Practitioner's Statement

Mistborn: The Final Empire Illustrated
Lara Apollonio

Inspired by Jim Kay's depiction eloquent of the *Harry Potter Series,* I decided to select a book to illustrate. After some consideration, I chose the first instalment of Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn* trilogy, *The Final Empire.* Influenced by my love for the fantasy genre, it seemed the perfect opportunity to create original imagery of a text that had not been visually explored previously.

I produced these works with the intention of creating a modern depiction of a fantasy setting. Using modern technology, I drew away from traditional media and the refined techniques and smoothed brushstrokes of many contemporary fantasy artists. The style of my work is loose and sketch-like, conveying realism without constraining the audience with a photorealistic representation but rather inspiring their imagination. This work was created with the intention of being an adult's illustrated book, which is in line with what I hope to produce in the future as a professional artist.

The novel consists of five parts. *The Final Empire* was illustrated through producing at least one painting from each of the five parts of the book to represent a pivotal moment in the storyline. Selected sections of the text were used as reference for the Illustrations and formed the guiding brief for each depiction and character portrayal. All the paintings feature a human figure to tell the story of the characters and their struggle to overthrow the Lord Ruler. Landscape settings were purposely selected to fit the format of the display book also providing a film-like snapshot of the scenes to enhance the connection with the audience. This layout also enabled me to portray environments such as the bar scene in part one. These settings incite the audience to wonder what is beyond the edges. For several of the paintings, for parts three, four and five, as the story developed, I selected a portrait composition as the images are solely focussed on the subject's face or body language.

The resolved body of work consists of a display book, twenty-five by twenty centimetres in size containing a series of eleven narrative digital paintings, produced on Adobe Photoshop using a Wacom Cintiq. The illustrations are accompanied by a small body of text from the novel, *The Final Empire,* giving context for those unfamiliar with the novel, and a reminder for those who had read the work.

I was influenced by the works of Camila Vielmond, as I admire the movement and loose brushstrokes in her work. Eve Ventrue inspires me through her high degree of photo-realism in a fantastical genre. Works by Alice X. Zhang were valuable influences in portraying the essence of a character.

A predominantly neutral black and white colour scheme has been adopted to build upon the work on the novel's cover, illustrated by Sam Green; I therefore relied upon contrast to distinguish objects within the compositions. For the images rendered in colour, complementary hues of red and blue have been adopted to adhere to the imagery in the novel and for symbolic reasons. In the world of Mistborn, Scardrial, the sky is red, symbolising the Lord Ruler's overshadowing presence. In contrast, I used blue to symbolise the main characters, Vin and Kelsier, as they are opposed to the Lord Ruler. For example, the piece featuring Vin in her red ball gown possesses a dramatic blend of black and white in addition to these two colours. Her face is without colour, symbolising a sense of neutrality while her gown is red to assimilate her amongst the nobility as she seeks to infiltrate them. Hints of blue are scattered throughout the red to hint at her allegiance to the Skaa. This consistency in complementary colour schemes achieves a sense of harmony between the paintings and links the multiple compositions together.

I achieved texture in this series of illustrations through the use of various Photoshop brushes, influenced by the highly expressive techniques of Vielmond and Alice X Zhang. I used a rough, loose, painterly technique in response to these influences and to achieve the portrayal of the emotional atmosphere of the text.

As two-dimensional compositions, the shapes are advancing and receding to convey distance. Using the rule of thirds and aerial perspective composition as a guide, shapes were placed and sized carefully to provide a sense of harmonious realism. Three-dimension was achieved through the use of highlights and shadows.

Many of the paintings convey character traits and emotions contained in the selected snapshots of the novel. For example, Vin is pensive and incredibly shy. She is wary of trusting and desperate to avoid the heartache of being betrayed. To convey this, her face is never fully shown. Two of the paintings only depict her profile view while she is in the shadows of other images. This is expressive of her extreme shyness after growing up on the streets and being subjected to abuse. Her placid expressions act as a mask as she further isolates herself from people. Kelsier, however, is portrayed as a bright, cheerful, powerful figure. I expressed this by depicting him in a light symbolising the hope he brings to the peasantry. I expressed heartbreak in the portrait of the Lord Ruler in part five through his expression. A glimmer of a tear in his eye as he comes to the realisation that he and his empire are about to fall after thousands of years, his parted lips and downcast gaze reinforce the portrayal of his depression.

I believe that while my paintings are successful in depicting the characters' personalities, most are not full illustrations of a scene. It was a challenge for me to step beyond the facial portrait in the compositions. This has been a valuable learning experience as my focus has been broadened to include still life drawing and portraying full body gestures. These skills will prove useful in future works. I believe I have successfully created a new and original interpretation of *The Final Empire,* whilst remaining true to the essence of the story and characters described in the text*.*