



CHARACTER ARTIST

STARTER PACK





WAIT A SECOND!

This guide and starter pack is made for those who have already previewed our MASTER LIST on entrylvl.ca.

If you haven't already, be sure to check out our Entry Guide on our website and be prepped with loads of information on starting up your job hunt.

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INTRODUCTION

BABETTE NORTON

Artist



Babette Norton is the founder and lead of ENTRY LVL. Within her first year of serious job hunting, she was able to secure a position in concept and 2D art within the games industry, working all-remote with SOUPCORP Games out of Quebec, CA.

Babette seeks to provide entry-level-friendly guidance on how she initially got her start in games, and how she continues to navigate the competitive world of art in games & tech.

Prior to working in the games industry, Babette worked as a freelance artist for several years and in Tokyo as an ALT for two. She has a BSc in Biology & Japanese, and speaks English, French, and Japanese.

Character art is one of those roles that can definitely be split further and further depending on how specific you want to go. At its base, character art is exactly that; creating the ready model or asset of the characters to go in the final game or as a reference/illustrative sheet. These folks work closely with *concept artists*, as they normally work off of those sheets and art to create the final renders. Character artists focus on these core ideas:

- Creating fully posable/full turnarounds of a character
- Ensuring the character artwork is ready to be placed directly into the game engine
- Working off of the concept art to bring texture and final rendering to a piece
- Showing a strong use of shape, colour, and art theories alongside dynamic posing

Personally, I like to think of a character artist as a mixture of illustration and concept art in terms of principles. While 2D character artists are absolutely common in games, often times the term character artist will refer to a 3D role, requesting an engine-ready model of the character (in indie roles, often with a skeleton rig and texture art, too).



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DEFINITION



A full animation turnaround done for a project by Babette Norton



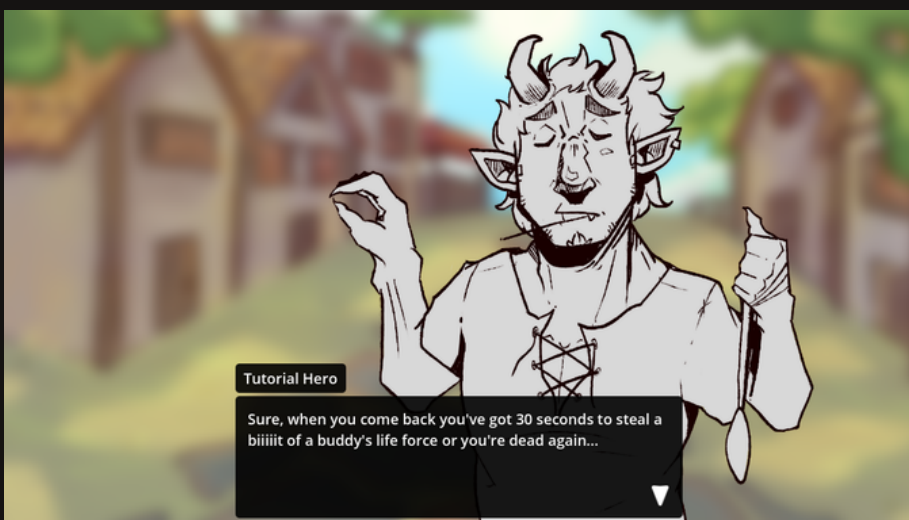
3D game-ready work done by Babette Norton

3 POPULARITY LVL

Character art roles are insanely popular due to the interest in the role and the importance within the game process. It has also been coupled with “race to the bottom” outsourcing, in which artists are underpaid for their 3D work by outsourcing it to lower-pay studios and countries.

In general, **there is also one or so concept artists for several character art roles**, who are moreso expected to replicate the design rather than create one from scratch in AAA studios.

If you stick to only 2D work, the chances of becoming a character artist lower rather significantly. Being able to do a variety of styles of character art can also be beneficial depending on how much of a generalist you want to be in this role.



Sometimes, being a character artist may be overlapped with other roles in an indie studio, like “art generalist”

4 INDUSTRY WAGES

Character art wages range of course depending on the company, location, and seniority/skill level of the individual. However, transparency is important; many roles have negotiable salaries or request you enter your offer first.

Often times a character artist will be paid around minimum wage for entry level positions, which can drastically differ depending on your area (in Canada, it's around 18\$/hr). **It's also not uncommon in this role to expect by-the-model commission rates or flat rates**, so having that on hand (**a personal rate list**) is a great idea!

Wages can also differ depending on if you are doing **2D** or **3D** character work and the complexity of the character. Since 3D character artist positions are more common, we've focused on that for now in terms of pipeline breakdown as well.





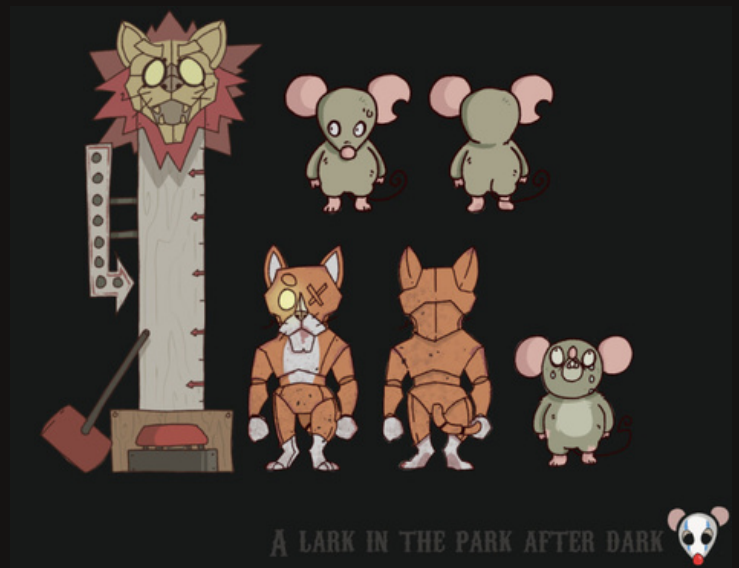
Character art of Fishhook & Friends for ENTRY LVL by Babette Norton

Making a resume is so important when you're applying to roles nowadays, as you have a very limited amount of time to catch a hiring staffs' eye. The bad news is a lot of it is now scanned by AI and doesn't even make it into the hands of a human.

Make sure you are familiar with ATS style resumes and that yours can be printed easily (no all-black!) As an artist, you **must include your portfolio** link here as well. Focus on your software skills & experience doing work on concepts, but it's also great to **include any work you've done as an artist in games**. Nowadays, a lot of companies search for at least 1 shipped title prior to applying, as well as full pipeline knowledge.

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RESUME



Character assets for ALITPAD by Babette Norton

If you haven't shipped a game yet, game jams are a great way to get your foot in the door for concept work as it simulates the job and environment.

Remember to tailor your resume to the position you're going to be given. My internship job was building a fantasy themed game, so I was sure to highlight fantasy themed pieces and involvement in TTRPG projects.

Remember to include keywords for the position too!

TIP:

A shipped title is a released, fully produced game.



NAMEROLE | EMAIL [@GMAIL.COM](mailto:EMAIL@GMAIL.COM)**REFERENCE LINKS & PORTFOLIO**[ITCH.IO](#)[LINKEDIN](#)[PORTFOLIO](#)**HIGHLIGHT OF QUALIFICATIONS****[TECHNICAL SKILLS]**

- Experience in softwares (art programs)
- Experience in management tools or secondary softwares
- Experience in team-based qualities
- Experience in other qualities; what things have you produced/created?

[NON TECHNICAL SKILLS]

- Soft skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Extrapersonal skills

EDUCATION & AWARDS**EDUCATION** – Degree

Place + time

WON AN AWARD? – 1st Place**PROFESSIONAL WORK EXPERIENCE****COMPANY – ROLE (At least 3-5 is solid!)**

YEAR (LOCATION)

- What was the role
- What sort of things did you create/what deliverables?
- Explain your successes and wins in the company
- Explain what you used/how you worked in a team/etc

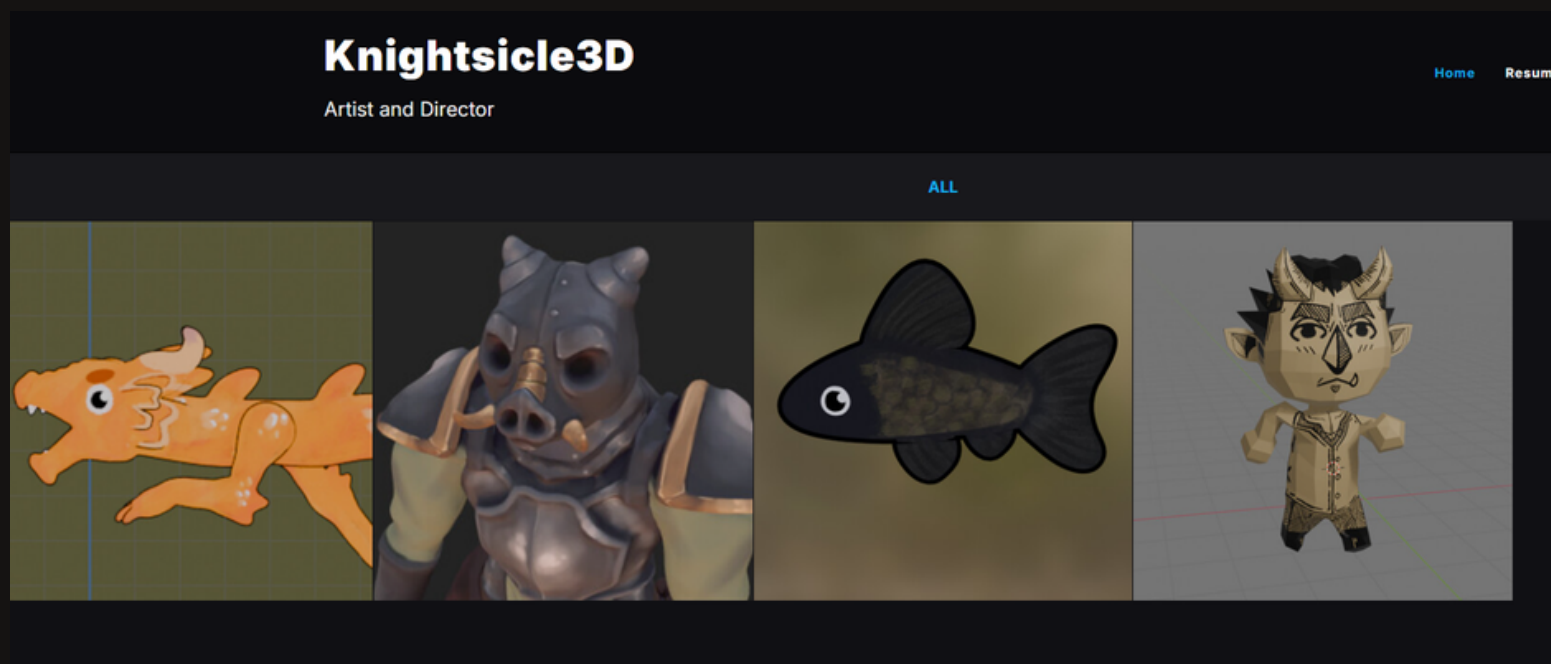
VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE**COMPANY - ROLE**

START - END



7 PORTFOLIO

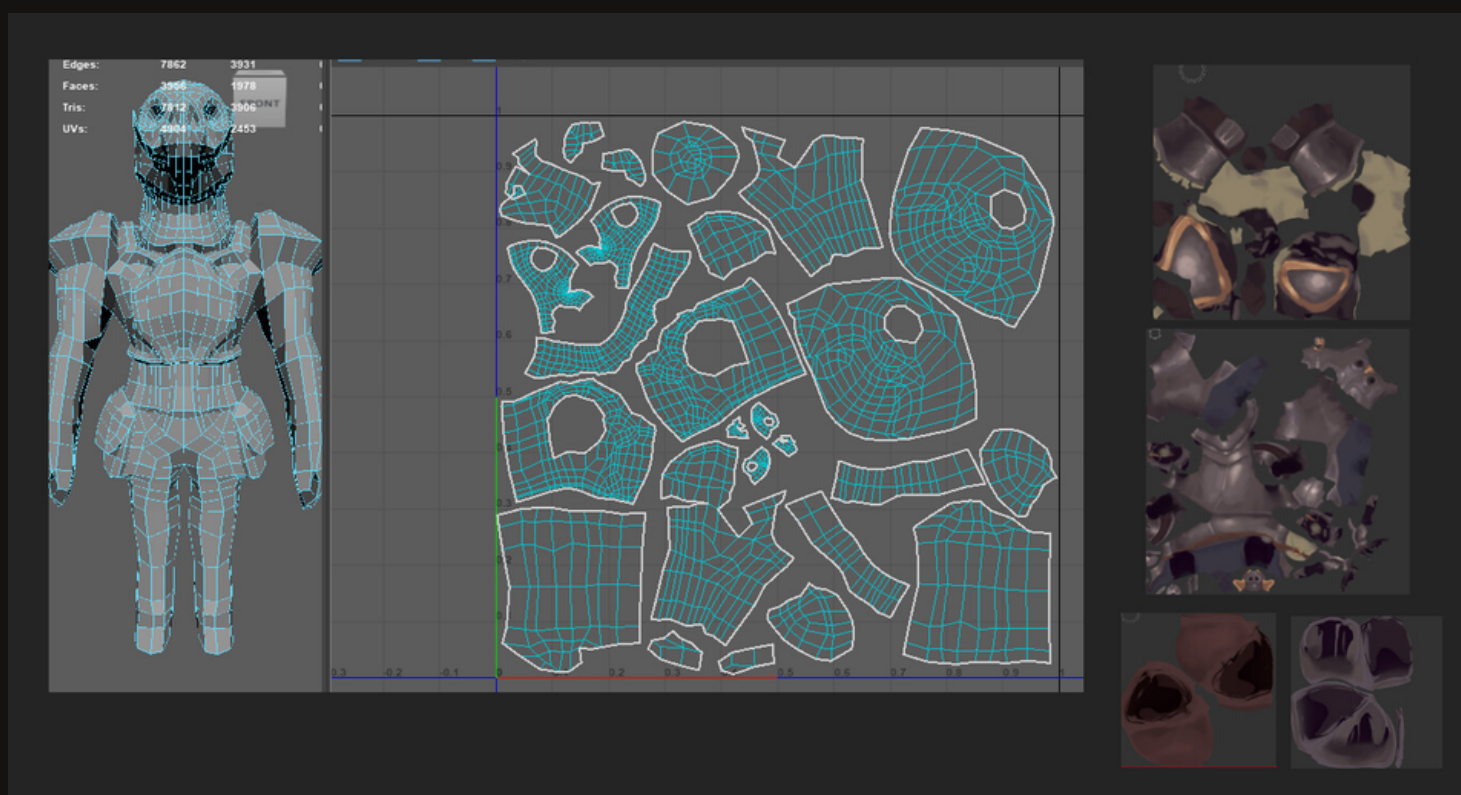
The first thing that's important is to **use ArtStation**. Within the industry, **ArtStation is the standard for portfolio pages**. If you go by a username, include your full name somewhere as well.



Most places nowadays will not require PDF or physical resume copies and prefer links. Your portfolio is also not for works in progress. If possible, you should also **focus of your portfolio pieces to demonstrate skills for the role you're applying for**; if I'm a character artist, pictures of environments and weapons should not dominate my portfolio. This may be good for generalist roles, but companies want to see if your style and technical knowledge is a match.

7 PORTFOLIO

The ideal portfolio for character art is short, sweet, and diverse. In 3D modelling, it is very important to show one if not all pieces' UV and topology to show that you know how to topologize and that you can tailor work to have optimal amounts of polygons.



UV topology and breakdown by Babette Norton

A character artist role in 3D is very pipeline heavy. Make sure to demonstrate that you can **model, bake from low to high poly, texture art, and potentially even rig a skeleton.**

Unlike a lot of roles including concept art, a lot of the time character artists bounce between several different programs in the 3D space. A pipeline is typically used between modelling → baking → topology → painting & rendering points. In general, 3D industry standards for character art are:

- Zbrush
- Maya
- Substance Painter
- Blender

While other softwares may definitely be used, these core 4 are seen almost everywhere, and are globally recognized as the powerhouses of the software. If you don't have access to these softwares or it's just too expensive remember, Blender is 100% free!

Character artists need to be able to integrate into that pipeline seamlessly, alongside a bunch of other artists in that workflow; make sure you **show** this in your portfolio by documenting the steps you take from beginning to final product! We go into the process a little more in the next pages.



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MODELLING

Modelling primary occurs in sculpting programs such as **Blender**, **Zbrush**, or **Maya** (these are the top 3 industry standards). Sculpting involves creating the model for your game or project without creating perfect topology or making it polygon-effective (optimized) right from the get-go.

There are a million ways to sculpt. Many **low-polygon based artists** will import an image and draw polygon by polygon. Some artists will use brushes and standard modelling practices to create stylized art. Others still will use anatomical references and exact information to create hyperrealistic pieces.

In the end, the project will determine your sculpting style. Here's an example of stylistic work below:



Step-by-Step ZBrush Tutorial | Turning 2D Concepts into 3D Characters

534K • 3y ago



Kaktusbaer

<https://kaktusbaer.gumroad.com/> Other Videos: ...

Step-By-Step Zbrush Tutorial | Turning 2D Concepts into 3D characters by Kaktusbaer



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BAKING

Baking is essentially transferring the high-end details of your final sculpt onto a **lower poly mesh** that you have created. This optimizes the sculpt by including way more detail despite not having to load a billion polygons onto your game engine at once!

Baking is also integral to making sure your computer or PC doesn't crash while you are working. Importing a high-poly model into a texture or paint program may crash it or lead to loading issues. It's much more efficient to import a lower poly model.

We recommend using a tutorial like the one below to understand baking a little bit better. This will also give you a nice introduction to normal maps and UV layers, and how they impact your sculpt.



Maya Tutorial - How to Bake Normal Maps from High Poly to Low Poly
102K • 4y ago

Figura

This is one way to make a Normal map, I prefer other more modern methods like Substance Painter or M...

4 chapters Introduction to baking | Preparing the scene | Configuring transfer maps | Baking

*Maya Tutorial - How to Bake Normal Maps from High Poly to Low Poly
by Figura*



10 RETOPOLOGY

If you unravel your sculpt, it's made up of thousands if not millions of tiny 2D shapes known as polygons. Retopology is an automatic feature in many programs, but it can be finnickier at best and downright awful at worst.

Most of the time, it is recommended to create a hand-drawn retopology in order to minimize artifacting (errors) or polygon overlap/UV issues.

Save yourself the hassle and do it correctly now in order to save yourself from a world of hurt in the future. **A lot of modern studios also want to SEE your UV maps and outlines**, which will be based on your retopology (just unravelled onto a 2D plane).



Retopology for Beginners in Maya
496K • 8y ago



FlippedNormals ✓

In this Maya modelling tutorial, learn how to get star

8 chapters Introduction to retopology

Retopology for beginners in Maya by FlippedNormals



Painting and texturing in something like **Substance Painter** or **Marmoset** is standard, as well as jack-of-trades programs like **Blender**. In the end, it really does depend on your comfort and money. Painting and texturing can be done in a variety of ways, from superimposing direct images of textures to hand-painted styles. Sometimes, you may even paint your own normal maps to give texture to a piece.

Understanding that there are multiple layers, including Ambient Occlusion mapping, Normal mapping, Metallicism, and standard Paint Layers is crucial to understanding how they interplay to produce the final product. Below, we've included a great video example on how stylized wood textures are made for a sign.



HOW I texture STYLIZED WOOD in SUBSTANCE PAINTER

87K • 3y ago



Stylized Schools

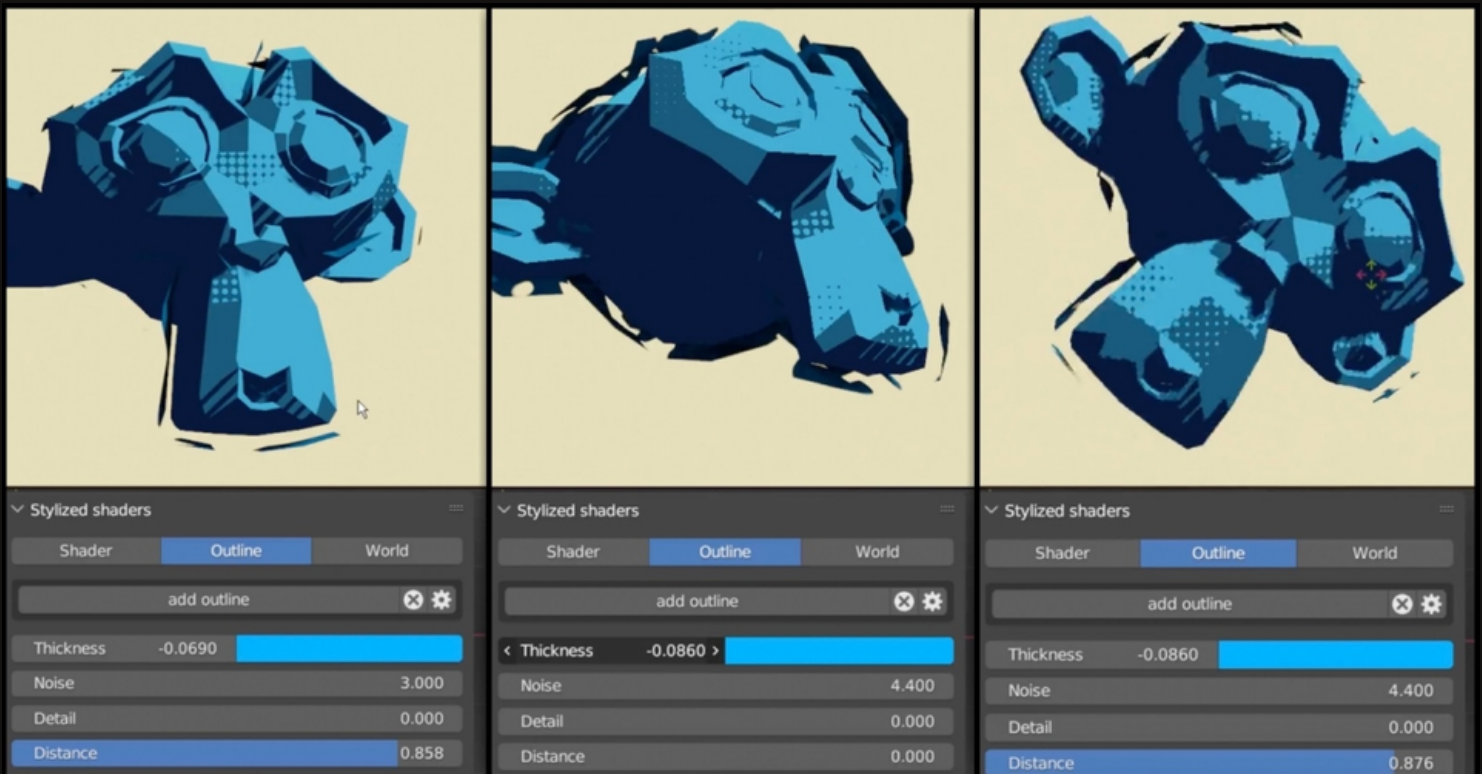
My Artstation: <https://www.artstation.com/jakobson> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/Jacobi>

HOW I texture STYLIZED WOOD in SUBSTANCE PAINTER by Stylized Schools



12 AND MORE?

And you'd think that's it, but we're really not even scratching the surface. We won't go into it ALL, but there's additional shaders and nodes you can use to alter the look of your painting layers, coupled with lighting and dynamics from the game engine itself.



An example of a stylized shader for Blender by Benjamin MacBain Blog

It's a bit of a cheap cop-out, but in scenarios like these google and youtube really are your friend. There's also a lot of free-use content out there too to help take your work to the next level!

Networking as a character artist will largely be the same as networking in other game industry roles.

Networking is the best way to get an industry career, but is so much more than friending everyone you can on LinkedIn.

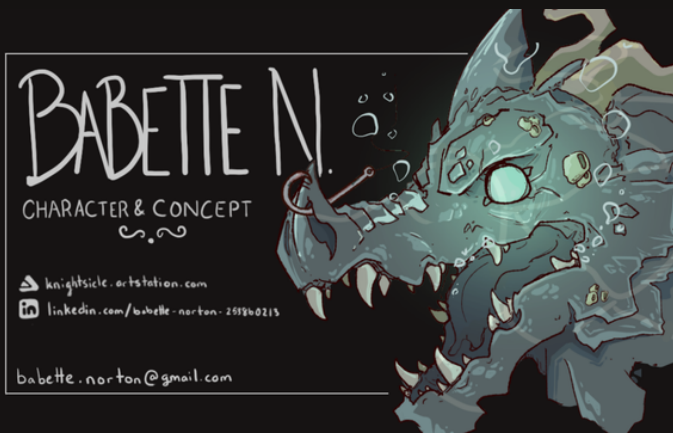
Networking should be much more than trying to get someone to refer you to a job. Especially in person, this comes across as insincere, pushy, and oftentimes leaves the mood sour. You obviously want to showcase your skills, but you should be trying to **meet colleagues and industry folks**, not finding a reference.

While many struggle with social anxieties, unfortunately I heavily encourage making the first move to conversations.

Of course, if you can afford it B2B events are your best shot at networking. In Canada, **XP Summit** holds 4 major events each year. While these may be costly, raffles routinely held by folks like **AMIR SATVAT** can help you get a ticket. In total, I've had all 4 of my networking B2B events compensated by professional giveaways.



Oddly enough, networking tools still include the good old fashioned **business card**. Both in Tokyo Japan and in Canada I carried business cards with me to events and was able to exchange them with both indie developers and teams and full companies and recruiting agents.



My most recent and past business cards!

As a character artist, I always recommend **keeping your art visible and highlighted**. I routinely get positive comments about my cards because there is my own art front and center on them.

While QR codes are common, **always include your information/username somewhere else** as well, as some people are still wary of QR due to possible virus sharing.

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PRO EXAMPLES



Mechanist Games character works by Graft Studio



OVERWATCH 2

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BLIZZARD
ENTERTAINMENT

Mauga Port-De-Paix Skin by DragonFly Studio via Artstation

Similar to networking, job hunting is largely the same as a concept artist to the rest of the industry's roles. **LinkedIn** often posts positions that are great for indie or AAA companies, but be wary of too-good-to-be-true offers and scams.

Bonuses of LinkedIn is that it often displays when your resume has been downloaded and viewed. It also allows you to view staff members of the company you're applying to and connect.

Workwithindies and **Hitmarker** are all great online job application tools as well.

If possible, **NEVER** take a "test" that is unpaid. Oftentimes companies will require an "art evaluation" as part of the interview. Your work should be paid, even if you do not secure the position, as you are spending time and effort on a potentially NDA piece.

Art positions like character art is being gradually overtaken by AI as of 2025, or outsourced to a "race to the bottom" lowest price. As mentioned before, **we highly encourage artists to be open to not only other art roles within games, but also open to non-games industry jobs** (especially as a starting point and resume booster).



A.

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B. NOTE ON AI



ENTRY LVL is against the use of generative AI in games.