

YOGA FOR THE MIND

Urban Artist

A MAGAZINE OF BALANCE & SELF EXPRESSION



Illustrating Imagination: The Creative Minds Behind the Art

MIKE BUTKUS

“I’d Love to Peek Into Your Brain.”

VANESSA BRANTLEY-NEWTON

The Magic of Colors

SELINA ALKO

The Thread of Life

The Future is Drawn

Illustrators Weigh In on AI’s
Impact on Illustration

by Veronica Stanley -Hooper



**Mad
Monster
Bash**

APRIL -JUNE 2025

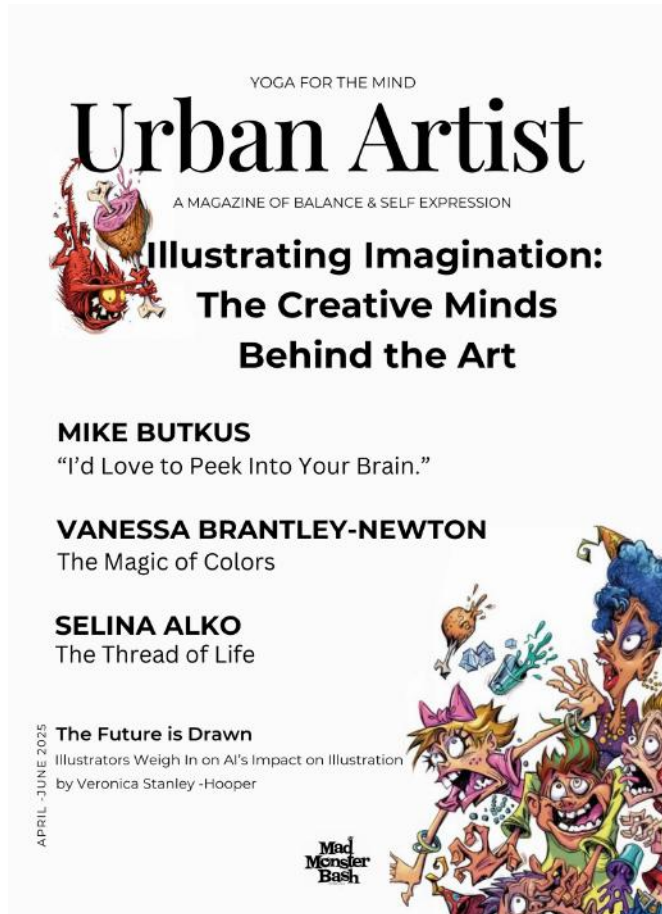
Cover
Illustrator Mike Butkus
Mad Monster Bash
Game illustration

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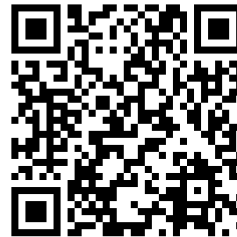
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Join Urban Artist Magazine while we sit down to discuss what its like to take on illustration as a career and designing new Games!

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ILLUSTRATOR VANESSA BRANTLEY-NEWTON THE MAGIC OF COLORS

Award-winning New York Times bestselling children's book illustrator Vanessa Brantley-Newton.

Vanessa has illustrated and written over 80 children's books. Urban Artist sat down with Vanessa and learned what it takes to arrive in this field.

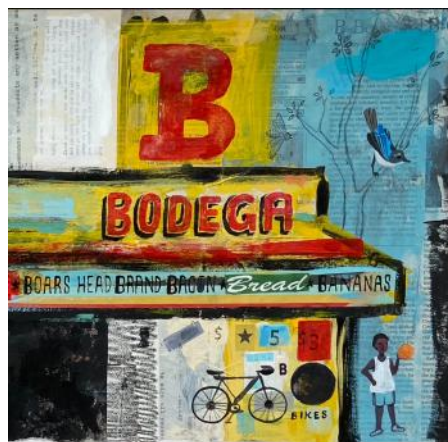
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ILLUSTRATOR SELINA ALKO THE THREAD OF LIFE

Award-winning writer /illustrator Selina Alko captures the diversity of life in her illustrations and writings. Urban Artist discusses the work of Selina Alko

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Art Lens

THE FUTURE IS DRAWN Illustrators Weigh In on AI's Impact on Illustration

by Veronica Stanley-Hooper

A look at how artists see the use of AI and how it fits in their world.

48



"Surf" by Cornelis Botke, Oil on board 10x12

Join Santa Paula Art Museum's 15th Anniversary Gala on **Saturday, April 5, 2025**, from **4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.** for an afternoon of art, live music, a petite art auction, and the presentation of the 2025 Mary Orcutt Henderson Visionary Award to David Schwabauer in recognition of his extraordinary vision and support of the Santa Paula Art Museum, Drinks and Hors d'oeuvres will be served. Cocktail attire is encouraged.

Tickets to the gala are \$125 per person, and all proceeds benefit the Santa Paula Art Museum and its community arts programs. Advance ticket purchase is recommended.

Visit the Santa Paula Art Museum website for tickets.
<https://www.santapaulaartmuseum.org/event/anniversary-gala-2025>

Santa Paula Art Museum
117 N 10th St, Santa Paula, CA 93060

Hours:
Wednesday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m. - 4.00 p.m.,
Sunday 12:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Closed Monday and Tuesday

Artist Sandy Fisher

Oil Painting Demonstration:



Reflections On The Nestucca River

In conjunction with the current exhibition, "**A Brush with Nature,**" at the Santa Paula Art Museum, Santa Clarita artist Sandy Fisher will demonstrate her oil painting process inside the Museum on **Saturday, April 12, 2025**. The **demo will begin at 2 PM** and guests will be able to observe and chat with Fisher as she paints. **The demonstration is included with regular museum admission, which is \$4 for adults, \$3 for seniors, and free for SPAM members, students, and children. Reservations are not required.**

Sandy Fisher

captures the magic of the landscape and flora with a sense of honesty and nuanced layers of color using strong compositional elements to provide a solid foundation to her artwork.

You don't want to miss seeing her in action!

For further information please call: (805) 525-5554 or visit
<https://www.santapaulaartmuseum.org/event/a-brush-with-nature>

From the Editor

"...Art is not an indulgence at any time, but a way of forging hope, asserting our humanity, undermining limited perspectives, and transforming the story we live in."

-Jan Fortune

In the darkest of times, art is not an indulgence. Medium - Feb 21, 2020

Creating this issue was challenging. I have been so distracted by much of the news lately that my focus has been elsewhere, and I realized I could not let that happen. I had to stay focused on my art and the writing of this magazine, and I realized that my creativity was bringing me to a peaceful, mindful space.

Talking with these astounding artists in this issue of Urban Artist, I was inspired to move forward and find that space where I could create. After all, isn't that what we do as artists? We create beauty from our thoughts and emotions of the world around us. We make things that bring joy to all.

In this issue, three talented award-winning authors/ illustrators are all powerhouse hitters in their field. How lucky I was to get interviews with these amazing artists.

First-up award-winning artist **Mike Butkus** has been in this industry for over 20 years. You have seen his work in more television shows, games, and movie posters than you realize.

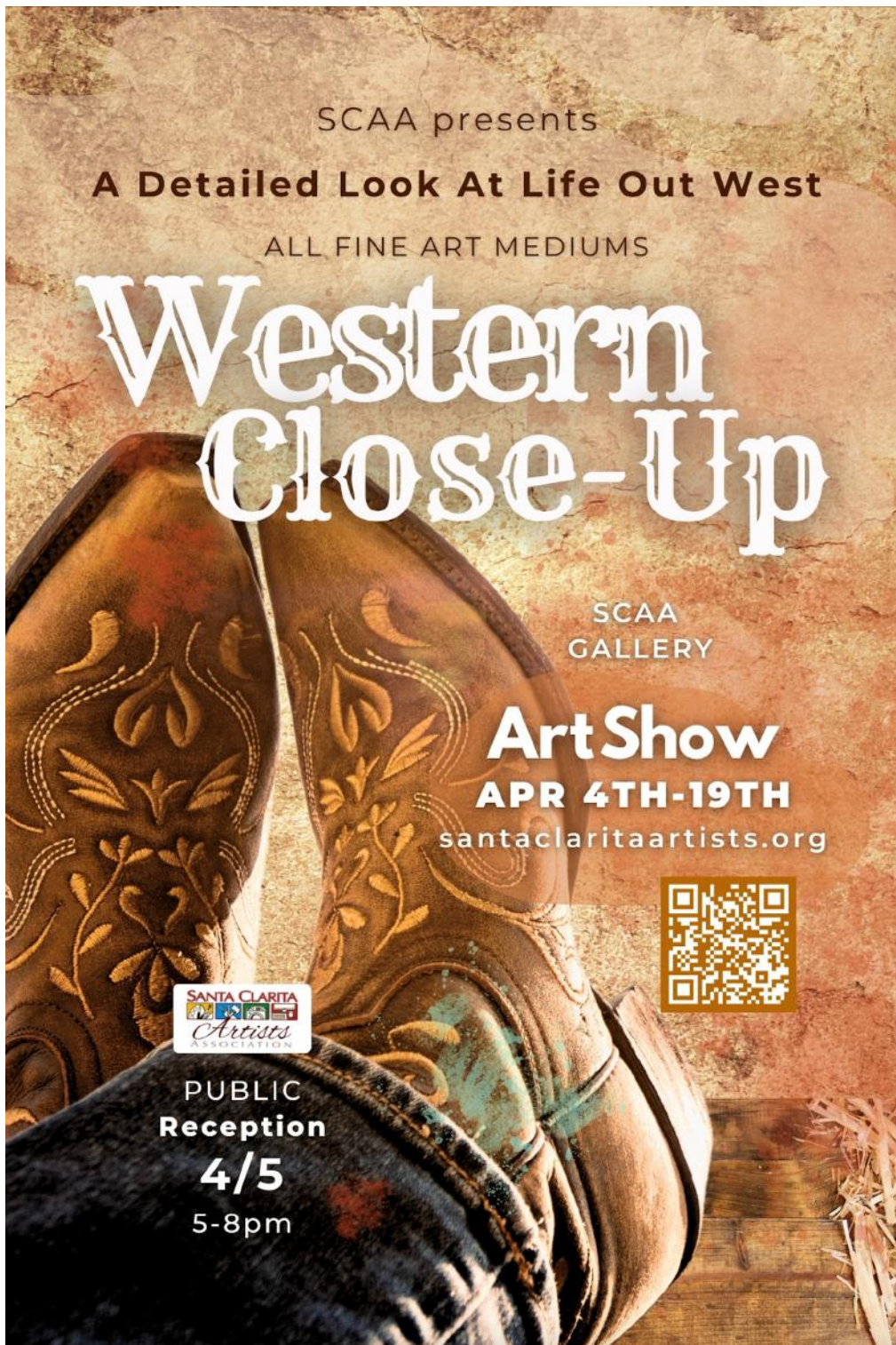
He has teamed up with Otto Stürcke (Urban Artists interviewee Oct 2024 issue) to prepare to launch **MAD MONSTER BASH** (cover art by Mike Butkus for the game). Read all about Mike's long career (pg 10) and the things he is doing.

Children's author-illustrator **Vanessa Brantley-Newton** has illustrated several critically acclaimed picture books and is an award-winning New York Times bestselling illustrator. Being a child during the Civil Rights movement, she understands how important acceptance and empowerment are in a child's life. She respects all children and understands their curiosity, saying, "They make you think with the questions they ask." Read all about Vanessa Brantley-Newton (pg 24)

Selina Alko is another fabulous award winning children's book author /illustrator who captures the diversity of life in her illustrations and books. Her art captures complex subject matter with emotion and understanding. She understands that children want to know the world around them, and she celebrates the threads of life of all people. Read more about Selina Alko (pg 40)

Contributing writer author/illustrator **Veronica Stanley-Hooper** tackles the subject of AI in her piece entitled The Future is Drawn (pg 48)

Kathy Gonzales
Editor/Writer



ILLUSTRATOR

MIKE BUTKUS

Rough Movie Poster concepts
for Wonder Woman, markers
and colored pencils



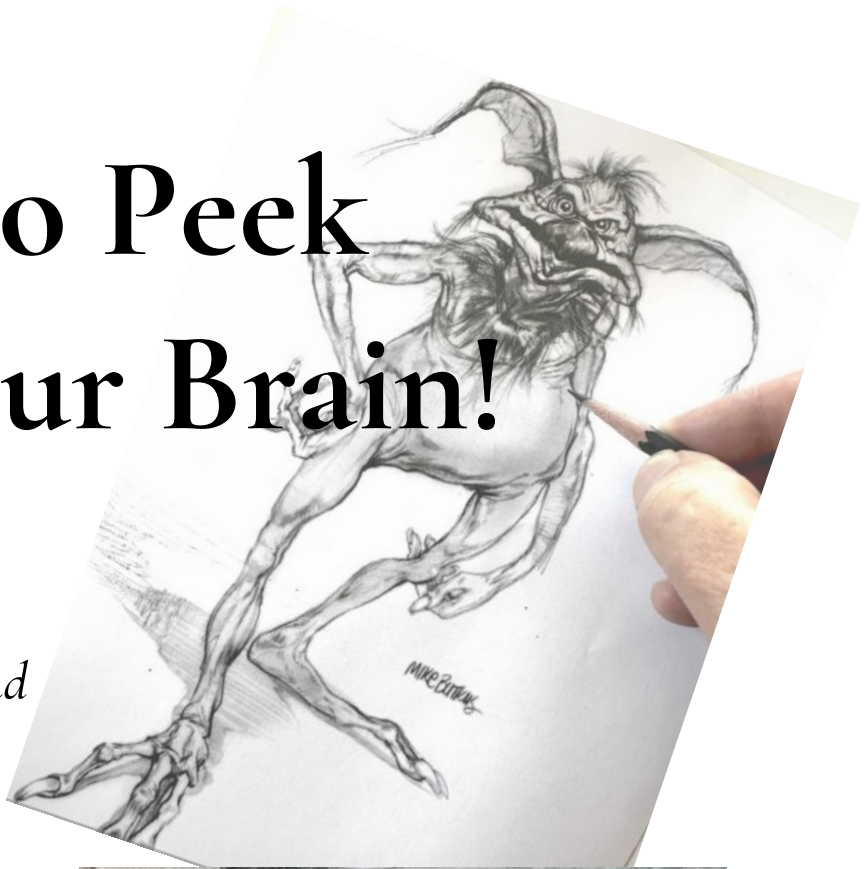




I'd Love To Peek Into Your Brain!

by K.Gonzales

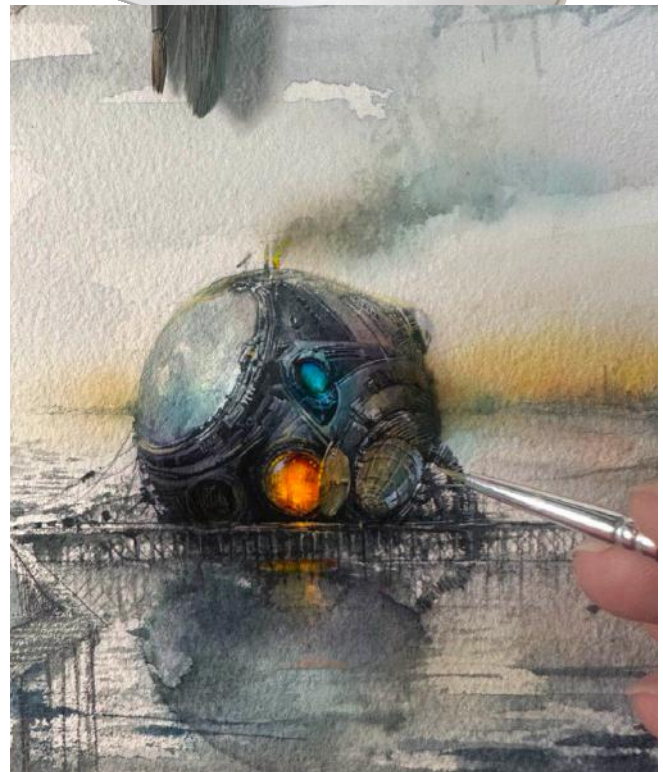
*International, award-winning
concept artist for the movie and
gaming industry, Mike Butkus*



Mike Butkus , has a long and impressive client list, from Netflix, HBO, Hulu, Warner Bros., Showtime, Dreamworks, Disney, Lions Gate and many more.

As a professional artist, Mike is fluent in various artistic media, from charcoal to oil. He is one of the best-known Illustrators in the industry. He is responsible for movie posters from Star Wars to Polar Express. He has drawn for movies, TV shows, games, toys, and books.

He is a visual storyteller with a vast imagination. His sketches have taken us to unknown worlds, and he has brought many of the scariest and funniest characters to life.



Top: Style guide. Star Wars character design /based on original production art

Bottom: Quick little Water color production sketch.



He started at the early age of eight, selling his sketches of comics of Annie Fanny, tanks, and hot rods to his friends for 50 cents so he could buy a bike, which he proudly says he did! Growing up, he wasn't sure if he wanted to be a biochemist or draw. Lucky for all of us, he took the fork in the road leading to art school and a long career of over 30 years of conceptual art.

Mike started on his way, taking that fork in the road. While still in school, he signed with an agency immediately and began his long, successful career as an illustrator. Mike is an easygoing guy with a great sense of humor! I enjoyed our conversation as we examined his career.

We talked of him starting as the starving artist and living off ramen and beer to his now more accomplished professional life and crossing the more successful menu of eating stinky cheese and wine! It's safe to say he is no longer the starving artist.

On occasion, Mike thinks of things other than monsters. At least during

our interview, we discussed wine, stinky cheese, and his family. So it's not just monsters, or is it?

Enter Mad Morpheus...

That leads us to his new project with his business partner, Artist Otto Stürcke (Urban Artist Magazine, Oct. 2024 issue). It's called **Mad Monster Company**, a company where they are free to create board games like the ones they grew up on. The game they made, "**Mad Monster Bash™**" has been in the works for some time. It is a retro family game about monsters, magic, and fun, which makes sense as he loves monsters and the characters he has drawn that live in his mind daily. This collaboration between Otto Stürcke and Mike has been a long working partnership.

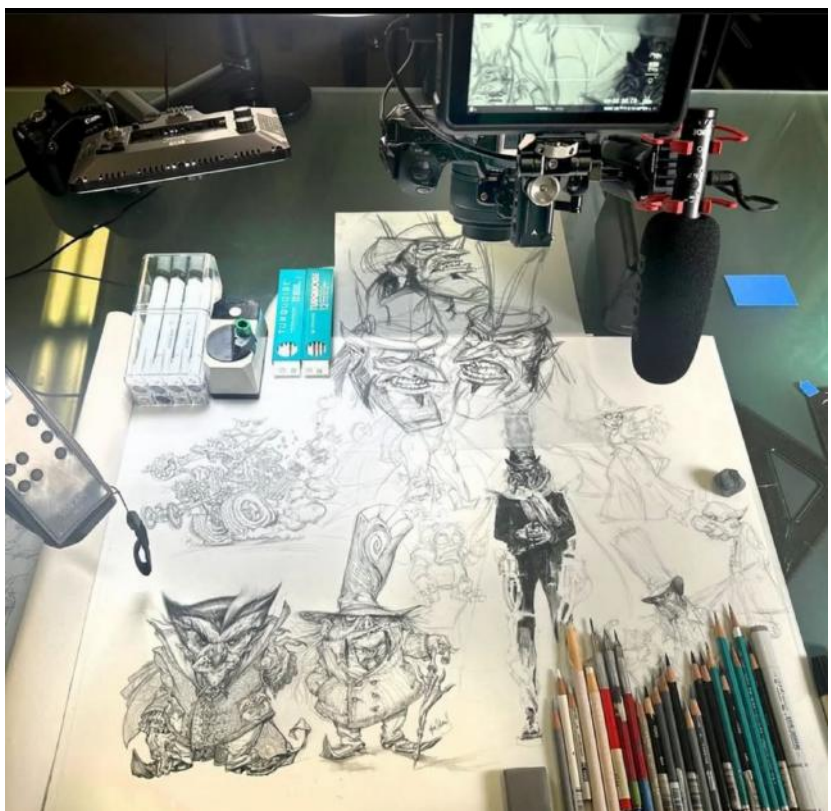
"**Mad Monster Bash™**" isn't Mike's first game. He and Otto have worked on several games for others, such as Penny Dreadful, the Wizard of OZ Monopoly 70th-anniversary edition, Game of Thrones game art, Legend of Zelda, and more.

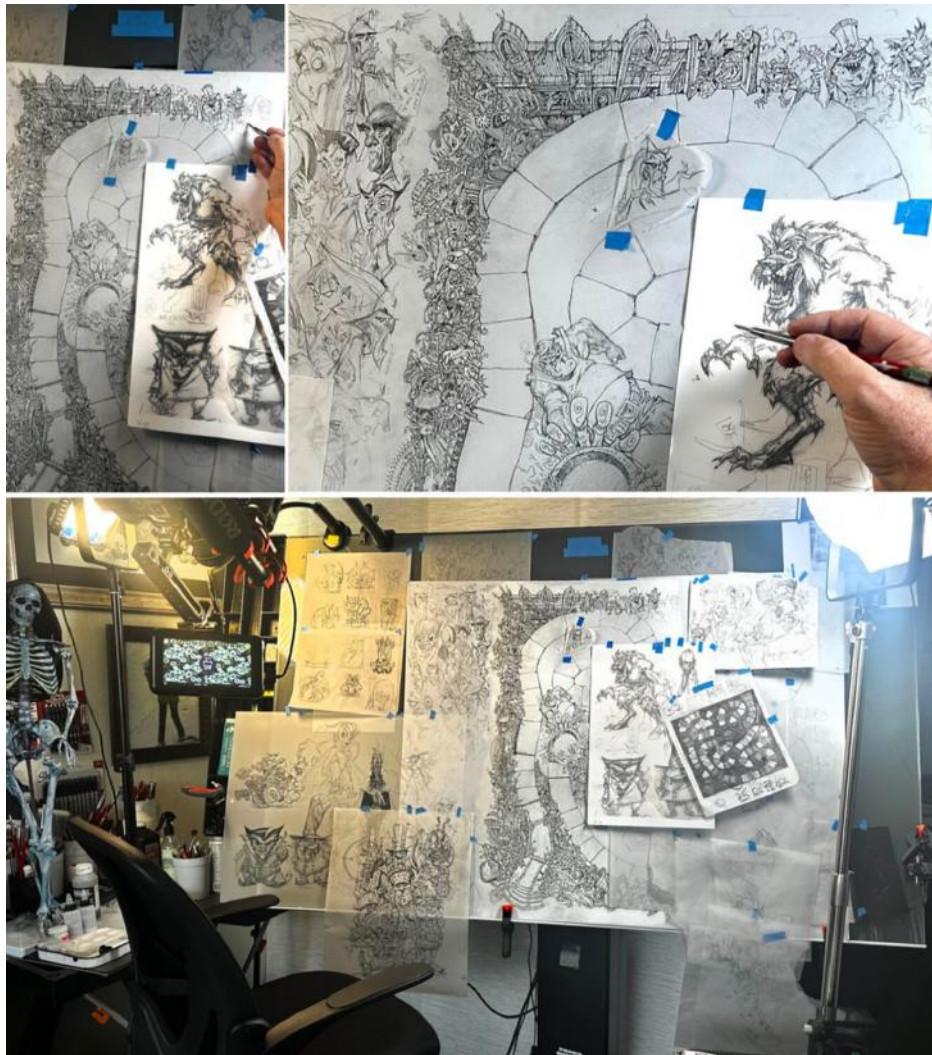
Still, the game **"Mad Monster Bash™"** has been in the making for over two years, from concept, which Mike says was mostly Otto's, to character creation, which is Mike's area. They soon learned it was not easy to develop a game independently, but they carried on and are still in the midst of it all. So many people are involved in making this game: writers, designers, a production company, a fulfillment company, and a videographer.

Mike likes the game's promotion because it shows the organic nature of the characters' creation—that the characters and the board are all drawn by hand. He feels that AI works in their favor here; you can see the differences between an AI-generated image and something more organic (as seen in the picture below all his characters; images are drawn by hand).

When they posted Mike's hand-drawn sketches of his characters in progress on his drawing board on LinkedIn, announcing Mad Monster Bash, it had 25,000 views, the highest for that week for LinkedIn. It showed the preproduction of the creation of this game and all the work going into it.

Mike begins working on character design for **"Mad Monster Bash™"** game coming soon! His studio setup is amazing here he getting ready to do a drawing demo for the board game.





"I think people like to see that it isn't digital artwork; but its people like Otto and me drawing. It's far more organic as people want to see organically generated images and not some weird AI image."

Mike is right; I appreciate Mike's work because he still picks up pencils and sketches. It resonates with the artist within all of us. When you see someone's work, a magic quality makes you wonder how someone had this crazy imagination and skill to put it out on paper. Even if you are not an artist, you can appreciate the talent. Mike does use other tools, but he still manages to develop his characters on the drawing board, and he is right. This

organic nature resonates with artists: those of us who choose to do art for a living produce materials for all to enjoy, which comes from our imaginations.

In addition to this game, Mike is responsible for many movie posters and title sequences. Please look at some of his work in the following few pages.

Mad Monster Bash™

“Mad Monster Bash™” is a family game (8-immortal, 4-8 players) that allows everyone to join on family game night, bringing them together to bond and enjoy a few laughs. Grab a set and take time with your family to enjoy the play when it comes out. Traditionally Illustrated /NO AI



The creation of the principal character, Mad Morpheus, party wizard DJ!!! All Hand drawn and out of the mind of Butkus!

Here is the Instagram announcement

Mad Monster is a monstrously fun-filled, interactive adventure. Mad Morpheus (the principal character) allows only one of you to escape this fiendishly festive night, while the other invited partygoers are doomed to be trapped in a brutal time loop! With a bit of luck and strategy, you can earn some MOJO, boost yourself with HEALTH POINTS (HP), and derail your opponents in order to reek free. Try to keep you wits about you, though as you have to act, beg, steal, blurt, and dance your way out of this wild party, But be warned you're also likely to encounter some nasty JIXES and ultimately realize, to your dismay, that in thier own pursuit to win, the most dangerous monsters of all might be the players right next to you!"



Final creation of the principal character, Mad Morpheus, party wizard DJ!!!

What is the last thing you worked on that I might see?

Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes, and Wicked to name a few, but there are many more. He is busy, busy, busy.



1. Movie poster Illustration Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes - Gouache, Watercolor, Dr. Martins and Colored Pencils

2. Character poses for the movie "WICKED" Jeff Goldblum, graphite on bond.

3. Luke Star Wars



What advice would you give upcoming artists wanting to enter this field?

"First, I would ask them why they wanted to do what I do. If you are an artist, it's not just about art; you must treat this as a business; you must have thick skin, and it's not easy. If you take it to a studio, they will take it and change the heads and everything around. They pay for the changes, but you have to be flexible.

You should do editorial or fine art if you want more control over your art. Commercial illustration can be a little more brutal.

I always tell students that if you have a passion for a particular artist, reach out to them. All these artists are more than willing to help out. They are very generous with their time. Students shouldn't be intimidated by the artists they admire. Don't be intimidated if you can get their number and cold call. Illustrators should keep Instagram professional and family on family accounts. Treat it as a business; we want to put our work out there for everyone to see; many studios will refer to it, so keep it about your work. Please set up your art style and look, be true to your job, and pitch it. If you are in a closet, no one sees it...."

Mike Butkus's entire family is the art gene pool and loaded with talent, from his wife Davin, who owns Chea Studio

& Gallery, next door to Mike's studio; she is a fantastic artist! His oldest daughter Amelie created and collaborated with Mike on the storyline for his next book, ***The Traveler's Guide to Drawing the Extraordinary Creatures of the Universe Volume 1: Aetherin***, and who, with her father, has written and illustrated two books of her own ***The Witch in the Wall*** and ***A Lamplighter in Larkeney***, to his youngest son who got the drawing bug from his dad, and his middle daughter who also draws, although not following in the artist footsteps picked up the other gene Mike has as she is studying medicine. A very talented family indeed!

So, stop by if you are ever in Mike's town. Bring some stinky cheese and a good bottle of wine, be prepared to laugh, and enjoy a good Monster game!

For More of Mike's work, go to:

<https://www.mikebutkus.pro>





SCAA presents

A Display of Flutter & Flight!

IN ALL FINE ART MEDIUMS

Things with **WINGS**

SCAA
GALLERY

PUBLIC
Reception

4/26

5-8pm

Art Show

APR 25TH-MAY 25TH

santaclaritaartists.org





Make a day of it, head to Le Chene for a Sunday Brunch and take a peek at the Santa Clarita Artists! Stop and shop for Mother's Day as it is just around the corner. Get 15% discount for Brunch or Lunch at the restaurant.

Sunday, April 27, 2025
Le Chene French Cuisine Gardens
10:00 am - 4:00pm
12625 Sierra Highway, Agua Dulce

THE MAGIC



OF COLORS

ILLUSTRATOR /Author
VANESSA BRANTLEY - NEWTON

K. GONZALES

Illustrations by Vanessa Brantley-Newton

Urban Artist Magazine 25



**LITTLE GIRLS
WITH DREAMS
BECOME WOMEN
WITH VISION.**

-UNKNOWN

Illustration by Vanessa Brantley-Newton



Vanessa's illustrations uniquely transport you back to the carefree days of childhood, evoking a sense of joy and nostalgia that resonates with us all.

by K. Gonzales

V is the author and illustrator of several critically acclaimed picture books. She is also an award-winning and New York Times bestselling illustrator.

She has illustrated over 100 books with other children's authors and six of her own. She says "I have had the joy of drawing covers for Highlights Magazine and greeting cards for Hallmark and American Greetings."

She has been commissioned to do signage and murals for various cities' children's play areas in parks.

She also worked on the Christmas Wonderland campaign before the

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) program ended at Target Stores. She advocates for all people and children and understands the need to showcase people's cultures and history.

Vanessa is also a multimedia illustrator/artist. Her tools range from Caran d'Ache Neocolors pastels II to Posca and Tombow pens, watercolors, and gouache. She has created the sweetest characters you come to love.

I have heard Vanessa speak many times she never fails to put a smile on my face. Just like her work brings joy so does she.

FINDING FOCUS, BALANCE, AND CREATIVITY IN TUMULTUOUS TIMES

"This time comes with its energy. With all that is happening in our community, country, and the world, it's just a different energy for me. I am a person of prayer, and meditation is essential to me. It's like putting on clothes; I cannot work through the day without them. I have had so much loss since COVID, and it continues. As a person of a spiritual nature, I see a significant change in the "guard" that is going on. Many of my family have passed away moving on, and it isn't easy to stay concentrated on the things I'm working on.

I'm working on a book about the famous *Carlotta Walls LaNier* of the *Little Rock Nine*. Most people don't know who she is, but I'm working on this book about her legacy and the price she paid for integration into a public school.

There are times when working on this story is a trigger for me. It takes me back to my childhood and all that I went through as a child of the civil rights era. Thank goodness for my parents.

They were musicians, and they were accepting of all people. They helped everyone; if you needed help, they would open their doors. So, my sister and I grew up diverse. My mom and dad's actions showed it. Meditation and prayer keep me grounded when I feel uneasy."



GETTING UNSTUCK

"The more I unplug from social media, the better I feel. Social media serves its purpose: socially engaging with others, asking questions, showing pictures, having conversations, and adding comments, hopefully ones of encouragement and enlightenment.

But for me, I have been practicing Tai Chi for six years. It is very meditative. The slow movements of Tai Chi help to balance your mind and body, relax you, and put you in a contemplative space.

Listen to encouraging messages that leave you with questions and make you think. Sometimes, I look at others' artwork, observe what they do, and play with my tools."



“We each get to bring our talents to the table. Where would the diversity and difference be if we all brought the same thing to the table?” - Vanessa Brantley-Newton

“Play with all the things they said you cannot use together. See where it takes you. This type of play is a beautiful way of taking you out of ‘I can’t’ the other thing is what you are saying to yourself. The worst thing we do as artists is measure ourselves with other people. We each get to bring our talents to the table. Where would the diversity and difference be if we all brought the same thing to the table?”

Not all of us can bring the same thing to the table. I want anything but the same thing. Having enough confidence to get your gifts to the table, celebrating the gifts we all bring, and telling each other how fabulous it is.

Do not be jealous; instead, learn from one another. That's when we grow. We don't grow up sitting in the corner pouting; we grow from sharing the knowledge and the experience.”

LEFT Page Top: Calm meditative by Vanessa Brantley-Newton

ABOVE:

Vanessa often will play with her tools and just create abstracts or character development and backgrounds

“That is what art is – its discovery.”
Vanessa Brantley - Newton

GETTING MY HANDS DIRTY

“Collage is my favorite because I get to do mixed media, from Caran d'Ache Neocolor pastels II to Posca and Tombow pens, watercolors, gouache, etc.

I love getting my hands dirty when it comes to art. I have three iPads and love using apps and tools, but I'm still stuck on crayons, pens, pencils, watercolor, and paper—all the things that allow you to create with joy without having to plug in. The worst thing is working on an iPad, and it loses power. I love working in a sketchbook; I find that so satisfying.

I have something called Synesthesia, a neurological condition that allows me to experience a five-sensory stimulation when I see, smell, feel, taste, or hear color. This unique ability influences my art and adds more depth and meaning to my work.

I love the art process; getting my hands in the paint and going over the drawing. Sometimes, the paper buckles gets beat up and curls; other times, it's just flat, and I have to go over it several times. But the process of finding out is immeasurable to me. That is what art is—its discovery.”



ABOVE Image by
Vanessa Brantley-Newton.
One of her cute characters

SOME OF MY FAVORITE ARTISTS

"My favorite artists are *Ezra Jack Keats*, *Faith Ringgold*, and *Vernetta P. Honeywood*. I fell in love with these artists and followed them. I studied their work. I saw the lines, the color, and the texture. You didn't need a whole bunch of colors; you needed three at most, which is even more sophisticated than having an entire rainbow of colors, so all these artists influenced me."

Ezra Jack Keats's story is a whole other article, but Vanessa wanted to stress that she holds him as an influence on her and her art. She learned that if you do this for a living, you must stay authentically in your voice and story, which a child of color can connect with. She loves Ezra Jack Keats because he was bold enough to say, "I'm not drawing what I'm not accustomed to." Keats got the depiction of his characters right because he was familiar with them; he watched, studied, and lived them; he stayed authentic to his voice.

CREATING CHARACTERS FROM HISTORY WITH LOVE

Vanessa draws her characters with love; she likes to learn all she can about the characters she is about to draw. She thinks about what they want to do, how they like to dress, their hair, their smiles, and their personalities. She likes to "sit" with them to understand who they are.

She teaches a character design class at [Storyteller Academy](#). She tells her students that children are very complex and simple at the same time. "They are the ones who ask you, 'Have you ever talked to God?' Has he ever spoken back to you?'... 'What's on Pluto'? 'How was it created'? 'Why are there rings around Saturn'? They ask all the questions that make you think."

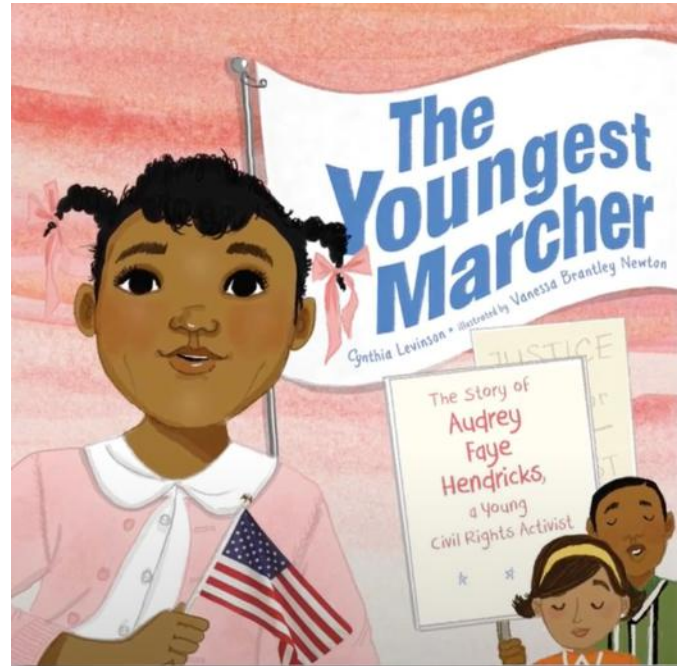
"Talk to your characters. Ask them what they want...."

"Talk to your characters. Ask them what they want. It can be simple or complex, but you design them differently once you get to know them."

Drawing her characters from life experiences for books she has or is currently working on, like the characters in *The Youngest Marcher* about Audrey Faith Hendricks for her life story or her current project on *Charlotta's Special Dress* for Charlotta Wallace. Vanessa utilized her sewing experience from her mother's sewing. Her mother, a milliner, made pill box hats out of peau de soie fabric for the women at church. Vanessa learned to make hats like her mom; she used to make big, ostentatious hats with feathers, beads, wedding garments, and veils.

Vanessa Brantley-Newton

So when creating these characters in the likeness of Audrey Faith Hendricks for her life story and Charlotta Wallace, she had to draw clothing of the times, which Vanessa says is sometimes hard as it takes her back to growing up in those days and takes her back to a time of racism however, because her mother handmade clothing and hats and taught her how. She could remember the beautifully handmade clothing, which helped her to draw those styles.



IMAGES ON THIS PAGE

Cover of *The Youngest Marcher* the story of Audrey Faye Hendricks



WHAT ADVICE DID YOU TAKE WHILE STARTING

She says, "I often asked people to help me learn what they were doing where art is concerned. Show me how to do that, and they would tell me no." Or people would tell me, "Why would I do that? You're my competition. Why would I try to help you?"

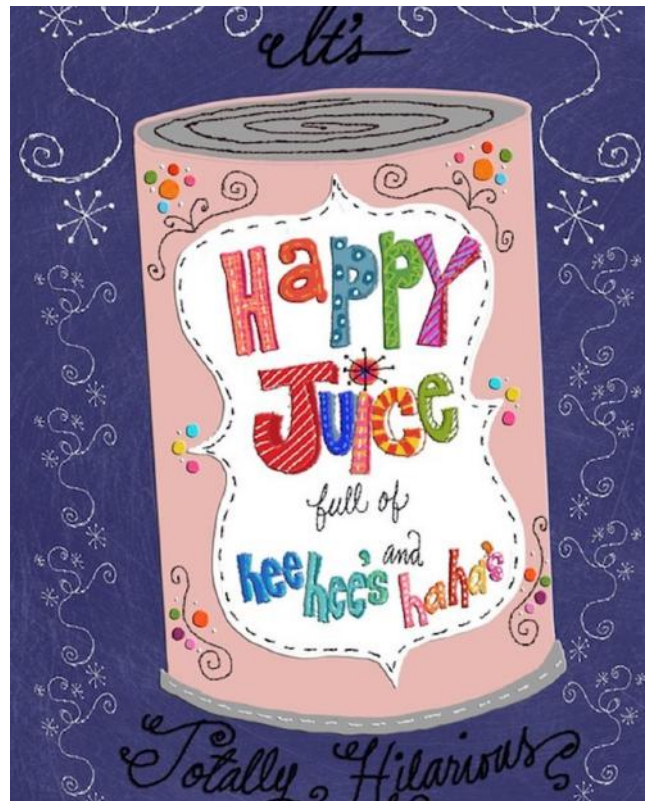
Sometimes, hearing that as a young artist can be disheartening when all you are doing is looking toward a person you admire to learn from. I'm not here to copy you out loud. I may copy you in my sketchbook because I will teach myself how to do it, which is how I taught myself how to draw.

I remember trying to reach out to David Catrow. I finally wrote him a letter, asking for advice on how to get my foot in the door. I did not realize he probably got tons of letters and phone calls. Finally, he wrote me back and said: "Hi Vanessa, so nice to meet you do the damn work." I cried. Nobody wanted to help me. I took that information and looked inward; I went to study my three favorite books, *Snowy Day*, *Madeline*, and *Good Night Moon*. Those are the three I got, and I tore those books apart; I studied them to see how Ezra did the work. How did I feel after reading them?

I put myself in my learning petri dish and have learned so much. I am working on a book with Nancy Paulson called "Jewels," (book title still in works)

about a little girl living in Brooklyn with her sisters. Penguin House will buy this book and publish a series of each of the sisters. So I'm very excited about this book. Get out there, do what you love, really study it, and do the work.

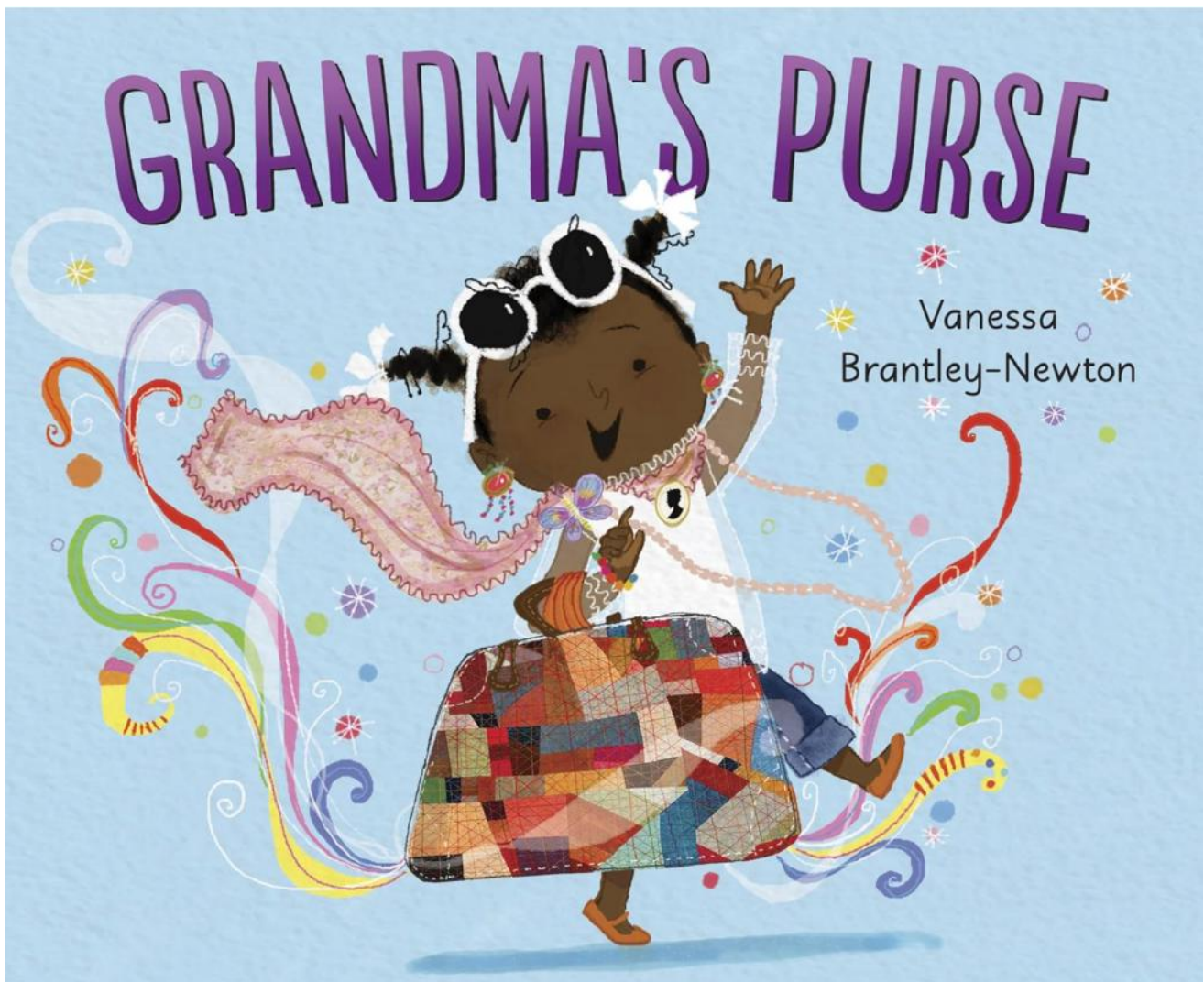
**"Get out there , do what you love,
really study it"**



Happy Juice - illustrated by Vanessa Brantley

FAVORITE BOOK YOU CREATED?

"Grandma's Purse: When I was a child, my grandmother would visit my sister and me. She always came over to visit and take us places. She had this black purse, which I loved. I just loved the way it looked with the clasp and beaded strap. As a child, I always wondered what was in the purse, so this was the spark for Grandma's Purse. I think of her every time I think of that purse."



Cover of Grandma's Purse



Vanessa Brantley-Newton
Illustrations from
Grandma's Purse



ADVICE FOR ANYONE STARTING OUT?

"I would tell them don't just say you want to be a children's book illustrator."

"Glean all you can and often. Find the books that interest you and make you want to draw and study children. Take your sketchbook and go to the park. Sit there and watch them play. Watch the reactions on their faces. That's the one thing I have learned: you really can't illustrate children properly until you have studied them. Even animals have emotions as well; you have to study them. I will tell you to put yourself in your petri dish and study emotions, faces, and body movements. Take a life drawing class to learn how the body moves. Then, get away from it so you can do something wonky that's not perfect. Play with color, read books, and give yourself prompts. Give yourself words like "bread and butter"; maybe it's a little boy holding a big piece bigger than him with butter on his face, or the bread and butter is the character. Learn to play like a child again, and come to the table with a five-year-old heart; I guarantee you will put stuff in your portfolio."

Come to the table with energy; energy will come like gasoline in your pencil. My sketchbooks are like diaries; I build new characters. All my ideas get sketched, and I test things out here. I define characters for my next story. Keep doing the work.

What's up and coming for Vanessa?

Vanessa shared with me the next book she is working on, and it will be an excellent story. Watch for Vanessa's other books, including Charlotte's Special Dress, "Jewels " (the book title is still in the works), and her upcoming book, Seed Doll. These are all wonderful stories; I can't wait to read them and see the illustrations.

Also, look for Vanessa on KidsPBS "Ms. V and Me."

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=CwASc2Re3Is>

Vanessa doesn't see the color of people; instead, she includes them in her drawings and books. Vanessa Brantley-Newton has a beautiful palette of colors that she draws with and sees the world with. In her art, she shows us that all colors are magical.

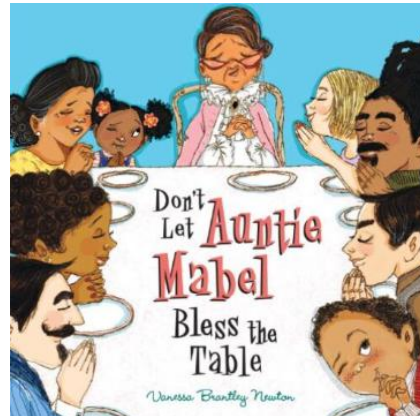
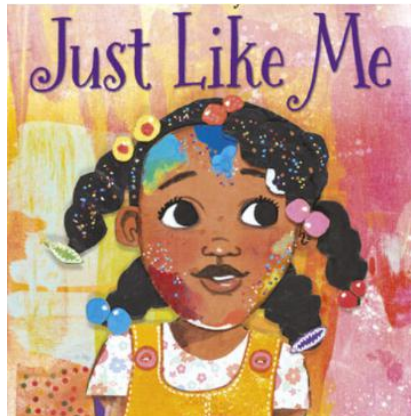




Illustrated by Vanessa Brantley-Newton



Written by Tammi Sauer Illustrated by Vanessa Brantley-Newton



Here are just a few books Written and Illustrated by Vanessa Brantley-Newton for more please see her site or visit your local bookstore.

To Learn more about Vanessa visit her here:

Vanessa is signed with Painted Words
painted-words.com/portfolio/vanessa-brantley-newton

www.vanessabrantleynewton.com

Sierra Madre Art Fair 2025

May 3-4

9:30 am - 5PM

featured Artist Laura Wambsgan



The 60th Annual SMAF Featured Artist Laura Wambsgan

Sierra Madre Art Fair 2025

222 Sierra Madre Blvd, Sierra Madre CA 91024

More information go to :

www.sierramadreartfair.org

“Sycamores Graceful And Glowing”



by Artist Laura Wambsgans

The

Illustrator /Author
Selina Alko



Thread of Life



Selina Alko

While working on this issue of Urban Artist Magazine, I encountered award-winning illustrator/writer Selina Alko. I love finding artists new to me, and when I saw her artwork, the colors, movement, and multi-cultural depiction of her characters and the energy immediately drew me in.

Selina Alko showcases and illustrates an authentic world. She brings to life stories of multifaceted people, history, and tradition. She is an artist who helps children understand the complexities of life. Her stories depict the very fabric that life brings to all of us. She explains this through the multi-media art. Her books and illustrations give children an understanding of the world around them.

I picked up a few books she wrote and illustrated to see more of her work, work focused on social causes and activism, "The Case for Loving - the Fight for Interracial Marriage," written by Selina and co-illustrated by Sean Qualls (her husband). It is a story of Richard and Mildred Loving, two people who were instrumental in changing the laws of interracial marriage. Showing that interracial

marriages were not wrong and the State of Virginia had to change the law!





"Stars of the Night - The courageous children of the Czech Kindertransport," written by Caren Stelson and illustrated by Selina Alko, is a story about the 669 children who traveled as part of the Czech Kindertransport from Prague to Britain. The illustrations in both these books are excellent and depict the images of the people in various times in history.

"I is for Immigrants, " is a look into the diversity and celebrations of her friends, family, and neighbors. This book brings to mind what is essential to the day's fabric—what makes this thread of life the lifeline to us all. I loved the images as they took me back to my time in New York, walking through neighborhoods and watching everyday life.

Title page image:

"I is for Immigrants" is the ABCs of the cultural celebration of a diverse neighborhood.

Image above:

"Stars of the Night" - The courageous children of the Czech Kindertransport.

With these illustrations and stories, Selina challenges us all, no matter what age, to embrace life to its fullest and to gain an understanding of our world at the start of where we live. Isn't this what we should do as artists to help us all understand our world?

I got to ask Selina a few questions about her career and what was coming up for her.

What are some of the standard medium and application tools that you use? What is the primary medium you enjoy?

I love to mix mediums. I collect papers with interesting patterns, ticket stubs, maps, stamps, etc., which I combine with acrylic paint to create texture and depth.

What methods do creatives use to move themselves out of complex times, especially in times of turmoil? Selina Alko's books help children and adults find peace, even if the topics aren't light. But somehow, you see the light in the work of these artists.

Have you ever felt stuck in your creativity, and what do you do to get out of that?

"Yes! I find changing my environment helps, even if it's just sitting in a cafe and writing in my

journal. But the best way for me to really loosen up is to paint/collage in my sketchbook and play. When I'm doing this just for myself, often random and delightful things happen, which in turn helps me feel more inspired."

Which of your books is your favorite?

"That's like asking which of my children is my favorite! I love them all for different reasons and in different ways. Usually, my most recent one pulls at my heart the most, though, because the memories of creation are the freshest."

Who are your favorite singers of all time? What's your favorite song?

"I love Joni Mitchell, David Bowie, and Brandi Carlile. I'm going to go with Joni's Both Sides Now for my favorite song."

I read and looked at the fantastic illustrations in Joni -The Lyrical Life of Joni Mitchell. This work is not only beautiful but also fits Joni Mitchell's poetic style so well. It captures her life in color. It is nice that children can get a book on some of the great musicians of the time who moved the world issues with music.



What advice would you give an up-and-coming children's illustrator? How do they get an agent?

Join SCBWI (Society of Children's Writers and Illustrators) and attend conferences. Learn as much as you can from the professionals in the field. Making children's books is not as easy as it looks! If it's what you want to do, you must be persistent and believe in the uniqueness of what you bring to the table.

What are you currently working on?

I'm just finishing the art for a picture book biography - which I also wrote - about Judy Blume. She is my favorite author of all time, and I am having the best time! It will be out in the spring of 2026.

Who do you admire in the illustrator world?

I admire Sophie Blackall for her beautiful books and for creating Milkwood, the most magical place for children's book illustrators to gather and retreat in the summertime. She is a true visionary of beauty and goodness.

I also admire Martha Rich. I adore her quirky illustration style and admire her political activism. She puts herself out there bold yet

vulnerable, and I am inspired to be more like her.

What do you think of book banning?

I am totally against book banning. I grew up reading many of Judy Blume's books, which deal with the themes of puberty and sexuality. In her books, I felt like I was less alone. Those same books of hers are frequently challenged, and she has worked tirelessly throughout her career to combat censorship. Kids need to see themselves reflected in stories. What is happening right now is outrageous!

Do you think technology is killing creativity?

It seems like there are new tools that, when used properly, can fulfill the creative impulse. The problem with technology is addiction to social media, which can temper creativity. One needs to be strong and set limits and boundaries with it.

What do you think of AI?

Not a fan.

To see more of Selina Alko's work:

Selinaalko.com

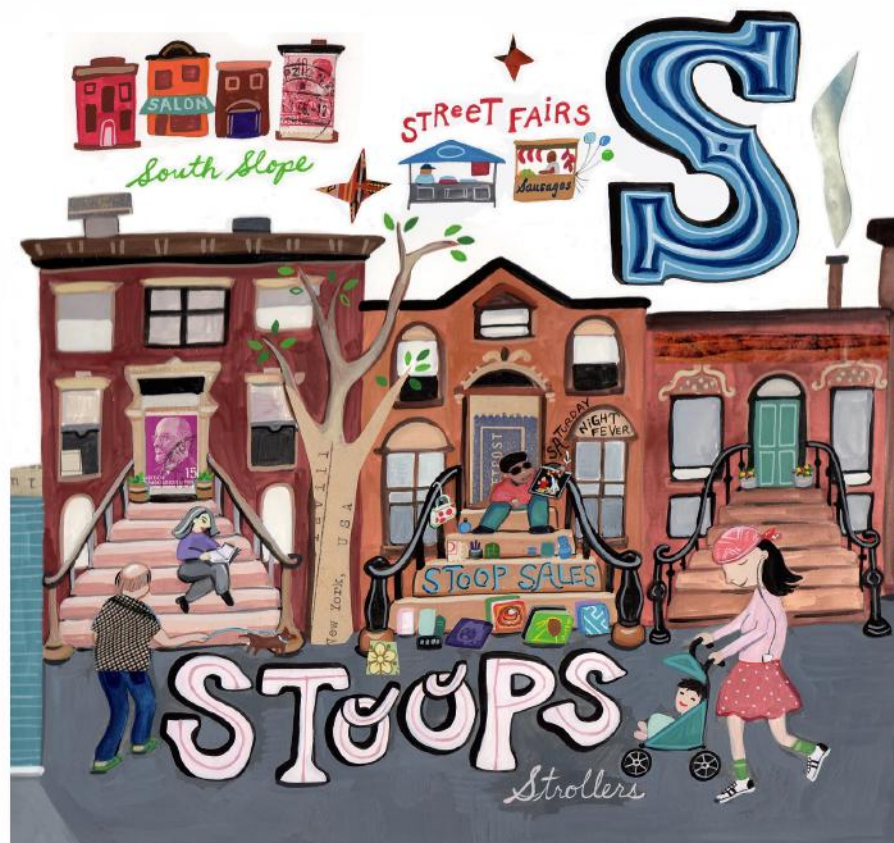
[@Selinaalko](https://www.instagram.com/Selinaalko)

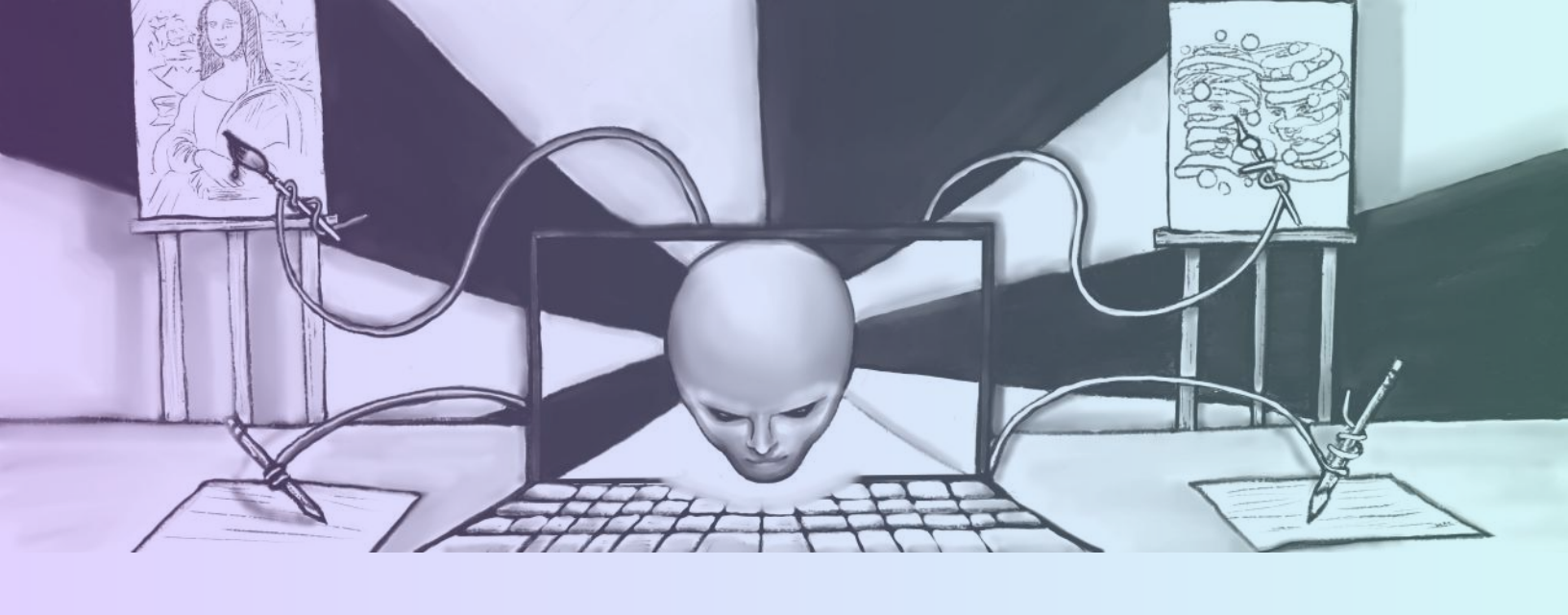
[Gallt and Zacker Literary Agency](#)



Above image:
 "Bodega" - I is for
 Immigrants, the
 ABC's of cultural
 celebration of a
 diverse
 neighborhood.

Image on right
 "S is for Stoops" -
 from B is for
 BROOKLYN





Illustrators Weigh In on AI's Impact on Illustration

The Future is **Drawn**

by Veronica Stanley-Hooper

As we enter 2025, the once-fictional concept of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an integral part of our everyday lives. From navigating travel routes to generating email responses, AI has been seamlessly integrated into various aspects of our daily routines. However, the creative world is grappling with the implications of AI on artistic expression, raising the question of whether AI can produce art that resonates on a deep, emotional level, rivaling the authenticity of traditional art forms.

To explore this question, I spoke with illustrators to gather their thoughts on the benefits and drawbacks of AI-assisted art. The results were both enlightening and thought-provoking.

Harley Scroggins, author and illustrator, explains her thoughts: "The best use of AI in illustration is as a tool." In her experience, AI can be particularly useful when illustrations need to be adapted to meet specific format requirements, such as creating more bleed— which will be cropped anyway.

“AI can serve as a muse to inspire creativity”

By leveraging AI in this way, illustrators can streamline their workflow and editing process.

Illustrator Laura Muncie shares a similar perspective on utilizing AI as a tool for illustration. "AI can help generate ideas for world building or be used as a reference 'photo' while you build a new piece of your own," she said.

Author and illustrator Therese Verner notes that AI can inspire creativity, saying, "I asked the AI for a sketch with a tree, some animals, and a book. The reference sketch I got back inspired me to create The Reading Tree. My artwork was nothing like what the tool produced, but it did give me inspiration.

However, none of the illustrators I interviewed believed AI could ever replace authentic art created by humans. The greatest concern is the potential for AI tools to scrape images from the internet, violating the copyright of artists, as noted by Verner.

Muncie adds that AI is a "minefield" due to the lack of legal frameworks in place. Ultimately,

Scroggins summarizes the issue by stating that AI "devalues artists."

As an illustrator and fine artist, I understand the need for inspiration and the occasional creative block. AI can serve as a muse to inspire an artist's creativity. However, as reflected by the illustrators interviewed, AI will never be able to replicate the authenticity and passion of original work created by humans. For centuries, humans have used illustration to communicate history, events, and the passage of time.

The texture and tone of a piece are more than just the image on the surface– they reflect the passion and experiences of humans, which cannot be replicated by machines.

You can find the illustrators interviewed for this article at the links below:

Harley Scroggins:

www.harleyscroggins.com

Laura Muncie:

www.lauramuncie.com

Therese Verner:

fineartbythereseverner.com

Veronica Stanley-Hooper:

www.veronica-Stanley-hooper.com

UA Magazine Selected Exhibitions

Los Angeles

The Getty

1200 Getty Center Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90049

Gustave Caillebotte: Painting Men
Feb 25-May 25, 2025

**A Brush with Nature: Romantic
Landscape Drawings**
Feb 18-May 25, 2025

**Maria Magdalena Campos-Pon:
Behold**
Feb.18-May 4, 2025

**Our Voices, Our Getty: Reflecting on
Manuscripts**
Feb 4-Apr 27, 2025

LACMA

5905 Wilshire Blvd., Los
Angeles, CA 90035

**Imagining Black Diasporas: 21st-
Century Art and Poetics**
Dec 15, 2024 - July 27, 2025

We Live in Painting
Through September 1, 2025

Moma

5905 Wilshire Blvd., Los
Angeles, CA 90035

Projects: Marlon Mullen
Through Apr 20

Santa Clarita Art Gallery

22508 6th Street
Newhall, CA

Support Structures - Michelle Miracle
Mar 28 - 30 Private Recieption

Santa Clarita Art Gallery - cont.

Western Close up

Apr 4 - 14 Reception April 5 5:00 - 8:00
pm

Pasadena

Norton Simon Museum

411 West Colorado Boulevard
Pasadena, CA 91105

**Retrospect: 50 years at the Norton
Simon Museum**
Feb 14-2025 - Jan12, 2026

Santa Barbara

Santa Barbara Museum of ART

1130 State Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Dario Robleto: The Signal
Dec 8, 2024 - May 25, 2025

**Sea of Ice: Echoes of the European
Romantic Era**
Feb 2 - August 24, 2025

Accretion

Sept 29, 2024 - April 13, 2025

Sullivan Goss

An American Gallery
11 East Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

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