

# CHARACTER DESIGN CONCEPT ART FOR A CYBERPUNK THEMED STORY

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## Abstract

Character design is a form of illustrative artwork used to visualize characters for films, games, and animations. These designs serve as the foundation for creating the final characters in various media. However, in today's film industry, artistic aspects are often overshadowed by commercial interests, leading to a lack of appreciation for creative concepts. To address this, concept art should be recognized and utilized as a guiding force in filmmaking. Cyberpunk, a captivating science fiction genre, explores a future where humans merge with machines, losing their humanity. The author will focus on character concept art aligned with the Cyberpunk theme, supporting the film industry in visualizing characters. Through Cyberpunk character design, writers can transform their once-dreamt ideas into impactful works of art, appreciated by audiences worldwide.

**Keywords:** concept art, character design, design elements, cyberpunk

## I. INTRODUCTION

Cyberpunk has become a popular theme in entertainment media such as movies and television series. This science fiction genre is currently dominating pop culture and depicts a society that is controlled by computers and has lost its humanity. The word "cyberpunk" comes from "cybernetics," that is, the replacement of organic human parts with machines. Even though it tells the story of advanced technological developments, cyberpunk contains a warning message about the importance of awareness for humanity that should not be outdone by advances in machines.

The cyberpunk theme has its own uniqueness, but most of the stories that carry it do not feature characters with strong and striking visuals. This makes the various cyberpunk stories that are released seem monotonous and less different from one another. Even so, the potential of this genre is still great. By strengthening the visual concept

and presenting more creative characters, cyberpunk stories can attract the audience's attention more. The use of advanced technology in the story must be balanced with an in-depth exploration of the uniqueness and complexity of the characters. Thus, cyberpunk stories can become more diverse and present a viewing experience that is more emotional and thought-provoking [1]. In this context, "monotonous" means that cyberpunk-themed character designs often follow familiar patterns and templates; characters with bionic parts, bodies that undergo transformation into machines, as well as cables to send information all over the place [2].

### 1.1 Character Design

Creating a character involves a crucial creative process called character study. It helps to delve into body shapes, gestures, and expressions, aligning the characters with the themes and ideas depicted in rough sketches [3]. A fundamental

aspect of character design is the archetype, which defines a character's nature, behavior, psychology, and physique, shaping their unique identity [4].

Character design involves three key aspects to consider.

### *Demographics*

Understanding the demographics and target audience is essential when designing a character. Each group, whether children, youth, or adults, has distinct preferences and levels of acceptance. Considering these factors beforehand ensures that the character's design effectively resonates with the intended audience.

### *Silhouettes and Greyscales*

Silhouettes and shapes play a crucial role in character design, ensuring memorability and easy identification. By crafting characters with clear, distinctive shapes and black shadows, a strong and easily recognizable silhouette is achieved. Additionally, greyscale and color techniques contribute to establishing value and contrast before final coloring, adding depth and dimension to the character's visual appearance. Utilizing a gradient between black and white enhances the overall visual impact of the character design.

### *Personality and Colors*

Character design should vividly showcase personality and traits through visual elements. Shapes and colors play a pivotal role in this representation, with bold and strong visuals embodying confidence, while softer and subdued tones reflecting gentleness. Moreover, a critical aspect is the cultural understanding of color interpretations, as colors hold diverse meanings across cultures. Thoughtful consideration of these cultural nuances ensures characters resonate and are embraced by a wide and diverse audience.

By addressing these elements, character design becomes more effective in conveying messages and fostering an emotional connection with the audience [5].

## **1.2 Theory About Cyberpunk**

In the journal titled "Cyberpunk: A Dystopian, Dehumanized High-Tech Future in Indian SF Virus," researcher Ms. Meenal R. Kale explains that

cyberpunk is a subgenre of science fiction. It portrays a futuristic world where advanced technology dominates human life. The genre focuses on stories depicting a dehumanized existence due to machines replacing organic human parts. Cyberpunk emerged through William Gibson's novel "Neuromancer" and gained popularity with the 1982 film "Blade Runner" [6].

The essence of cyberpunk lies in raising awareness about the progress of time and questioning our existence as humans, pondering whether we might be consumed by technological advancements. This theme is exemplified by body horror visuals popularized by the 1988 film "Akira," further reinforced by the analysis of the film "Blade Runner 2045" [6].

## **II. RESEARCH METHOD**

In this research, the goal is to identify and analyze patterns in cyberpunk character design, and improve upon the pattern and reimagine them into the design process. To achieve this, an experimental approach will be adopted, employing the content analysis research method. The study will involve comparing samples from various media sources to draw conclusions and apply the findings to the character design process, considering the previously mentioned aspects of character designing. Key steps in the research include selecting appropriate demographics for the characters, ensuring that their silhouettes align with cyberpunk expectations using greyscales, and carefully choosing personality traits and colors that complement the cyberpunk theme. By implementing these measures, the research aims to improve the overall quality and authenticity of cyberpunk character design.

Content analysis is a valuable learning technique used to examine and understand conclusions, allowing for their replication within the context of the analyzed data. In this study, qualitative content analysis methods were employed to dissect symbolism and meaning in cyberpunk visuals, enabling researchers to recreate similar visuals with precision [7].

### *Visual Analysis*

To examine and collect the sample needs to be compared, visual analysis is used to gather all the data through reference and visual study. The visual analysis method is carried out to examine the

visual part. According to Gillian Rose in her book entitled *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, visual research is divided into three areas of view that can be used by researchers, namely, the site of the production image, the site of the image itself, and the site where it is seen by various audiences. In this study, the researcher uses “the point of view of the site of image itself”, where the researcher acts alone to make interpretations, meanings and understanding of the objects being researched and observed by researchers. With this research method, researchers can see not how the image looks, and how the image is viewed [8].

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Visual Analysis

##### Cyberware

Cyberware is a design element used in various cyberpunk characters. Cyberwares are the robotic parts of cyberpunk characters and it’s most repetitive in this genre.

In this content analysis, we examined three distinct samples: A - the captivating art created by Florian Cassani, a talented artist featured on Artstation; B - the iconic character of Johnny Silverhand from the renowned game *Cyberpunk 2077*; and C - the beloved Alita from the blockbuster movie “*Alita: Battle Angel*.”



Figure 1 sample: a, art by Florian Cassani (Artstation). Sample B, Johnny Silverhand, *Cyberpunk 2077* (CD Projekt Red). Sample C, Alita, *Alita: Battle Angel* 2019 (20th Century Studio)

Figure 1 shows the samples used to compare and here are the results:

Table 1 Cyberware Samples Comparison

A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cyberware on the character by Florian Cassani face implies an enhanced feature in that area, possibly improving vision and thinking abilities due to its placement in the head.</li> </ul>
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Johnny Silverhand has cyberware in his left hand, indicating it's his dominant hand for various activities.</li> <li>• This cyberware enhances Johnny's physical capabilities and interactions with advanced technology in the cyberpunk world.</li> <li>• It provides combat advantages and special skills for Johnny.</li> <li>• The cyberware adds depth to Johnny's identity, potentially unveiling an intriguing backstory.</li> </ul>
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alita's entire body has been replaced by technology, except for her head to the collarbone.</li> <li>• The cyberware enhances Alita's body, giving her extraordinary abilities beyond ordinary humans.</li> <li>• Despite Alita's cyberware body, Alita's identity remains rooted in her human nature, filled with emotions and determination.</li> </ul>

Based on sample comparison in table 1, we can pull a conclusion :

- Cyberware in characters replaces organic parts with technology to simplify body horror elements.
- The design of cyberware implies character enhancements.
- Cyberware plays a significant role in cyberpunk narratives, portraying the blend of humans and technology in a futuristic world.
- Organic replacement with technology represents character transformations and internal struggles.
- Cyberware serves as a symbol and narrative tool to explore themes like identity, humanity, and ethics in cyberpunk stories.

Lines

Lines are a defining design element in cyberpunk characters, prominently featured in various parts of their bodies, particularly in the face. By analyzing different samples from diverse media, we can uncover the significance of these lines in character design within cyberpunk-themed stories.

In this content analysis, we examined three distinct samples: A – Crypto from the game Apex Legends B – Geisha from the movie Ghost in the Shell C – Cyberpunk girl by 雷ks from Artstation.

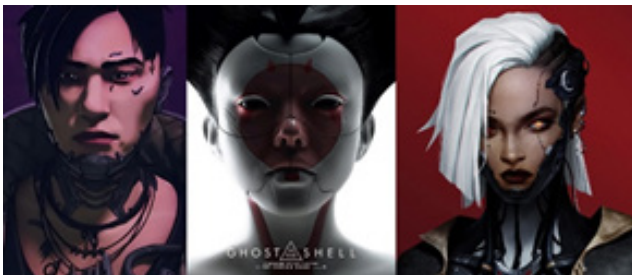


Figure 2 Sample a, Crypto, Apex Legend (EA). Sample b, Geisha, Ghost In The Shell (Paramount Pictures). Sample c, Pinterest

Figure 2 shows the samples used to compare and here are the results:

Table 2 Lines samples comparison

A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crypto's character features lines on his face, resembling a pattern of cyberware that is not directly connected.</li> <li>• The design conveys the message that his face contains electronic circuits or circuitry.</li> <li>• It emphasizes Crypto's identity as a character deeply intertwined with the cyberpunk world.</li> </ul>
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These lines indicate differences or "gaps" where some parts cover her original face. The striped designs add an interesting dimension to the Geisha character, hinting at transformations and hidden secrets.</li> <li>• The lines create mystery and complexity, making the Geisha character more intriguing.</li> </ul>

C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The lines in the sample depict circuitry or wires hidden beneath the character's face.</li> <li>• In this sample, the lines serve as accessories rather than functional components.</li> </ul>
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Based on sample comparison in table 2, we can pull a conclusion:

- Lines can indicate the presence of cyberware or describe the character's condition and personality.
- Lines can also serve only as accessories for the character, and may not carry any specific meaning.
- Different line shapes convey various messages, like a box line representing confinement or limitation. Endless lines suggest a long journey ahead or reflect the character's life story.

3.2 Character Design Result

After research were made and all the character design basics were covered, we can move straight to the results of the designs.



Figure 3 Results of the character design

In total, 12 characters were created, each with different personalities. The Cyberpunk-themed story includes typical archetypes such as mercenaries, hackers, and corporates. By following the patterns studied earlier, we can derive the results as shown in Figure 3.

*Character Silhouette*

Figure 4 The 12 character's silhouettes

In Figure 4, you can find the silhouettes of the character designs. Each character has a unique silhouette that reflects their personality. Sharp-edged characters represent aggressiveness and activeness, while curvy characters represent friendliness and approachable traits.

*Characters Studies*

To implement the previously mentioned aspects of character designs, conducting character studies becomes crucial. This process ensures that each character adheres to the studied patterns, incorporating all the cyberpunk design elements in a coherent manner that aligns with the cyberpunk theme, as shown in Figure 5.



Figure 5 Character Studies

**IV. CONCLUSION**

Based on the objectives and the results obtained in this study, it can be concluded as follows:

1. To break away from the monotony of cyberpunk characters, adding more personality and colors is essential.
2. Improved silhouettes play a crucial role in conveying better character designs, focusing on distinctive shapes [9].
3. To add more depth to elements like lines and cyberware, adding subliminal messages for the audience will make for more innovative and distinguishable character [10].

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