

Norse Mythology: Digital Illustration Design Applications

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Abstract

Norse mythology is an ancient and profound mythological system with high artistic value and cultural significance. Digital illustration design carries on the stories and images of Norse mythology culture through the artistic expression of images, allowing people to better understand and know the culture, stories and morals of Norse mythology. Through diverse styles and techniques, digital illustration design innovatively represents the stories and images of Norse mythological culture, making them more vivid, interesting and appealing. Using the monsters of Norse mythology as the main vehicle, this set of designs combines some of the stories of the mythology with the simplicity of the Norse style. Through four monsters and one 'Twilight of the Gods', a different approach and a new perspective are used to express the understanding and interpretation of Norse mythology, allowing people to gain a deeper understanding of this mysterious world. The applications of digital illustration design in Norse mythology demonstrates the infinite possibilities of digital art in cultural heritage and innovation.

Keywords: Norse mythology, monsters, digital illustration design

1. Introduction

When it comes to Northern Europe, many people think of the fantastic and excellent natural beauty there, for example, the uncanny artistry canyon of Norway; the endless countryside of Denmark; the countless lakes of Finland; the sequestered forest of Sweden and the fantastic aurora of Iceland. Therefore, the beautiful natural scenery of Northern Europe inspires many artists' creations and inspirations. I believe that these are mysterious and gorgeous. As well as, the Norse mythology is infinitely more attractive to me. It is different from the ancient Chinese mythology, as it is remote and mysterious, with its unique charm and imagination.

This set of design works is dominated by the monsters of the Norse mythology, in combination with some stories of its mythology and the simplicity of Nordic style, through four monsters and a "the twilight of the gods", I want to express my understanding and interpretation of the Norse mythology by a different way and a new perspective.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Norse Mythology

The myth of North Europe also is called the Norway myth, western mythology system, one of Scandinavia is peculiar to a system of legend, the forming of time later in the world other several big mythology systems. The earliest

Norse mythology comes in the form of songs. In BC, the legend of “the beginning of chaos, the beginning of the heaven and earth”, which has been circulated in the Nordic-Germanic tribes. (Baidu Baike, n.d.) Compared with the Greek and Roman mythology, the Norse mythology is not so well-known, which of course, is partly because the northern European myth has been eroded by Christian culture too soon. The Norse mythology, like other mythologies, describes the origin of the universe, the creation of the heaven and earth, the source of the humankind, and the life of the gods and so on, with its unique charm and existence value. The Nordic deity is more particular, as the heresy, it exists in the dark ages of the middle ages, like the dawn, radiating the humanistic spirit in the dark ages. The myth of North Europe reflects the pagan beliefs of the primitive tribes and their fantastic imagination in the struggle against nature. King of the gods—Odin is a one-eyed hero, and the god of war—Tyre is a one-armed warrior. Such images show that the ancient Nordic tribes struggle to conquer nature, especially the courage to overcome the icy cold. Even so, the myth of North Europe has had a significant impact on modern life. For example, the four English words that are now used to indicate the position of the east, west, south and north are the names of the four dwarfs in the myth of North Europe. Moreover, also, the English names of the four days from Tuesday to Friday are even the names of the four gods in the myth of North Europe. (Google, n.d.)

The Norse mythology is very different from the Chinese religion. Because the myth has specific regionalism and limitation, different civilisations or nations have their mythological meanings. The gods of the Norse mythology are not omnipotent and perfect, and themselves face the fate of death, Lord—Odin, for example, had to sacrifice his left eye to gain knowledge and was hanged on a tree for nine nights before he received a long gun that symbolised power. On the other hand, the world of the Norse mythology is also not eternal; it is believed that when everything dies, new life will form again, and everything in the world will be recycled. Regarding the geography, the Nordic climate is terrible, and people need to struggle with nature all the time, of course, the myth looks very hardliner, very destiny, as well as, it is more tragic. Compared with this, some ancient Chinese myths are scattered and short in the

length of articles, some stories of the gods are very brief, and the storytelling is not persuasive. In the ancient Chinese mythology, the praise and devaluation of the gods mostly take morality as the criterion, and this way of thinking is deeply injected into Chinese cultural psychology. It is this spirit of virtue that makes Chinese culture reflect the demands of “virtue”.

2.2 *The Monsters of Norse Mythology*

Unlike the gods of the Norse mythology, which often appear in the novels and films, the Nordic mythological monsters are not so well known and noticed. When it comes to monsters, the first thing people think of is their large sizes and terrible appearances. This set of design works, with the monsters as the primary carrier, creates an exciting and lovely style illustration with a variety of different brushes and methods, at the same time, redesigning to express a whole new mythical world.

2.2.1 Evil Wolf—Fenrir

The most famous of the Norse mythology, the giant wolverine monster, the first child of the fire god—Loki and the female giant—Angrboda, and the big brother of the world’s python Jormungandr and death Hela. It is said that when it opened its mouth, the upper and lower jaw could withstand the heaven and earth. Because of its ferocious nature, it was chained to a chain of nine days and nine nights by the god of the sky, but it quickly broke the string. The gods had no choice but to turn to the armed dwarfs. Dwarfs used mountain roots, cat’s footsteps, fish’s breath, woman’s beard, bear’s tendon and bird’s saliva, these six rare things were forged into a name called “Gleipnir” of invisible chain and sacrificed one hand of the god of war—Tyre, then taken it alive. Like the prophecy, it broke loose in “the twilight of the gods” and joined its father and its brother, sister in the ranks of against the gods. In the battle with Odin, it conquered Odin, the father of the gods, and then was killed by Vader, the son of Odin. Fenrir had two sons, Hati and Skoll, who have chased the carriage of the sun and the moon, until “the twilight of the gods” finally engulfed them.

In this work, I designed the Evil Wolf—Fenrir in the centre of the picture, its eyes look ahead, with bright colours and rich textures, using the Norway’s national flower—erica and the Norway’s national bird—water ouzel are decorated with decorative patterns around it,

and straight and narrow. Some fairy tales about the Evil Wolf are in its backgrounds. Moreover, there is a huge mouth, the hand of the god of war, the six elements that capture it, its two sons swallow the sun and the moon, and it could break free of the chain, and the carriage with the sun and the moon.

2.2.2 Sea Monster—Kraken

The deep-sea monster of the Norse mythology is depicted as a giant squid or an octopus. Legend has it that the monster's long was 155 meters and its weight was 330 tons, which was described as a monster that ugly, huge and anything could be swallowed. Kraken's body was massive like a small island, which could not only cause enormous damage but also create whirlpools by its tentacle. Many fishing boats were attacked by it and buried in the bottom of the sea, which was a nightmare for fishers.

In this work, I designed the Sea Monster—Kraken in the lower position of the picture, its head is like an isolated island, projecting its vast body and multi-faceted claws, decorated with the Finnish national flower—lillian. Some of the mythological stories of the sea monster are designed in its backgrounds, such as the island's houses, mountains, rocks, fishers and fishing boats, and the waves and whirlpools it creates and stirs up.

2.2.3 Black Dragon—Nidhogg

In the Norse mythology, it is a black dragon that is continuously gnawing at its roots at the bottom of the tree of the world—Yggdrasil. Legend has it that there was a black dragon called "despair" lurking beside the root of the "tree of the world", it sat with countless other snakes and ate the roots of the tree. When the roots of the tree were eaten, the tree of life was rotten; the world would be destroyed. When "the twilight of the gods" came, it stirred up its wings and flew on the battlefield. It was also one of the few creatures to survive "the twilight of the gods".

In this work, I put the massive head of the black dragon in the prominent right position, with the national flower of Iceland—pansy, and patches of the cloud scattered all around, reflecting a kind of feeling of flying in the clouds. The fairy tales of the backgrounds describe the grand "tree of the world", Nidhogg gnaws away at the roots of the tree, and it sits on the bottom of the roots with its body.

2.2.4 Monty Python—Jormungandr

In the Norse mythology, it is a vast sea snake around the world, the fire god—Loki and the female giant—Angrboda's second child. Because power was too evil, Odin threw it into the bottomless deep sea of the human world. Jormungandr could not break free in the midst of the sea, so it had to close its body, and blocked the whole world—Midgard, hence the name "the world python" and "the giant snake around the atrium". In "the twilight of the gods" in the battle of doom, it resonated with the evil forces on the ground, it recovered from its sleep, churning up the seafloor and lifting the waves, at the same time, it came to the land of Asgard and declared war on the gods. Its belligerent rival, Thor, was the one with whom it had a profound vendetta. In the course of the battle, it had to spray the venom on Thor and used all means to attack Thor. In the end, Thor managed to hit Jormungandr with a magic hammer, but the sea snake's venom also went deep into Thor's body, destroying both sides.

In this work, I split the image of the monty python into two parts, projecting the considerable snakehead and winding body, decorating with the Danish national flower—holly in here. The mythological stories in the backgrounds describe both "the raised cat" and "the fishing serpent", two of which are related to Thor, as well as, the end of the battle about Jormungandr with Thor.

2.3 Norse Mythology—the Twilight of the Gods

According to the Icelandic poem *Edda*, in "the twilight of the gods" of the apocalypse, the Lord god—Odin was devoured by the evil wolf, Thor was poisoned with snake's venom, the Lord of Fertility—Frey and most of the other male and female gods abandoned life and went to the battleground, and the Wallonia's gods were not spared either. The fire giant—Surtr burned the whole universe, and the sun, the moon and the stars were destroyed, as well as, the earth sank into the sea. Moreover, the old world and the old order were swept away. It took a period, another new world was rising from the sea, and the daughters of the sun god and the moon god were shining the world again. The men and women who took refuge and survived under the ground became the masters of this land of rebirth. The descendants of Odin, such as the gods of light and the gods of dark returned to the earth one after another. However, the era of

the gods was gone forever, and then the next was the time of the gods' integration into the people. (Shi Qin'e, 2014)

In this work, I want to express not only "the twilight of the gods" in the battle of doom, but behind it, I could see a new light and hope. The background is yellow, symbolising the heaven. I paint the sun, the heavenly horse, the stars and the buildings in the picture, and they are eventually destroyed and sank into a huge ocean. The left and right sides of the picture design the golden apples, putting six elves inside, enhancing the harmony of the picture, expressing a kind of beauty and future. It is like Cimabue's work *The Madonna and child in majesty surrounded by angels*, he places six angels vertically, not one behind the other. (Erich Lessing & Vincent Pomarede, 2015) The fire giant—Surtr's fire sword is thrown into the sky, obscured by the light of the sun, expressing the power of justice will ultimately prevail over the endless evil in the end. Some apples and a beautiful fawn, the symbol of luck and peace, are also designed in the picture to reflect the aspiration and expectation of the future. This light has given me a profound experience. "That day, I looked up at the clouds, the sun was shining on the clouds, and I thought the clouds might melt away. When I looked straight at the world, it became grey, so I had to move my body to let the light shine on the world." There is nothing in the sky, but it always soothes the soul. At that time, the history is still so short, and ancestors use fertile imagination to make up one fantastic story after another, and there is enough space to imagine the pictures they hope. Now, however, we have been told by enough long history to the truth. It is like Hawking talks us that comets are not like this; it is as if Galileo

uses *Sidereus Nuncius* to tell us what the "heliocentrism" theory is. When we look at the starry sky, like the beautiful starry sky painted by our predecessors more than 400 years ago, we are still willing to live in our fantasies, as well as, look forward to the bright and future.

3. Figures

Pierre Kleinhouse, *Norse Mythology Monsters Guide* (2015)

The designer wants to design an exciting and colourful book to introduce children to the magical world of Nordic mythology. Each page tells the story of a monster that appears in a Nordic fairy tale. The monsters in the book are huge, but not terrible. Designer design a more casual and fun style that allows children to enjoy the process of exploration.



Figure 1. (Image from the book of *Designing Books for Children*, 09/02/2021)

John Bauer, *Nordic fairy tale* (the 1910s)

In the 1910s, Swedish illustrator John Bauer painted a Nordic fairy tale. The princess, the prince and elves were all handsome and beautiful, making a bright light in the gloomy picture. John Bauer has illustrated many classic works of literature.





Figure 2. (Accessed on google images, 10/02/2021)

More than 400 years ago, people painted the stars. The universe was so mysterious and unpredictable to them.



Figure 3. (Accessed on Weibo images, 10/02/2021)

More than 400 years ago, people painted the stars. The universe was so mysterious and unpredictable to them.



Figure 4. (Accessed on Weibo images, 10/02/2021)

Lili des Bellons

Lili des Bellons is an artist from France and is currently based in Paris. He is involved in films, 3D animation and illustration. His works are full of psychedelic colours, and fairy tale, myth, cartoon interweave together, the picture decorative peace surface feeling is compelling, the colour is bright, very absorbing eyeball. His works are always mysterious and make people seem to enter a similar world.



Figure 5. (Accessed on weixin images, 11/02/2021)



Figure 6. (Accessed on google images, 13/02/2021)

Giovanni Cimabue, *The Madonna and child in majesty surrounded by angels* (1568)

Giovanni Cimabue (1240~1302) is one of the first painters in Florence of Italy. He is an inlay painter, and it is said that he is the teacher of Giotto. His painting works have the end style of Byzantine painting, the art of the Italian Renaissance period, and has the meaning of the prelude.

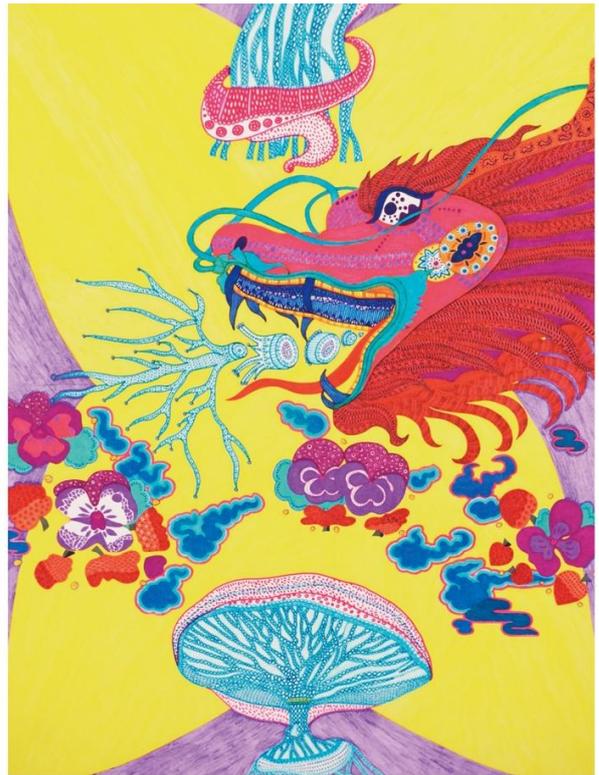
This considerable painting is one of the masterpieces of Italy created on the eve of the Renaissance. This painting depicts the Virgin Mary sitting in the middle of the throne surrounded by six angels, and the background of the picture is entirely golden, symbolising heaven. The painting is known for its strong sense of calm and sense of majesty. This work, with remarkable new sensibility, breaking the aesthetic standard of the previous Medieval and Byzantine art. However, Giovanni Cimabue does not understand the perspective method, so he places six angels vertically instead of one behind the other. The work can be traced back to Cimabue's the earliest career, drawing before his famous work *The coronation of the Madonna*, which is a famous work he has painted for the Santa Trinita. The painting is thought to use at the altar of the San Francisco church in Pisa. Its frame is unique, and it is decorated with 26 bright colours, highlighting saints and angels' round ornaments.

4. My Work

This set of design works is dominated by the monsters of the Norse mythology, in combination with some stories of its mythology and the simplicity of Nordic style, through four monsters and a "the twilight of the gods", creating an exciting and lovely style illustration by a variety of different brushes and methods, telling stories and expressing feelings. In the case of Pierre Kleinhouse's big monsters in the *Norse Mythology Monsters Guide*, the four monsters have a large proportion in the pictures, which is to highlight the subject. The Norse mythology is introduced through the stories and events of monsters drawn in the backgrounds. There was a painter John Bauer who made the story of the Norse mythology in the 1910s. His technique is exquisite, colour is magnificent, and telling the story vividly and expressively. Regarding colour, I prefer Lili des Bellons' illustration colour style. The backgrounds use purple and yellow of large area, bright and eye-catching, attract people's eyeball. While studying these advantages, I want to express my understanding and interpretation of the Norse mythology by a different way and a new perspective. Compared with the Greek and Roman mythology, the Norse mythology is not so well-known. I hope that through this set of design works, more people will know and understand the story of the Norse mythology, and find its light.



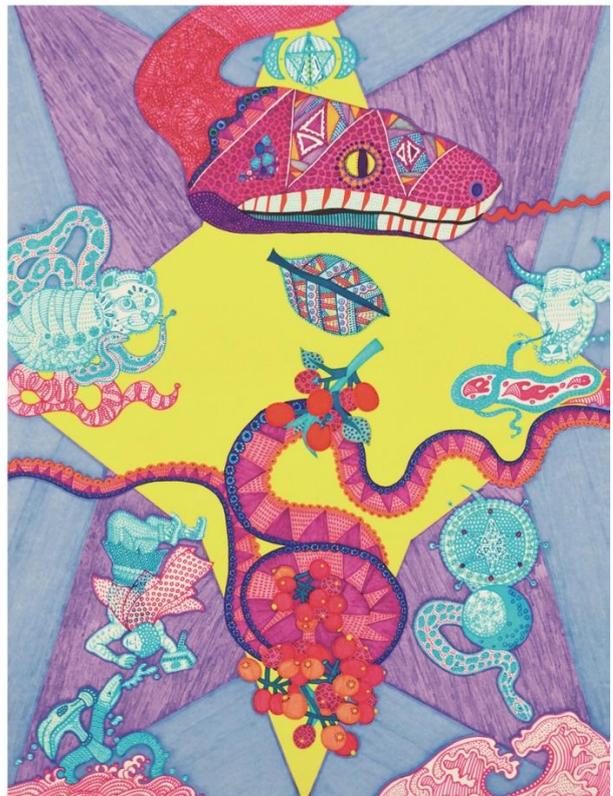
In this work, I design the Fox Wolf—Fascia in the center of the picture. Its eyes look ahead, with bright colours and rich textures, using the Norway's national flower—arisa and the Norway's national bird—white swan and decorated with decorative patterns around it. Some fairy tales about the Fox Wolf are in its background. Moreover, there is a huge mouth, the head of the god of war. The six elements that relate it, its feet have the sun and the moon, and it could break free of the chain, and the carriage with the sun and the moon.



In this work, I put the massive head of the black dragon on the prominent right position, with the custom figure of black-stripped and patches of the cloud are scattered all around, reflecting a kind of feeling of flying in the clouds. The fairy tales of the background describe the general "Tales of the world". Nothing glazes away at the roots of the tree, and it sits on the bottom of the roots with its body.



In this work, I design the Sea Monster—Makara in the lower portion of the picture. Its head is like an octopus head, pointing to the body and tentacles, decorated with the Finnish national flower—lily. Some of the mythological stories of the sea monster are designed in its background, such as the legend "Whales, mermaids, rocks, fishes and flying boats, and the waves and whirlpools, it creates and stir up."



In this work, I put the image of the mirror pattern into two parts, presenting the considerable individual and winding body. According with the German national flower—lily in hand. The mythological stories in the background describe both "the sacred lot" and "the falling season", one of which are related to "Tale, as well as, the end of the battle about cosmogony with Tiamat."

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