and designing "anything from croissants to islands – anything" using, among other apps, SketchBook Pro. Because it's so portable, McLeod's on-the-go studio lets him get down to work – whether it's painting, designing or working on his upcoming children's book – wherever he is.

"In theory I could be 100 percent productive," says McLeod. "Once I found I could produce my artwork while on the streetcar, it was amazing."



Neil Wiernik | Musician

Under the sparse glitches and brooding minor key ambience, a deep bass pulsates rhythmically. Dark and foreboding, it would work well as a contemporary film noir soundtrack. With such dense production value, you'd think the music came from a stack of expensive synths, miles of cable and a shiny laptop. Nope. It was realized entirely on an iPad.

The man behind the sound – an electronic ether inspired by post-dubstep and what's often referred to as Intelligent Dance Music – is Toronto composer and sound designer Neil Wiernik, who records under the name Naw.

Much like other artists such as Damon Albarn, who created an entire Gorillaz album using his iPad, Wiernik's eschewed the perpetual clutter of a studio for the portability of his tablet, with which he uses several different apps to compose music wherever inspiration strikes him.

"You'll be sitting anywhere, any time and you have an idea," says Wiernik. "I can sit down wherever I am – a park, a café, on the bus, which I often do on the way to work, and work on a piece of music."

His enthusiasm for creating on a tablet started after an extended hospital stay. While in isolation, Wiernik needed a creative outlet, so he picked up an iPod touch and soon enough he was handling an iPad. "I've got about 200 music-related apps," says Wiernik. The list includes SonicLife, chipPad and KORG iMS-20. "Instead of plugging a synthesizer into my laptop to record a synth line or using a virtual synth tool, I would take a cable and plug it into my iPad and boot up synth and guitar emulators."

He also began using his tablet as a wireless midi controller in conjunction with Ableton Live software, which he's adopted for live performance and recording. Wiernik is set to release several albums made on his iPad, and uses it while performing. "People come up to me after the show, wanting to know what I was using," he says.