

Magic Paintbrush

by William Chua Tiong Keng

William Chua, known as Xiaobaosg to his friends, is an amateur freelance illustrator and self-confessed “kidult” from Singapore who believes in creating something out of nothing as an artist.

William’s work has been showcased at Singapore’s Chinese New Year events, in the IdN book *Tiger Translate GOLD*, Imagine FX, Synk magazine Australia, and the 115 Digital Art Gallery in Bucharest, Romania.

His inspiration for *Magic Paintbrush*:

“The magic of inspiration is that once it strikes, the idea flows smoothly from the artist’s brush. Hence, it is my hope that every artist finds their inspiration easily, and with a wave of their brush, the creation turns out as magnificent as the dragon symbolizes.”

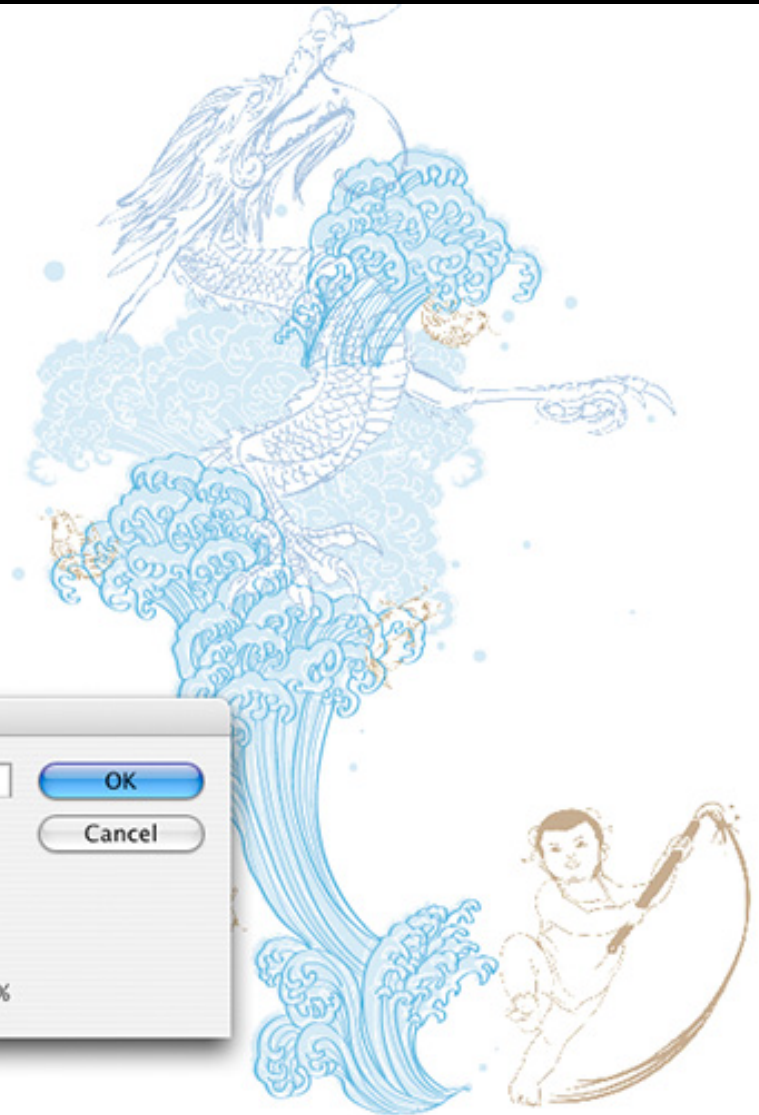
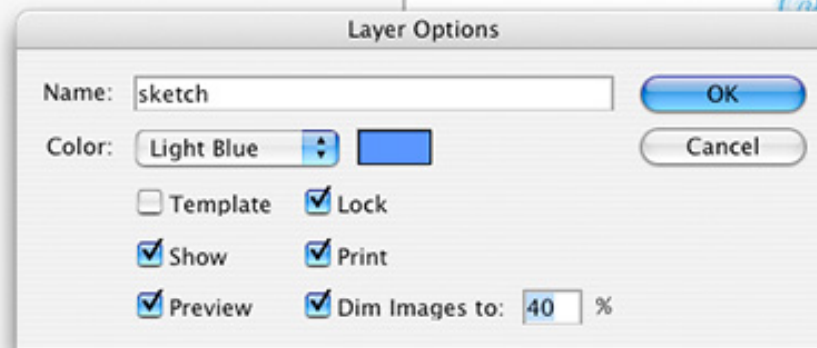
Magic Paintbrush was commissioned by Adobe and created using Adobe® Illustrator® CS4 software.



I start off with a sketch that I want to create as vector art in Adobe® Illustrator® software. I choose File > Place to place a scan of the sketch on the artboard.

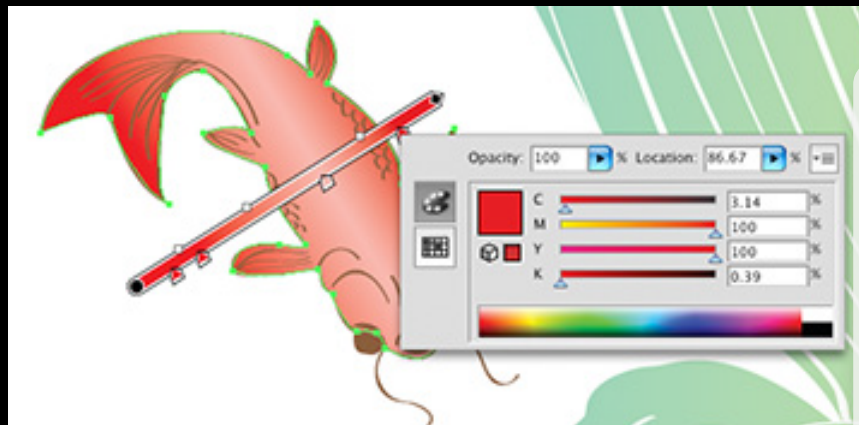
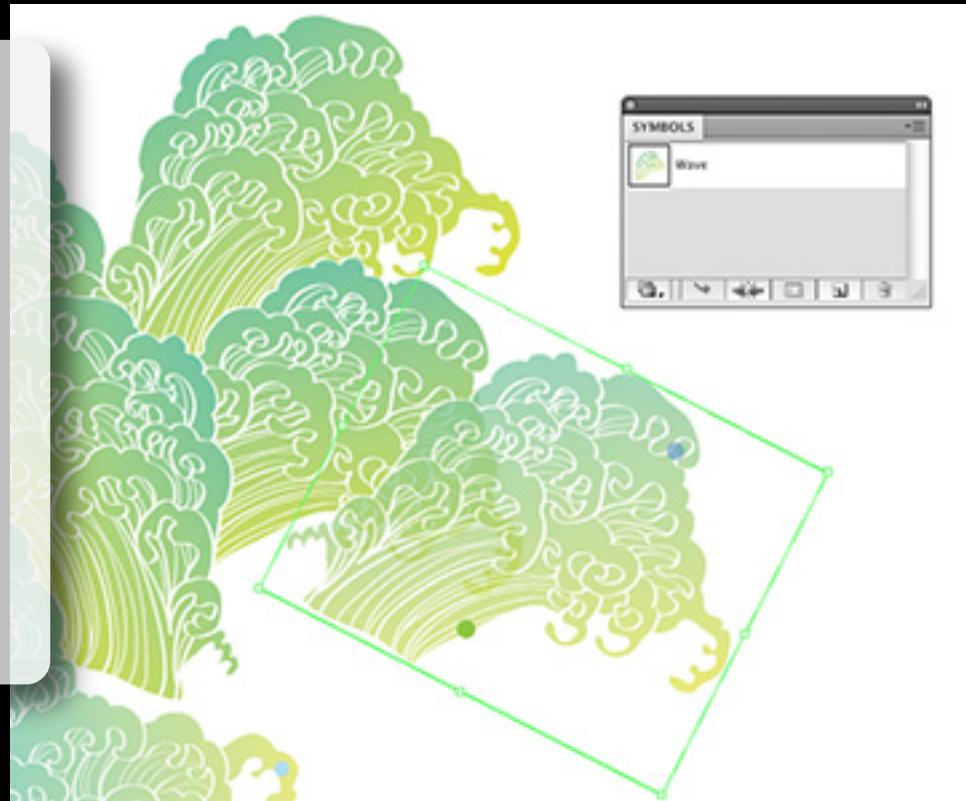
Double-clicking the sketch layer icon opens the Layer Options dialog box. I select "Template," which dims the image so that it will be easy to see and trace the sketch and locks the "sketch" layer.

Next I create a new layer and name it "water." I re-create elements of my sketch with a custom calligraphic brush that has no fill. I only trace the lower and upper portions of the water.



Once I finish tracing the water, I change the stroke to white and fill the water shape with a gradient. I use the same gradient color for the upper and lower parts of the water. I then create a new symbol by dragging my water object to the Symbols panel and name it "wave."

I wanted to create a symbol, since I'll be able to use it for the rest of the water. Once I'm done, I lock the "water" layer and click the eye icon button on that layer. This turns off that layer's visibility so it doesn't cover the other areas that I want to trace.

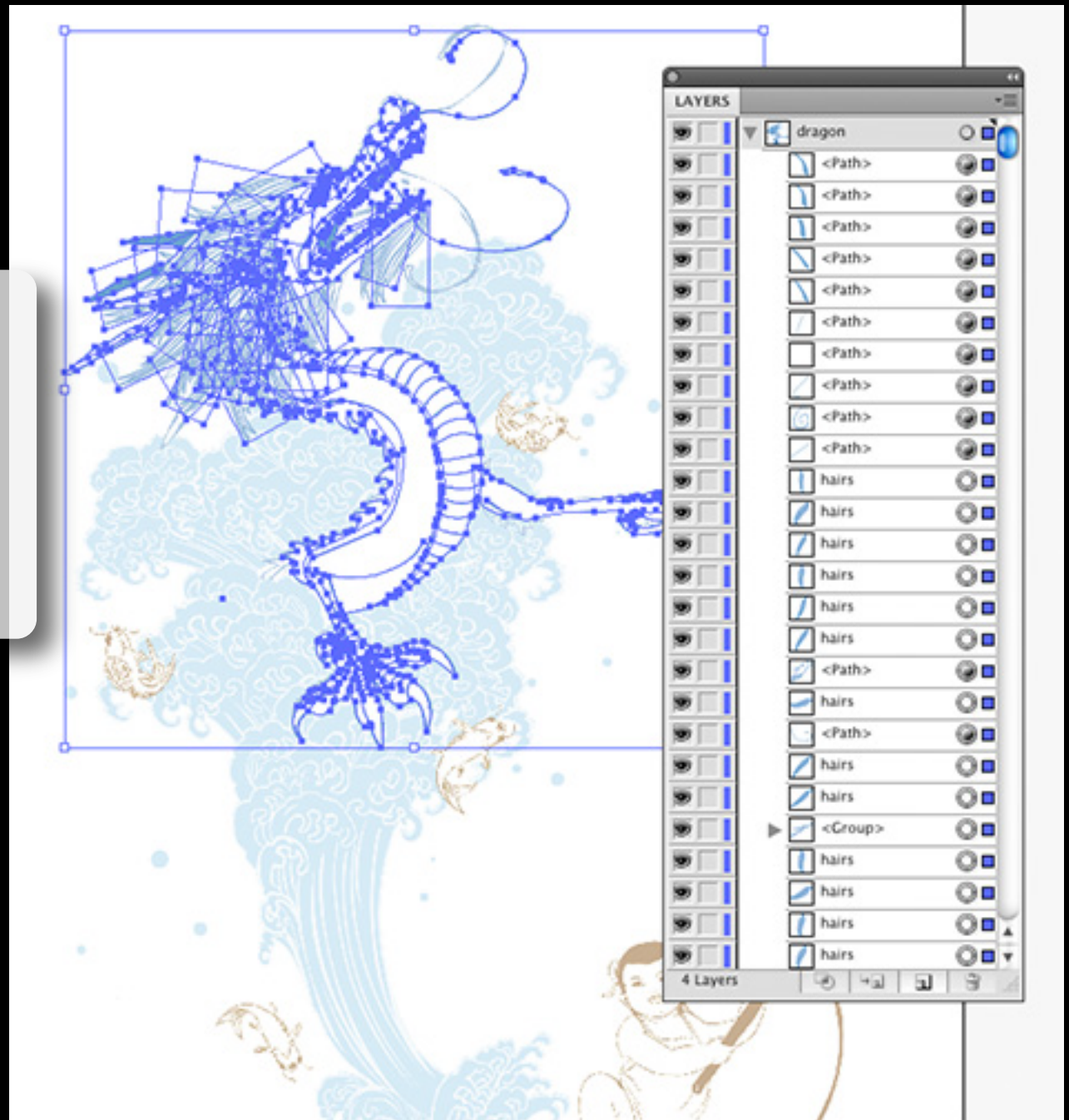


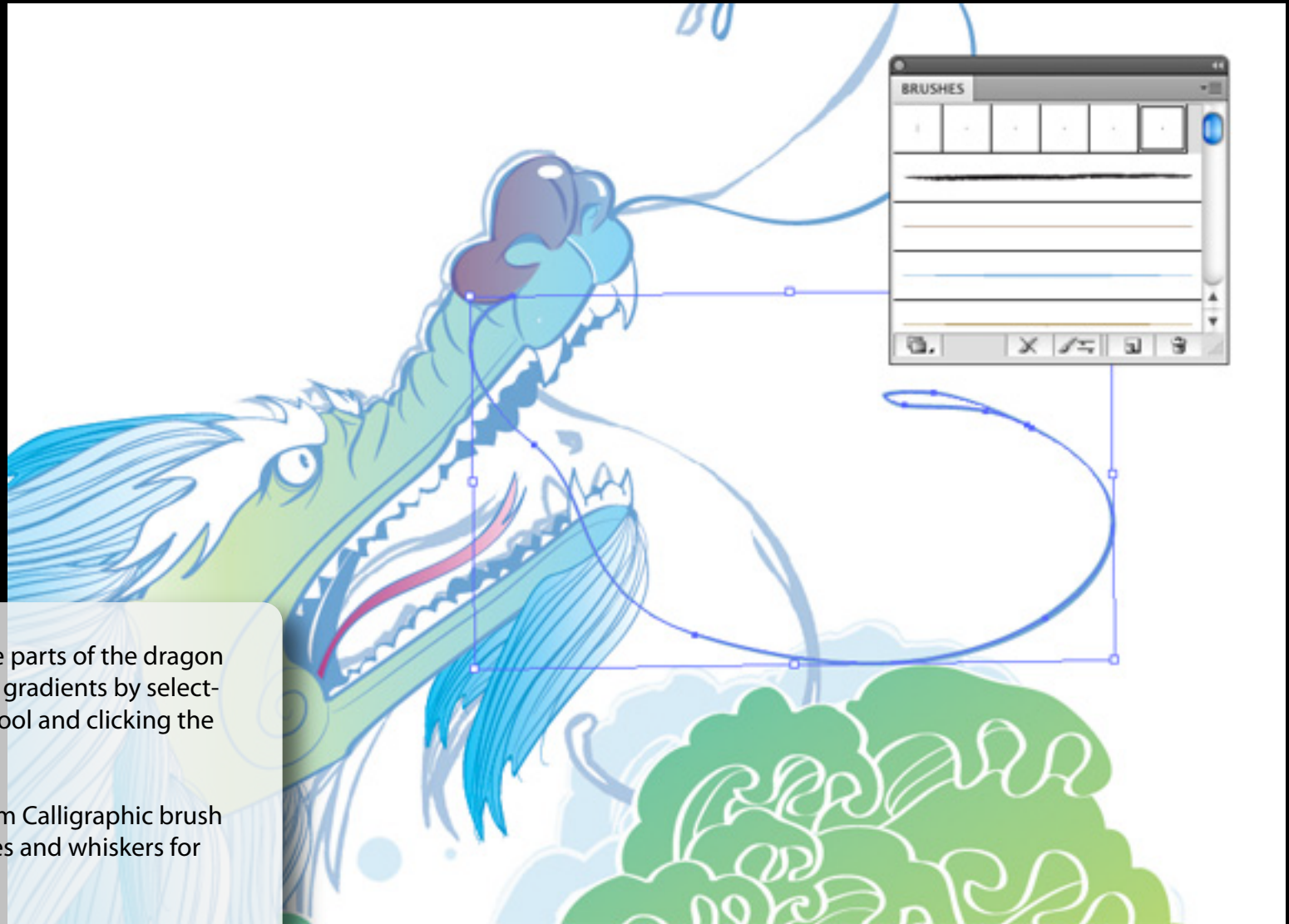
I only need to trace two of the four fish since the other two are similar. I copy, paste and use the Free Transform tool to scale, rotate and move the copies.

When all of the fish copies are adjusted, I select one, click the new Gradient tool, and play with the gradient colors using the gradient controls.

To draw the dragon, I create a new layer and divide the dragon into parts, such as hair, body, scales and head.

To draw the head faster, I create a symbol for the hair, place multiple instances of the hair symbol by dragging them to the artboard, then move and rotate them to get the look I want.





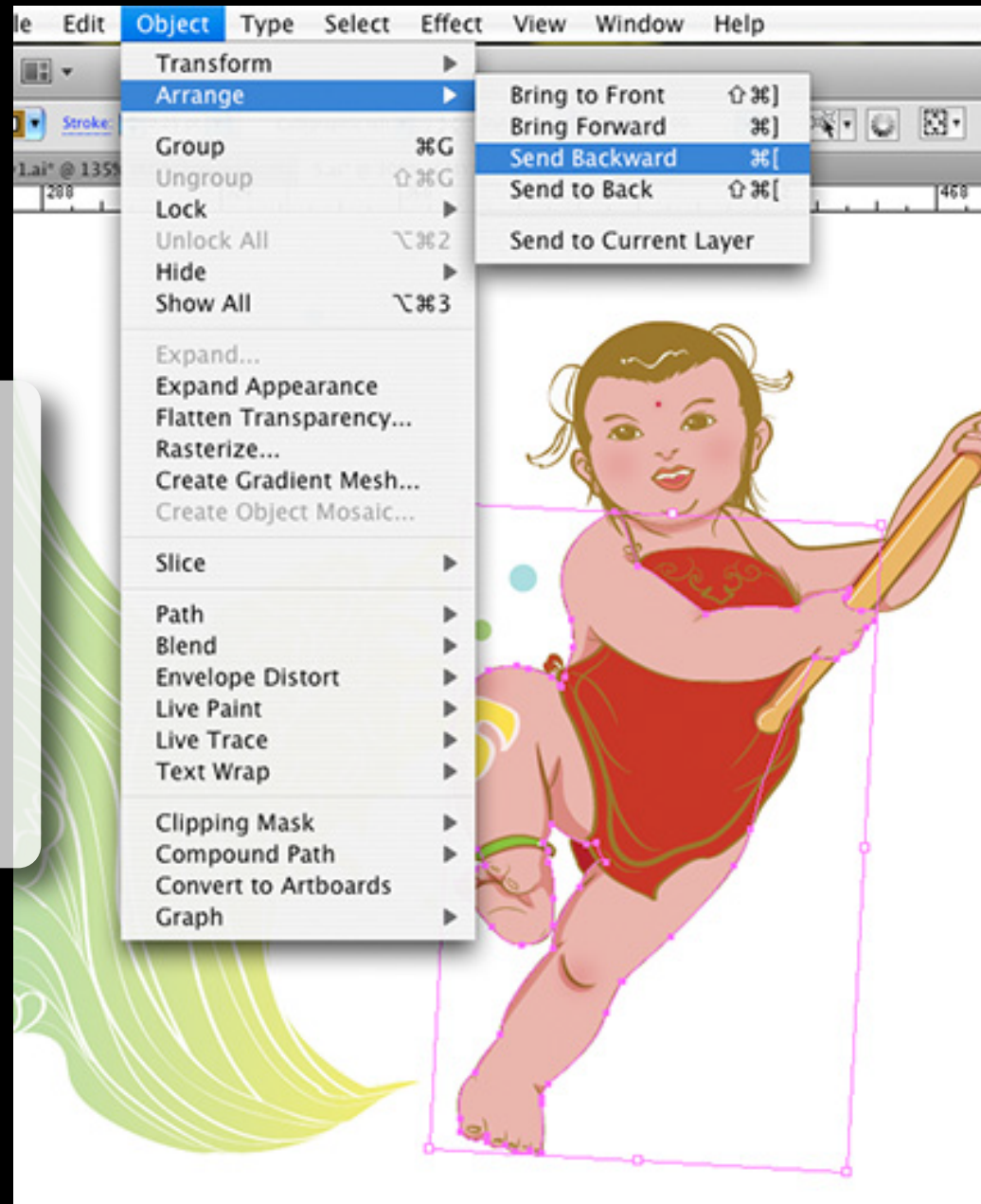
Once I have all the parts of the dragon traced, I fill it with gradients by selecting the Gradient tool and clicking the parts I want to fill.

I then use a custom Calligraphic brush to add in the scales and whiskers for the dragon.

For the whisker hairs, I create a new symbol and play around with Object > Arrange until I get all the hairs placed the way I want.

For the little boy, I use the same approach as with the dragon: I divide the line art of the boy into separate objects on a new layer.

Once the boy is traced, I delete the underlying sketch and fill the new vector objects with solid colors. I rearrange the order of the elements that make up the boy by using Object > Arrange.



Once I have created my main objects, I start to refine and rearrange all the layers, and begin to add more detail.

Using the Splash brush from the Artistic Paintbrush library, I add in water splashes around the dragon. I also create gradient splashes for the boy's brush by expanding the Splash brush strokes, grouping them together, and creating a new fill with the Add New Fill button in the Appearance panel.

To further enhance the illustration, I add in other elements, such as the frame, speed lines, and clouds. I also add a layer of gradient color on the top and bottom of the illustration.

To clean up the corners around the frame edges, I lock all the layers except the layer containing the top and bottom gradient colors. Using the Eraser tool, I erase the paths that peek out underneath the frame.

Finally, I use Simplify Path, Object > Path > Simplify, to remove unnecessary points from the water's shape.



Finally, I wanted to add a T-shirt design on a new artboard to my existing file.

To add a new artboard, I use Shift + O to go into Artboard Edit mode. Then I drag to create the artboard. The dimensions are shown in the Control panel as you drag, or you can choose an artboard size from the Presets menu in the Control panel. I use a template from Cool Extras > Templates folder for the T-shirt outline.

To finish up, I select the art I want from my original design, then copy and paste it into the new T-shirt template.



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