

{PROFILE}



Rowan Dodds

# Rowan Dodds

With a great deal of technical skill, Rowan's digital artworks range from painterly, realistic to - at their most simple form - pixels! This talented artist shares his working history and art process with Outline.

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**Outline:** Have you always planned to be an artist/illustrator? What was your first job in the field?

**Rowan:** Sort of. In school I was strongly drawn to both art and computing, and found it hard to choose between the two. I ended up choosing to pursue art and illustration and was extremely glad I could eventually combine my two passions when computers finally gained the power to compete with the finish of traditional illustration. I've been working digitally for well over a decade and these days the entire process is done on a computer, from initial thumbnails and sketches to the final finished piece.

My first full-time job was as a Studio Junior at Young & Rubicam Advertising when I was 17 years old (I was offered the job when in my first year of TAFE). They got me when I was young, eager and willing to work 16 hour days for peanuts, and I got the experience of working with some of the biggest brands in the country while learning firsthand from some of the most talented & skilled illustrators and retouchers around, so we both did really well out of it.

**Outline:** Could you tell us about your business, Inksplat? How much of your work is design work vs retouching vs illustration - or is there a bit of all for most projects?

**Rowan:** I decided to move on from Young & Rubicam after 7 years (by then I'd learnt about all I could there and it became less challenging) and set myself up as a freelancer working from a home studio, operating as Inksplat Studios. It was a very scary step for me as I had no idea if I'd get enough work to make ends meet, but it ended up being the best move I've ever made. There's nothing like being your own boss and being in charge of the sort of work you do, the hours you keep, and which projects you decide to take on.

The sort of work I do varies a lot, depending partly on what sort of projects I decide to chase/create for myself, and partly on what ends up coming my way through my industry contacts. What I like most of all is the variety and the fact that I'm rarely doing the same thing twice in the same way. It keeps me on my toes and keeps me excited

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about what I do. Often I find there is an element of all 3 disciplines to most of the projects I work on as the skills and software involved are all so intimately connected.

**Outline:** Could you share with us some of your favourite projects to date?

There have been a lot of really fun projects over the years (it's been over 10 years since I set up Inksplat) Last year I got to illustrate a really fun set of anime characters for a caravan that toured outback Aboriginal settlements promoting healthy living and eating choices. I always prefer working on projects that are attempting to do some good in the world whenever possible, rather than just trying to sell more products to people.

**Outline:** We'd love to hear of the process you use to create your detailed work, e.g. the stunning iceberg. How long do your works typically take? What mediums do you use?

**Rowan:** The process I use changes for each job. As all of them are so different the process really needs to be tailored to the needs of each client and project. They can take anywhere from 30minutes to a month to complete, with projects normally taking a few days or weeks on

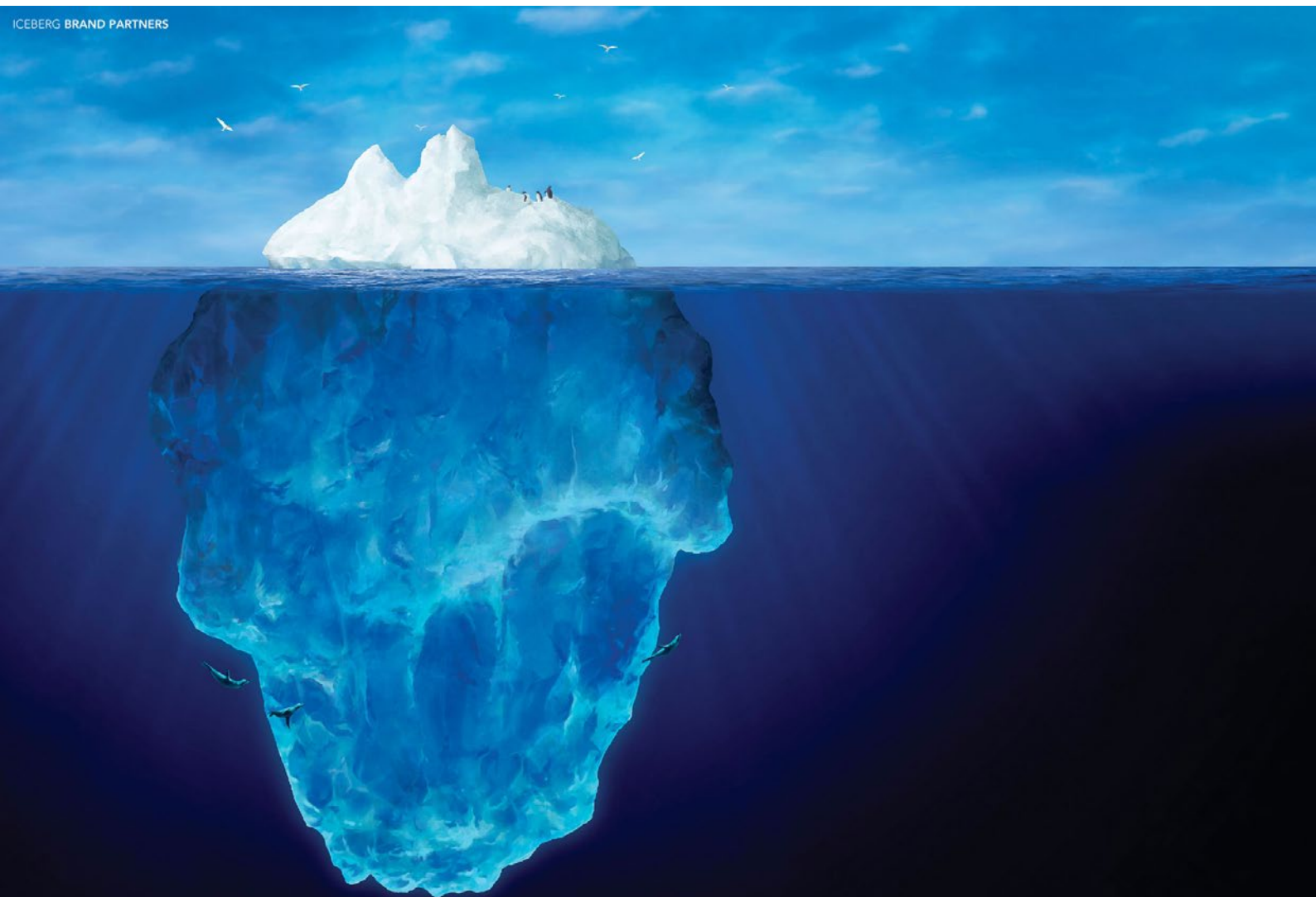
average.

All of my commercial work these days is produced digitally, even the initial sketches and scribbles. I now use a Wacom Cintiq which makes the whole process so much easier and faster (not to mention more fun!), but at the time of illustrating the Iceberg poster I just had a normal Wacom attached to a laptop. I spent around two weeks on that project, which was lovely and relaxing as it's rare to get that amount of time to really get into and concentrate on an illustration, it's textures and overall feel. The iceberg texture was painted in Corel Painter and then taken into Photoshop for colour tweaking and illustration of the little animals interacting with it. I find each program is better in certain areas and tend to jump files between them to take advantage of the best bits of each.

**Outline:** What is the key software or materials artists working in a realistic style typically use - or does each artist usually develop their own mix of programs and techniques? Do you find the technology is changing quickly?

**Rowan:** I find that while each artist really develops their own preferred workflow, everyone seems to use Adobe Photoshop at some stage in their process. Whether they are initially rendering the image in a 3D program, painting

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them by hand or in a program like Painter, ArtRage or even painting the image or making a montage of existing image elements in Photoshop itself, images almost always go through Photoshop for final tweaking and file preparation (with the possible exception of vector-based illustrations).

The technology is always changing and developing and I really love that part of it – it makes things possible today that I could only dream about 5 years ago and the changing landscape of the industry means you never get the chance to get bored with it.

**Outline:** On the flip side of creating detailed work - I love the pixel pals on your Facebook page! Could you tell us about this project and how you interpreted your characters to a few colours and squares?!

Well, those image actually developed just by procrastinating on another job. While waiting for inspiration on a larger project, I thought I'd mess around with trying to make a retro-pixel version of myself and a few friends ... and it soon turned into a bit of an epic collection of old video-game inspired portraits. The challenge of making someone instantly recognisable by only using a few coloured squares was a lot of fun and quite a refreshing change from the detailed work I usually do.

**Outline:** How do you find the illustration/art community in Adelaide? Are there any places/people/galleries you visit often?

**Rowan:** I find the local community incredibly positive and supportive and they have been a huge help to me in my career, especially when first going solo and having to work out how to deal with clients, find new projects and even how to charge properly for my work. Specifically, I owe a

huge debt to the SA Illustrators Australia president Harry Slaghekke for his help and advice, and try to pay back the favour whenever he needs advice on anything technical or software related.

I don't tend to get out to galleries nearly as much as I should. These days I do most of my browsing of inspirational work online as it's so convenient and you have access to the global illustration community at your fingertips. It's often the easiest way to find other people who work in a similar way to yourself and come across different ideas and perspectives on how to approach things.

Unless I'm searching for something specific, most of my exposure to new work, and even interaction with other illustrators happens over Facebook these days. Anyone out there who is interested in illustration or keeping up with my work, please feel free to send a friend request: [www.facebook.com/inksplat](http://www.facebook.com/inksplat)

**Outline:** What projects are you working on currently, or have planned in the pipeline that you'd like to share?

**Rowan:** Lets see ... tonight I'm working on an illustrated wallpaper-style design for a fashion store, re-interpreting the illustration for the hero character of a liquor brand, sketching up some cute animal characters for a third company and retouching a photograph of flowing, printed silk for some packaging (which is why I'm writing out these interview responses at almost 2am ... it's the only spare time I have)

Most of my work goes like this, where I'm working on multiple confidential projects at once and by the time they're made public I've usually forgotten about them as I've done so many new things in between. It's a bit chaotic,





but keeps me busy and off the streets.

With my personal work, I've been creating a lot of iPad-based sketches recently (*see above images - Ed*), working out ways to use the tablet as a mobile digital illustration sketchpad for quick life drawings as well as a few more considered pieces. (and have actually found a couple of proper illustration commissions that worked best initially sketched in the iPad as well)

I've also taken some time off this year to learn oil painting, which is very challenging but can produce some unique results that are just impossible digitally. I'm quite lucky in that the process I use for my digital painting is based off old oil-painting theory, so a lot of the skills I've been working on over the last decade are translating back to the real world relatively successfully (though I'm still searching

for the undo button on my canvas). I'd like to say that I'm working towards having an exhibition of some sort in the near future, but that would require having a lot more spare time to work on personal artwork than I currently have up my sleeves. Like all things though, it's just a matter of balance and when the creative urge gets strong enough I'm sure I'll find the time.

Until then I'm just going to keep experimenting, working, changing and developing, and see where life takes me. ●

**{▶CLICK!} Rowan Dodds**

Website <http://www.inksplat.net>

