# How Christmas cards helped Iris van den Akker's illustration craft

**Iris van den Akker studied Illustration at the AKV St. Joost in the Netherlands, and after that did a Masters degree in Animation at the same school.**

Immediately after that, she was lucky to get a job at Ambassadors in Amsterdam, a creative studio that creates visual effects and animation for mostly commercials. There she learned a lot about storyboards, character design, concept art and 2D animation.

After three years however, she missed traditional illustration, and quit her job to be a full-time freelance illustrator and 2D animator. Now Find out more about the artist in our interview.

## How do you scratch your creative itch?

I'm very easily bored. Maybe it's something to do with my Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD.) I need to be motivated all the time. To have different projects in all kinds of areas really helps. No job is the same, and you meet people from all kinds of backgrounds.

When I worked at a studio, we worked on some really cool animations, and I had the luxury of having a paycheck every month. But after a while I felt I was just doing the same thing over and over, and not meeting anybody new. It’s good for me to throw myself into new situations. I don’t like the feeling of not growing, creatively. I then become lazy very easily.

I enjoy both illustration and animation equally. The best situation for me would be to switch illustration and animation every other job, or to combine them.

## What projects are you most proud of so

## far?

I’ve had the luxury of doing so many interesting projects! There aren’t many which I didn’t like.

I think the one I’m most proud of is probably my first ‘proper’ freelance job. I was still working at Ambassadors, when I got an email from someone who wanted me to create an animation for her Kickstarter, ‘Chateau 10.0′. In two weeks, I illustrated and animated the whole project, alongside my full-time job. It was unbelievably tense, but I made it work. After that I think I slept a solid 11 hours, haha.

I’m very fond of it as it’s a complete solo-project (apart from the music, of course). My client gave me complete

creative freedom, which was lovely. And it allowed me to make some money so I could take the plunge and become a freelancer full-time.

## What would you like to try next?

I would love to take a mini-break to experiment more with my illustrations. I’m fairly busy on some longer-term animation projects. Those are really cool, but I don’t have much time to sit down and draw.

I like my work, but I feel I can do better. I want to prevent doing the same over and over again. I have this need to improve.

On my bucket-list is creating a graphic novel for Nobrow, my favourite publisher, and being on stage for Playgrounds, a digital arts festival. But these are long-term plans!

## Please tell me more about the Christmas cards you do annually for your dad’s company.

This project is so fun! My dad owns an accounting firm, and asks me every year to design a Christmas card he could send out to his clients. I’ve done it for about five years now, I think. The first ones were horrible.

It’s a relaxing job because I get complete freedom (though I

need to abstain from drawing cutesy animals, maybe) and it returns every year. It’s fun to see how you’ve improved every year. Obviously you get better at drawing every year, but I also notice my subjects, compositions and use of colour evolve. It’s definitely a good way of tracking your work every year, taking a step back to be critical of it.

## Why do you love illustrating the female form?

I think maybe it’s a natural subject for artists to draw females. It’s such a cliché, haha.

I think I love it because of the natural curves and shapes. I’m a sucker for strong shapes and composition. And flowing

hair, that’s just really relaxing to draw.
A few years back I noticed however, I was only drawing white, thin figures. I consider myself a feminist, but my work didn’t reflect that. I spend more time pushing myself creating more diversity in the girls I draw. Now, most of them have huge shoulders, and thick arms. I think it gave my work a boost when I became critical of their shapes. I implemented it also in other subjects; I love to stretch and exaggerate shapes.

That might be it, though: the female form is what I fall back to when I want to draw for myself. If I have no ideas or inspiration, I draw the female form, and watch what comes out of it.

It’s almost therapeutic for me. I then push myself to make it

more interesting, until I’m satisfied.

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