Why illustrators should collaborate more

Artists around the world share their love of collaboration, including Kiv Bui, Ronald Kuang and Felix Taaka.

Illustration can be a lonely endeavour, especially as a freelancer, but there are ways to avoid feelings of solitude as a creator. The most obvious solutions are either to share a studio or reach out to fellow artists to collaborate on a piece online (one can of course do both.)

Having seen more creatives do the latter recently on social media, *Digital Arts* reached out to some fantastically talented rising stars who've worked on equally fantastic collaborative pieces with fellow young greats.

Below we've showcased their thoughts and works of art, artists ranging from the Philippines to the States who all share a great affinity for Japanese pop culture. In fact, a lot of the illo collabs we see online are between artists who work in a post manga-tradition, seemingly bonded by love of all things Japan, as you'll see below.

Kiv Bui on killin' it with collaborations

is a freelance illustrator, currently studying abroad in California, United States. As an illustrator, her work covers storyboarding, fabric designing, concept, and background developing.

By Kiv Bui and Mirot
Collaboration between artists has always been something I enjoy doing to build a stronger connection with my artist friends and artists I admire.

I like it because of conversations while discussing the process. We get to share our creativity and learn from each other. While working on a collaboration, I'll be so curious about what my collaborator will bring to the table and get blown away if it is different or way better than my imagination. It's a silly, fun feeling.

Sometimes, I can have up to three collaboration acceptances a week. I always like to propose collaborations ahead of time, and when we both are available together, we then discuss the schedule further.

Kiv with
Collaboration is super casual and straightforward because we are friends. We often direct message each other on social media to check if we have time or are interested in collaborating on specific concept ideas.

We bring to the chat the senses that are interesting and start expanding on it. We keep the prompt simple; for example, this one with my artist friend, , we decided each of us would draw an original character of mine, Moon Child and Sun Child, holding Japanese desserts and wearing a Yokai mask.

Or for a fan art collaboration, we share a pic of a scene from the animation we both love and draw it in our style. For example, for my collaboration with my friend Thumin we picked a scene from *Spirited Away.*

Model collaborations

Other than collaborating with illustration artists, I also collaborate with some model friends, for example or .

In the future I want to expand into more types of collaborators to make each of our portfolios more diverse and at the same time create stronger connections with talented artists out there.

The Japanese Connection

For my circle of artist friends, we all happen to love anime and Japanese culture, and maybe it was how we got interested in each other in the first place. As such, our collaborations

turn out to be about what we both love. But it seriously can be in any concept and subject matter.

Follow Kiv Bui on Instagram.

Felix Taaka talks collaborations

Felix Taaka is so far making his name in the Philippines through his bright, crisp tour posters for bands on the local gig scene.

There’s something really special when collaborating with fellow artists, people with the same interests. I think the music and art scene locally is flourishing and there are lots of great talents sprouting each year; collaborating with some of these artists/creatives inspired me to create and explore

more!

What I love about collaborating in general is the exchange of vision and ideas. I learn so much from different communities whether it’s music or art.

It’s always fun because every collaboration can embrace experimentation & opportunities for the development of your craft. Also you contribute a part of yourself to each project, and it goes both ways!

The process itself is breezy. Usually I take the time to meet them in person if I can, as a way for us to fully connect with our aesthetic language. If they’re not around in the area, we would exchange ideas online just to set a direction to where

the artwork is headed.

So far though my collaborators have been very generous to let me propose a concept and a huge amount of creative freedom; it really helps when the collaborators are familiar with the works i’ve already put out and vice versa because it saves us a lot of time in conceptualising! The best part is that they are very open to any new ideas which is very cool and benefitting for both parties, and it’s always been a fun time to experiment every time that chemistry happens.

For me this is one of those examples of just having fun while collaborating. I collaborated with my significant other, , who is a fellow artist. I figure that the style I’m going for has great chemistry with her style which is a combination of

colourful shapes and lines along with my human figures and my own use of colours.

The final output surprised us both in that we didn’t expect that our styles would complement each other. The story behind this is our friend Camila Sunn was planning to get us to make a poster for her birthday but her stay in the U.S. was prolonged thus overlapping the birthday date, and so we decided to surprise her with a gift instead: this very artwork.

It’s the first time we collaborated and it was an incredibly inspiring experience because I’ve always been wanting to work with Terence. We are looking forward to more crazy collaborations in the future!

Music collaborations

This is a project for Mich Cervantes, a very well respected illustrator, and award-winning artist for her graphic novels and comics. Bedspacer is her experimental music project,

The above is a homage to her art style as well for use of incredible shapes and geometry. The concept was Bedspacer riding on an alien-looking paper fish and more colourful paper fishes in the background.

The composition was inspired by origami paper folds intersecting the action of the subjects, using isosceles triangles to show the equal connection of Bedspacer and Mich.

The movement is also predetermined: Bedspacer’s about to pull Mich’s hand, Mich about to grab Bedspacer’s, and the bigger

fish about to catch Mich.

Also I included her Tamagotchi baby, Dimple, as she mentioned online that it is a source of happiness to her.

On the Japanese influence

I think the popularity of lo-fi beats, Japanese funk or City Pop and future funk (a subgenre of vaporwave explored by *Digital Arts* recently) sparked a trend of 80's/90's nostalgia. It is very digestible and comfortable to look at!

I believe that these styles have been very effective in relation to how we process instant information nowadays with our devices. Artists are coming up with new concepts, and it's incredibly inspiring to see. It's also evolving as how our lifestyle evolves.

We also can't deny that Japanese art has influenced a lot of artists today with the country's amazing skills with conceptualisation and ingenuity in art, mostly simple but never, ever lazy.

I very much admire and respect these styles and it's relatability connects different kinds of fans and artists alike!

Ronald Kuang: collaboration king

is a digital illustrator & pin designer based in LA who has worked with Kiv Bui in the past.

There are a lot of reasons why I collaborate with other artists. The main reason being that it's fun to see what we can create when we combine our creative forces together.

I always seem to have some sort of collaboration in the works or am discussing potential collaborations with some artist friends. Other than seeing what cool things we can create,

it’s also a really nice way to interact with other artists in the art community. We get to know each other and create long lasting friendships.

The collaboration process in my experience is all pretty casual. It’s not like we get together into a group conference and pitch ideas. Usually it starts with a group of artist friends or someone we know hitting us up with a casual chat. Sometimes the idea for a collaboration pops up.

If we feel up to it we usually start brainstorming ideas and choose something we all agree on. During the brainstorming phase, ideas can vary a lot. Sometimes collabs can be a single image everyone works on, or separate images with a single theme. Then we set a soft deadline on when to get our parts done.

Sometimes collabs can take longer than anticipated, but that’s okay because everyone has their life and might be busy. Because of that, we’re pretty casual about when everyone’s parts should be done. But when we eventually finish all our parts, then send them over to each other to post together.

From top left to lower right the artists for each pill are: sinistersquids, kivbui, mrtidama, rykyart, teriskyart, and Ronald.
This above was my biggest collab with a total of six different artists working on their own pill designs.

Everyone here has their own unique styles that differ so much from each other, but we somehow made it work out really well by containing each other’s worlds into tiny pills. This was definitely one of my favourite collabs to work on.

Here’s a collab with the amazing Stephanie Priscilla. When I saw that Stephanie had done some collabs in the past, I knew I had to ask her for a collaboration at least once.

I was so glad she said yes because I’ve been a fan of her work since I’ve been on instagram. She ended up doing the character artwork because I’m not so great at drawing characters. I worked on the Japanese cyberpunk-ish background.

Another one of my favourite collabs was with a talented pixel artist, .

I honestly had no idea how we were going to fuse pixel artwork with non-pixel artwork at first. There was such a fundamentally different gap in our styles that it completely took me by surprise when we made this amazing cyberpunk-styled cityscape.

I painted the general background and cityscape in layers and left some empty spaces for billboards. Then James came in and brought the entire piece to life with his fantastic pixel animations.

Japanophiles

There might be a reason for why there’s a lot of collabs happening between those with Japan-influenced styles. Those with similar styles tend to gravitate towards the same interests and aesthetics.

Because of similar interests, there’s a high likelihood that they would get to know one another at some point after seeing each other’s works so often. Then it’s only a matter of time until someone throws the idea of collaborating out there.

Look out for the second part of this collaboration celebration series on Digital Arts soon.

Read next: Why illustrators around the world are in love with a 1980s Japan they’ve never experienced

https://www.digitalartsonline.co.uk/features/illustration/why-illustrators-should-collaborate-more/