Studio Collateral Damage's anime art is cuddlier than its name suggests

Collateral Damage Studios (CDS) first started out as a group of friends who wanted to take part in artist alleys of pop culture conventions.

Forming a *doujin* circle (a group of people who share an interest) was, as they put it, a "logical step for everyone to pool their talents and capital to create interesting fan products."

"But we went beyond that with ambitious goals such as to promote our local Singaporean talents, and to make a mark within our *doujin* art community," CDS tell me in a joint interview.

Through their participation at conventions and active engagement with their local community, CDS have managed to gain a bit of a following and even attract other artists to join their informal collective.

Overseas Expedition by WaHa 2018
“Over time, companies also started approaching us for commercial commissions. Eventually, we professionalised with some of us becoming full-time staff of our newly formed professional studio and others supporting the studio as freelancers. Although , we still retain our original mission of promoting our Singaporean talents and working closely with our community.”

CDS got their big start in doing animated commercials. Today, they mainly take on commercial projects involving character designs and key visuals.

“We have worked with ad agencies, indie video game developers, board game designers, anime conventions and even health-related NGOs,” I learn. “Recently indie clothing labels and

YouTubers comprise a decent part of our clientele.”

Of their projects, CDS have really enjoyed working with Anime Expo (below, art by WaHa & Space Penguin) for their badge artworks and merchandise art. “Seeing our art blown up to such a large proportion and hanging off the lampposts of Los Angeles was a reward in itself.”

Usanekorin of the studio has also enjoyed working on the artworks for the Kickstarter-funded board-game, Bullet❤ (below), while Poopiepuff is proud of drawing the species showcase artworks for Everybody Gaming. Such works incorporate both character and environment design plus visual storytelling elements.

In Singapore, CDS is best known for Japanese anime-influenced artworks as a whole.

“Anime is what inspired us into taking up digital illustration, after all. Each of us have our own unique style and approach to art. WaHa likes to describe his art as cute and/or cool while Usanekorin considers his work to be colourful and atmospheric.

“Poopiepuff takes a slightly semi-realistic style, with the facial aesthetics of her characters being very much inspired by ball-jointed dolls, mainly ‘Dollfies.’ We think that our diversity in stylistic approach is one of our key strengths.”

Orchidées – l’ imagination collab by Desti, Usanekorin and Poopiepuff 2020
Although the anime look is their forte, CDS try not to limit themselves to just that genre.

“To grow as an artist, we do not restrict ourselves to being one-trick ponies, so we try to work on more traditionally western art such as for TTRPGs or comic covers. We have also done work outside of pop culture such as instructional, medical illustrations for guidebooks and even icons for software UI.”

Due to COVID-19, CDS’s physical studio near the Singapore Chinatown is currently empty as they all work separately from home, communicating with each other via Slack.

“As our team has quite a range of different art and rendering styles, we occasionally split up the workload of different projects depending on the job scope that best suits our individual artists’ strengths.

“For example, one artist might focus on the environmental art while another will work on the character artwork. On other occasions, we might have one artist handle the pencils while another artist will deal with the inking or colours.”

Moe Circuit Board Girls by Usanekorin 2020
I ask CDS how anime artwork should look outside of animation when used for commercial purposes.

“A good anime artwork should have a good colour palette, composition, and interesting details,” they believe.

“Thematically, the best ones are imaginative and can strike a chord with the audience. There are a variety of styles which resonate differently with audiences to cater to different genres of stories within anime.

“To effectively use anime artworks for branding projects, one should keep in mind the style which best appeals to the target demographic when approaching the design process. Usually the client will have a certain idea of what they want when they approach us. However, we will always listen to what the client wants to achieve first and will not hesitate to recommend a different approach if we think it’ll work better for their target audience.”

by GSong-chan 2020
The studio is aware *Digital Arts* recently covered a viral

Singapore news survey which said artists are ‘non-essential,’ so I ask the group how valued they feel as creatives in Singapore.

“Illustrators in Singapore have always been somewhat undervalued and that particular survey served to highlight how the general population truly viewed our field of work. So it’s not surprising for artists to be labelled as non-essential.

“There are still plenty of Singaporeans who appreciate art and artists such as us. So we do our best to meet or possibly exceed the expectations of people who value what we do for a living. And over time, eventually gaining the appreciation of a wider audience in Singapore and abroad is our goal.

“The truth is that the Singapore arts scene can be surprisingly vibrant beneath the surface. As mentioned, CDS takes an active role in the local *doujin* art community. We provide consultation for youth-led initiatives such as student art competitions and community art exhibitions. Beyond what we do with youth, the COVID-19 crisis has energised many local creative professionals to come together and organise for their collective betterment in the industry.”

Haru at home by GSong-chan 2020
Finishing the interview, I ask what projects the team would like to tackle in future.

“The best projects are the ones that inspire and stretch our imaginations. We certainly wouldn’t mind more anime-focused projects! That said, some of the things that we’ll like to try our hands on are editorial art or horror-themed projects.

“We are also preparing to release our own adult colouring book. The book is currently almost completed. The theme of the book is anthropomorphised animals of Singapore. While Singapore was under the circuit breaker lockdown, we were inspired by plenty of wildlife stories coming out in the news due to a decrease in human outdoor activity.”

Looking forward to it! Social media links for Collateral Damage Studio below:

Website :

Twitter : https://www.twitter.com/collateralds

Instagram :

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https://www.digitalartsonline.co.uk/features/illustration/collateral-damage-is-studio-cuddlier-than-its-name-suggests/