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Finding a unique and appealing style is a very common concern among artists, and yet if you ask very experienced artists and art directors, you will often get answers like “don’t worry about style, it’ll find you”.

And this is true!

But it isn’t a very helpful answer to the concerns that I think artists are actually worried about when they ask about style.

You probably already have a style, even if you don’t think you do. When I hear concerns about finding your style, I think what most artists actually mean is,

**“How can I develop a style that I actually like!”**

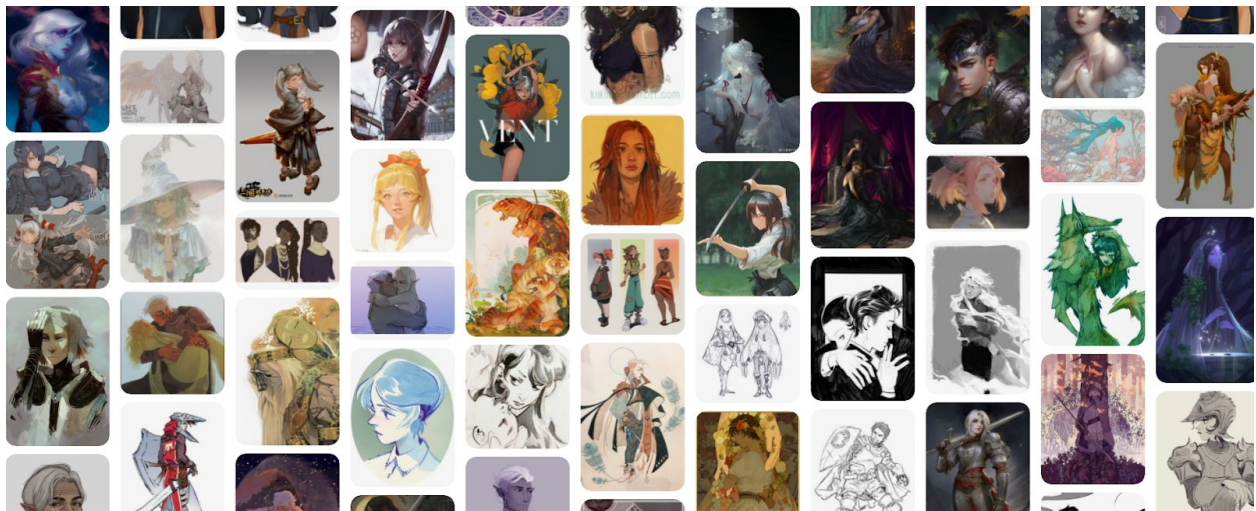
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It's true that your style will develop naturally, whether you are consciously thinking about it or not. But there are certainly ways to help push your style in a specific direction faster if you ARE consciously thinking about it!

So let's go over ways to do that. These are methods that I specifically use when I am trying to develop my style in a conscious direction.

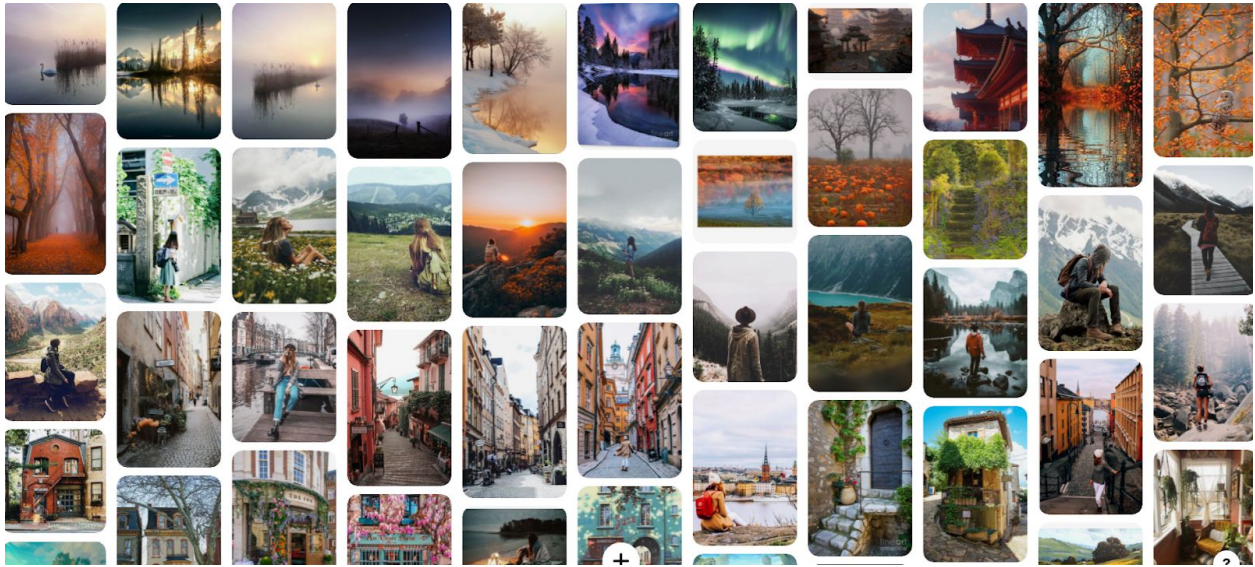
## 1. Look at art you find appealing.

This general tip hardly needs to be mentioned, because it's probably something you are already doing!



Style will naturally develop from what inspires you and what you surround yourself with. The more you look at artwork with certain styles, the more your eye and brain will log how those artists represent certain shapes, lines, colors, etc

## 2. Look at photos you find appealing and (if you can) go to places you find appealing and inspiring



I think it is very important that we gather inspiration from sources outside of other artists.

Of course other artists are super inspiring! But we also need to be gathering mental reference and inspiration from our real lives and photography. This kind of inspiration will help add your own unique experience and flavor to your art and style.

## 3. Build an Inspiration Board

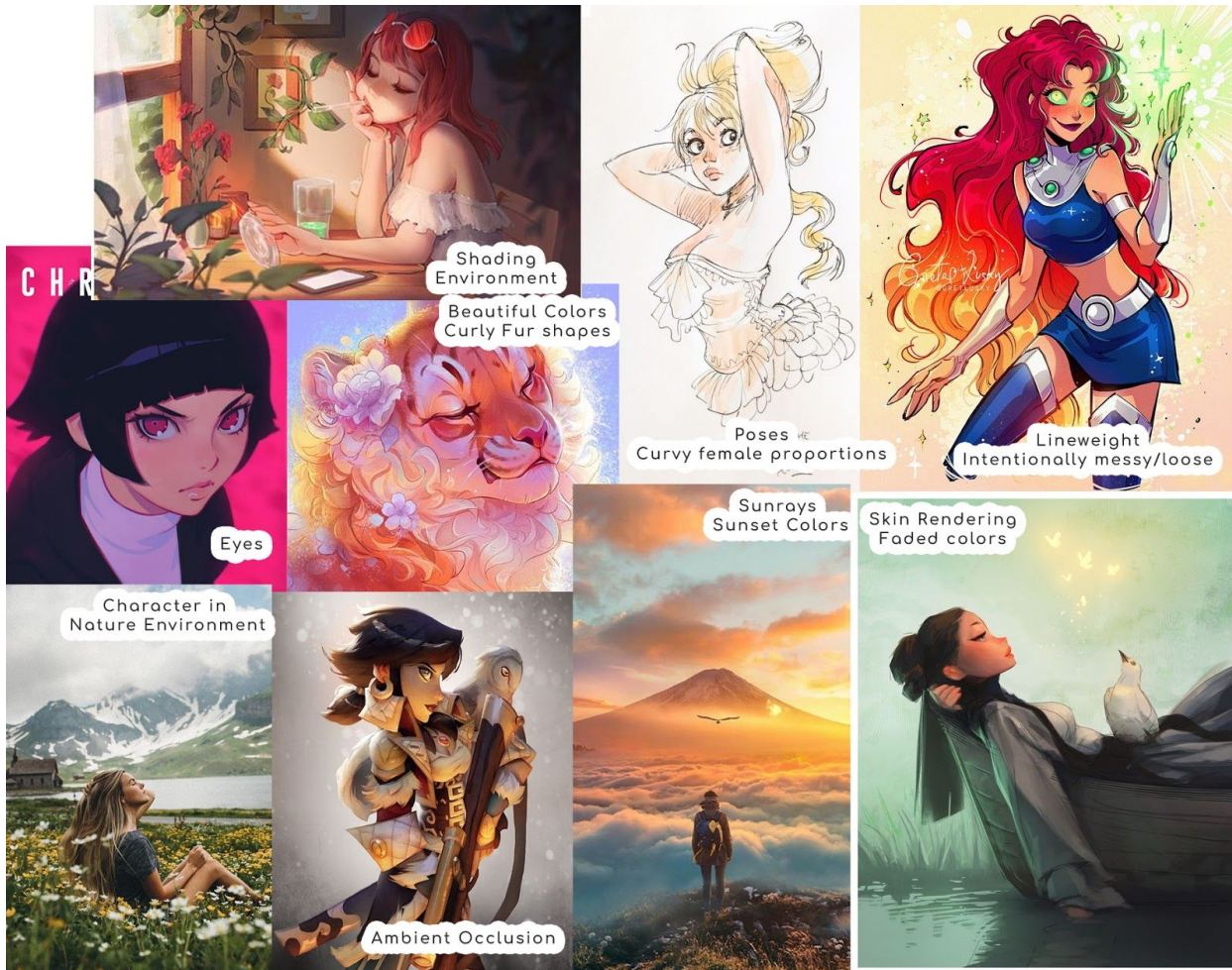
Okay, now we are getting down to putting in some work towards style. Choose photos and artwork that represent what you want your style to be!

I recommend choosing somewhere **between 5-15 photos/artworks**.

Not too few because you need multiple inspirations to avoid just copying one or two artists. And not too many, or else it will be confusing and overwhelming and you won't be able to really hone in on what you specifically want from each reference.

## 4. Write Down what you Love about each picture!

Get out your pen and paper and WRITE DOWN what it is you like about EACH picture.



**WHY** did you choose it?

What about it do you want to learn to incorporate into your artwork? How that artist draws lineart? The textures? Something about the proportions or how the artist draws a specific aspect of the character? The way the light looks? The color pallets?

It could really be anything, and figuring out what you find so appealing about that picture is a good exercise in analyzing and breaking down what you want out of your own work.

If you can't come up with anything specifically to write down about a picture, you might want to consider scrapping that picture for now so that you can focus on the other pictures in your inspiration board.

## 5. Its OKAY to not do EVERYTHING!



Another important note is that even if you LOVE to look at a specific style of artwork, that doesn't necessarily mean that you HAVE to draw in a style like that.

If you don't enjoy working in a specific style, that's okay. You can just appreciate it without doing it yourself.

For example, I absolutely love this kind of symbolic tarot style artwork, buuuuuut I don't particularly enjoy creating it myself.

So, at least for now, I am satisfied with just enjoying it as a viewer. It doesn't mean that I can't learn and be inspired by it, but it isn't something I'm actively trying to incorporate into my own style. I just love looking at it!

## 6. Draw a Character or Subject you are familiar with but incorporate Style notes

Sit down to draw something you are familiar with. I recommend choosing something that isn't too overwhelming, maybe a character you have drawn before. Make sure to keep your inspiration images handy and close by so that you can easily look at them with your notes while you are drawing.

If you have a lot of images, consider choosing just a couple to focus on so that you can really hone in on the style notes you find most important.

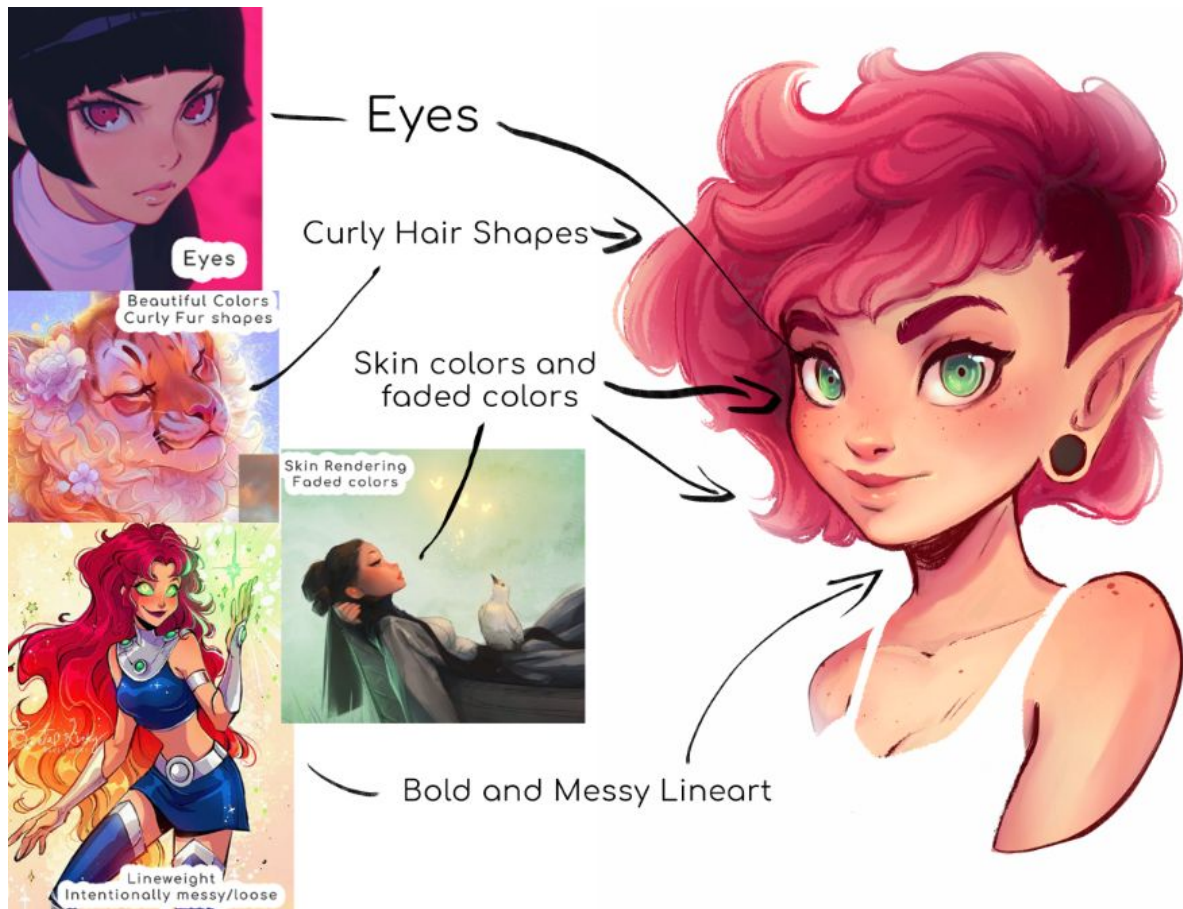


Image 1: Ilya Kushinov, Image 2: Nani Qi, Image 3: Gretel Lusky, Image 4: Sam Yang

So I chose to draw a portrait of my elf-sona since I have drawn her many times before... and she tends to show up in these articles on occasion. I decided to only choose 4 references to focus on for now, especially since it was just a portrait and I really wanted to focus on specific aspects of each style reference.

# Cheats

Let's talk about a faux pas that I have actually used in the past to help develop my style and I think it's really helpful!

## TRACING!

Oh yes. And not **only** tracing photos, but tracing another artist's drawing. \*gasp!\*

**Disclaimer, you should only do this for LEARNING purposes.** I definitely do NOT recommend posting anything you have traced to social media, and you should certainly not claim it as your own.

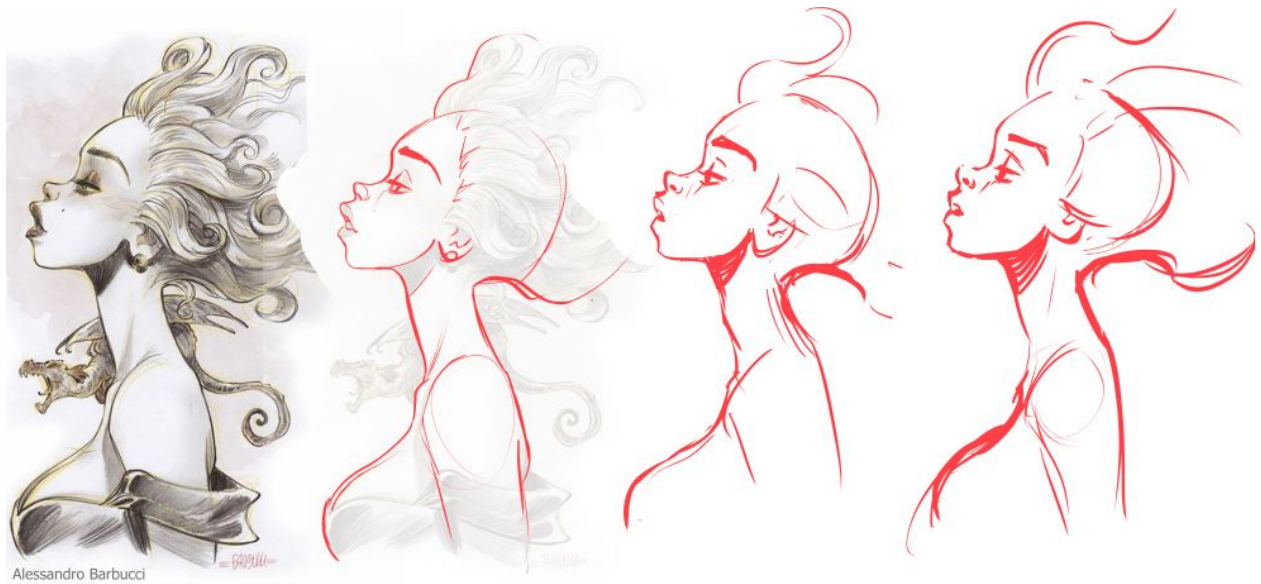
Unless it is of a photo you took yourself or have the rights to, tracing is for learning purposes only my friends!

We have talked about tracing photos before (see [Tips to Draw Anything](#)) and why I think it can be educational, but let's talk about how I think it can be helpful to trace another artist's actual drawing.

It helps you get a sense for the shapes and proportions that the artist uses.

I don't know about you, but I get so used to drawing things **my way** that it can be really eye opening to trace another artist's work every now and then to see how someone else represents the shape of a head, or a torso, a hand, or whatever else it is! And it is cool to see how it is different from what I normally do.

Try this exercise!



1. Take another artwork, trace over it to break it down and see the types of shapes that artist is using.
2. On the same canvas, right next to the traced work, try and redraw/replicate the shape a couple times to get it into your muscle memory.
3. Now try and incorporate that new way of drawing that shape into your own original art.

## Liquify

Here is another little cheat! Using the liquify tool in photoshop or procreate is an easy way to push your style a little bit. What would it look



like if the eyes in your art were bigger or smaller? What would it look like if you reduced the size of the chin or enlarged the ears?



Obviously, you can go overboard with this tool and things can get crazy, but liquify is a really quick and easy way to play with proportions if you want to quickly experiment with a drawing that you already have.

If you find some interesting new proportions that you like, reduce the opacity of your liquified artwork, make a new layer and practice tracing those new proportions to get them in your muscle memory!

## Color Correction

Diving even deeper into digital art cheats... have you ever finished an artwork and wished that the colors were a little more.... Stylized or pushed? Well guess what? That's pretty easy to experiment with in digital art.

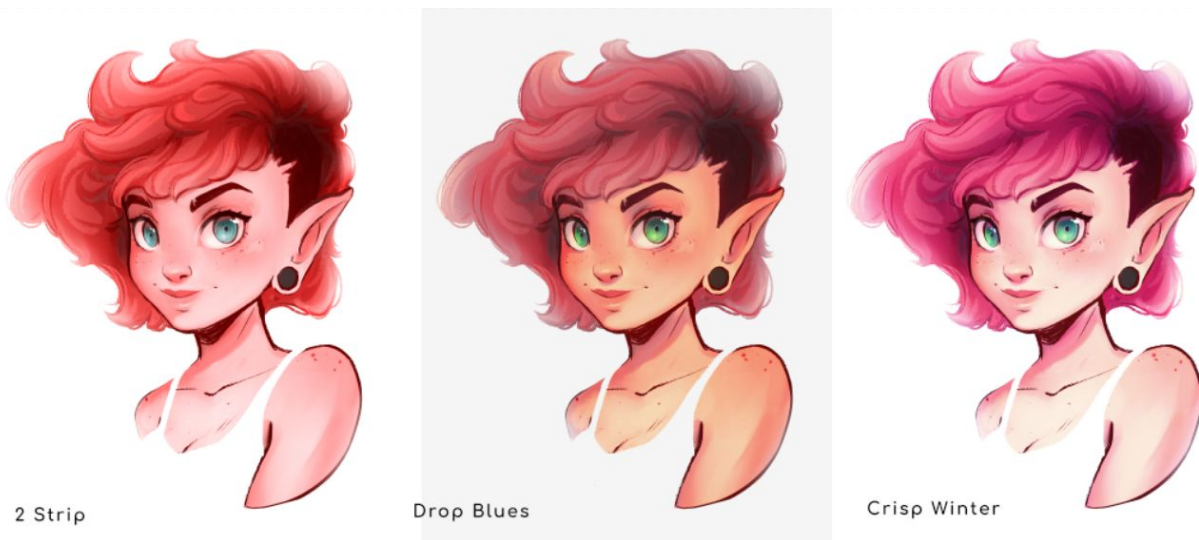
## Color Look Up Tables (LUT)

In photoshop you can apply color lookup tables to your work. This is one of the few things I still use photoshop for because I absolutely love them.

They are kind of like filters and can push your colors in interesting and stylized ways. The only way to really get a good feel for them is to experiment with them.

So if you have photoshop, I recommend loading in some of your artwork.

Choose Layer>Adjustment Layer>Color Lookup



And cycle through the color lookup options to see if you can get anything. Since you put the color lookup on an adjustment layer, it is also easy to reduce the opacity if you want a weaker effect.

3 default LUTs that I really like are:

- 2 strip
- drop blues
- crisp winter

## Gradient Maps

Gradient maps are a super fun feature to use but can be a little more tricky since building gradient maps are usually a little more involved than just slapping a filter on top of your art. Gradient maps are available in Photoshop, Clip Studio, and Procreate now!

You can do a similar thing: put a gradient map on a new adjustment layer and try building different maps. Something I enjoy trying to do is really playing with the color of my shadows. You can even change the layer mode to see if your gradient map can enhance the colors you already have in

your art.

There are lots of really nice pre-made gradient maps you can pull from the clip studio asset store for free! Check these ones out!

Skin Gradient Maps: <https://assets.clip-studio.com/en-us/detail?id=1775673>

CB Gradient Set: <https://assets.clip-studio.com/en-us/detail?id=1792342>

CB Gradient Set 3: <https://assets.clip-studio.com/en-us/detail?id=1801353>

Goretobler Gradient Set:

<https://assets.clip-studio.com/en-us/detail?id=1800508>

## Textures

Sometimes an artist's work is really distinguishable because they use certain textures over and over again in their work. The nice thing about this is that it is something that's easy to try out.

I love adding a subtle watercolor or subtle noise grain texture over my work at the very end of my process. I just love that it gives my work a little extra grittiness or bite.

I use default textures from Clip Studio but you can easily find watercolor paper textures online to copy and add in to your artwork.

- Make the textured paper the top layer
- make it a multiply
- reduce the opacity to a really low number

## Brushes

Okay, I know the joke is that the only brush you need is a round brush.

BUT, it is certainly true that a particular brush can contribute a bit to an artist's style.

If you are drawn to really textured lineart in your style, then you are going to need a textured brush. So, if you can, try and figure out what brushes the artist you are inspired by is using, and snag that brush or a brush that is similar to what they are using.

Of course, if you are curious about my brushes, you can check out the index/resources post and scroll down to the brushes section:

<https://www.patreon.com/posts/index-34442010>

## Style Takes Time and is Ever-Changing

Art style is a big combination of many different techniques, skills and preferences that all come together and create something recognizable and unique to you! Even with techniques and focus to try and push style, know that it will take time.

There are some parts of developing an artstyle that are purely skill based and the more you improve at drawing, the more your style will develop.

In addition to accepting that developing an art style that you like takes time, also know that your preferences will be ever evolving!

That means that **even if you have a style that you like for a while, it is likely that it will change over time** as your preferences change and grow! That's also okay!!

You can always return to the style developing exercises and techniques throughout the process to push your style in whichever direction your new inspiration comes from!

## Enjoy the Journey Reflect on your past Styles

It can be really rewarding to pause and reflect on your past art styles to see how far you have come.

Notice what elements of your style have remained over the years and what has changed. You can learn a lot about your own process by analyzing past work like this!

Plus, it is just fun to look back and see your journey so far!

