Sajan Rai is a cartoonist and illustrator whose work defies easy categorization. Mixing illustration and graphic design, betraying influences from across the world and across time, each work by Sajan stands on its own. You can find his art on his website or on social media: twitter, tumblr, instagram, mastodon… you get the picture. Anyway, I'm delighted and honored to have Sajan here to share some insights about art with all of us!

Logan: The standard question but a fun one: what are your primary artistic influences / who are some of your favorite artists?

Sajan: I'm very fortunate that my parents had a lot of art books around the house when I was young, and I loved poring over Paul Klee's stuff. I think the way he experimented with different styles, created work that looked full of fun as well as methodological, has been consistently inspiring to me.

Gary Larson and Brad Neely are also pretty influential in both my cartooning and the illustrated

haiku pieces I do - there's something I love about their capturing of snapshot moments in their single-panel stuff.

Basquiat's work is inspirational and comes to mind when I think about how I approach the ontology of the art I make - the way he scaled graffiti, notebook visuals and text into large paintings is magical. And his inclusion of deliberate erasure, such as scribbled out elements, and the very humanly diagrammatic stuff is so compelling.

Others I should mention: Ivan Bilibin, Roger Dean, Edvard Munch, Hokusai, Hiroshige, William Blake, Michelangelo, Maurice Noble, as well as plenty of old work from outside of European art traditions - especially Tibetan Thangka and South Asian art and sculpture.

Logan: Mentally, how do you approach each artwork? What's your process like? As someone who tends to work in a fairly mechanical and reproducible way (sketch->ink->base colors->highlights) I'd be interested in how you end up with so many different pieces each of which seems to exhibit a style unto itself.

Sajan: Treating every piece as an experiment! I've developed more reliable methods over the past few years, but even if working in one of those, I try to incorporate new and unexpected touches in every piece I do. I still don't have a preference when it comes to starting an artwork with shapes or linework.

I do really like using shapes, and should also say [Janet and Anne Grahame Johnstone](#) were an influence on how I approach figures. I loved their use of flat colours against painterly elements. And, similarly with anatomy - they manage a lovely fluidity between realistic and stylised. Juxtapositions and exploring the in-betweens when it comes to things like that forms a very large part of my process and creative ideology.

Unless I'm capturing a fully formed image I've thought of, I thrive working in a very stream-of-consciousness way- which is fun for me, but not at all the best or most professional way to get stuff done! I do wish I had the control to plan things more.

Going back to experimentation - I like to dip into different softwares. It's mostly passing a file between Procreate and Photoshop, but I'll occasionally use a vector program, or once in a blue moon, Blender - which I've made an annual habit of learning and forgetting over the past few years **(Editor's note: none of us would be real illustrators if we didn't learn and then immediately forget Blender one to two times per year)**. I've recently been enjoying Rebelle too. I did my Art Foundation course at Bucks New Uni, and some of the very exercises we did in the first few weeks there were very formative - lots of accumulating textures, creating, recording, destroying, re-recording, etc. Since then, a lot of my process involves deconstructing my own work along the way.

Logan: A lot of your art is paired with a unique haiku. What got you into composing haikus? And when you make these paired pieces, what comes first: the poem or the picture?

Sajan: I began the illustrated haiku poems as a means to learn to illustrate completely digitally - so it began as, and still is, a sketchbook project. I wanted a consistent and grounding framework whilst experimenting with different styles and approaches. I'm glad I did, because It quickly spiraled into a fun exercise in world-building. The haiku format gave me a syllabic constraint that meant I could pour all my indecisiveness into the art.

In terms of what comes first - It's often a more vague idea consisting of visuals combined with a few phrases that I might thumbnail. But there's no set method. Sometimes I'll just start drawing and finalize the poem afterwards, and other times I'll formulate the haiku first.

THE DIRE CHOIR RELEASED,
STRUGGLES TO FOLLOW STRANDS OF
RUNAWAY'S CHANGED TUNES

Logan: As a self-employed artist, what do you find yourself doing most often for commissions? Are there any projects you'd like to work on but haven't had the opportunity to yet?

Sajan: I've recently been in a sweet spot of doing lots of work for indie TTRPG games, which is neat. They've been really pleasant clients and I've gotten to draw extremely fun stuff for them. **(Editor's note: shoutout to indie TTRPG creators for keeping us all employed.)** If I could get more gigs just drawing 'disgusting aliens' I would be delighted.

Doing more album covers would be fun! I got to do digipak artwork for 2mello last year which was so cool - having a little more control of the overall design is something I rarely get to do. Doing gig posters would be great too. I used to constantly hog a copy of a book out the library called "Fucked Up + Photocopied: Instant Art of the Punk Rock Movement" that was full of American Punk Posters. Reminding me I should actually buy it.

Logan: Who is an artist you think should be better known?

Sajan: Fiona Kaerhon draws/paints people in such a beautiful and distinctive way, and equally so in her use of tone, whether working in pencil, inks or paint.

If I'm allowed some more: Nate Tazewell creates fantastically weird and unique scenes, Freya JN treads a world between cartooning and painterly styles in a really pleasing way. Someone that might fit well in your 'Anyone But Moebius Mondays' is an artist called Thomas Heitler doing lovely ligne claire work that feels like its own thing.

Logan: What's a recent book you read? What's your favorite book?

Sajan: A recent one I read was *The Sea of Tranquility* by Emily St John Mandel. As well as *Station Eleven*, I love how compelling she makes the inner lives and voices of her cast of characters. I'm a sucker for stories that switch narratives like those two do - I read a novel called

Daylight By Saturday By JB Priestly when I was young that I remember finding enjoyable for that. Need to find more books with that going on, feel free to recommend any! **(Editor's note: If you haven't read it already, I think *Little, Big* by John Crowley might fit the bill for a book with multiple different perspective characters, each of whom has a really rich and distinct personality.)**

Logan: Anything else you want to say? Any questions for me?

Sajan: Should go without saying that I adore your work - and I really admire that you're so active in discussing illustration and interviewing peers. But I'm also interested and curious about influences that extend beyond one's field - For example I'd cite Star Trek, the 1960's Batman series, Marx Bros, Laurel & Hardy, Seinfeld, and even some musicians' approaches as influences on my artwork and comics. Are there any creatives (or non-creatives!) in other disciplines that you feel inform your art or methods?

Logan: Oh man, great question! This is the kind of thing I could rant about for hours so I'll try to keep it brief.

Some of my influences from outside of the realm of visual arts I imagine are pretty obvious. I have a huge interest in clothing design and the history of fashion as it relates both to aesthetics and practicality. Endlessly fascinating to me how the things we wear are affected by our physical surroundings as well as ideology, propaganda, religion, personal preference and on and on. I have TONS of reference images of robes, pants, dresses, shoes, headgear, etc. Pretty much every time I draw a new character I'm doing some research and pulling up new reference to design an outfit for them. For whatever reason it's something that always has, and probably always will, interest me.

Another big one is history. I'm more or less always reading about different times, different places, and different human experiences. It's just fun to learn and it's an endless well of new ideas for things to draw. More recently, I've had a lot of interest specifically in the history of technology- what technologies we use and why. This combined with having been (at least nominally) educated as an engineer tends to influence how I design artifacts, tools, vehices, etc in my art. I often get caught up in doing a lot of tangential research for my illustrations, probably more than is usually necessary.

Some other influences I think are a bit less apparent. I'm deeply interested in architecture of all kinds. Vernacular architecture and the ways people have historically adapted to their physical environment is on my mind a lot but formal movements interest me as well. Specifically everything from the late-19th to the mid-20th century: Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Brutalism, Mid-Century Modernism, Frank Lloyd Wright's work, Craftsman homes and historical revival domestic architecture. I love all that stuff but I'm rarely commissioned to design/illustrate buildings and when I'm drawing for fun I tend to lapse back into comfort zone material (characters, creatures) as a form of relaxation.

A lot of toys and games from my childhood still influence me, even if indirectly. Sonic the Hedgehog and Pokemon gave me a lifelong appreciation for bright colors and strong, simple silhouettes. Lego and Bionicle have heavily influenced my approach to designing vehicles and robots. And there are a whole slew of children's books, video games, and TV shows will probably be bouncing around in the back of my head forever.

I have a huge appreciation for the art and design of "heavy music:" harcdore, emo, heavy metal etc. I love gig posters, illegible metal logos, aggressive punk t-shirts. Nobody ever asks me to design that stuff and it sucks.

I'm fascinated by the aesthetics of industrialized bureaucracies. Hazard communication standards, the graphics of government agencies, vexillology, passport stamps, birth and death certificates, transit signage. When you think about how recent a lot of that stuff is, at least from a historical standpoint, it becomes a lot weirder.

I'll stop myself here because this is getting out of hand but thank you for such a fun question!