



TRANSCRIPTION OF SOUNDTRACK

LEGO® Art – 31205
Jim Lee Batman™ Collection



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JIM LEE: What's interesting about it is that we have our style and so how do you translate it, given these parameters, and still make it look visually, aesthetically cool but also recognisably ours? And I think that was a big hurdle. And then realising that every dot was critical and so it was fascinating, seeing our style and kind of translating it into this LEGO style, but then also seeing how they then brought it to life and how critical each placement was and how nuanced it was. And so it was an interesting and fascinating process from start to finish.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Imagine crafting your own wall art. Maybe it's a passion that fascinates you. Or maybe it's the promise of an immersive, creative experience like no other. A piece of iconic art you can build for yourself. Relax and reconnect with your creative side. We've created unique soundtracks, curated around the world of art, animation, music and movies. And in this soundtrack we'll speak to Jim Lee, a world-renowned comic book artist, writer, editor, publisher and Chief Creative Officer of DC.

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JIM LEE: You know what, let's go ahead and just burn another couple of hours of sleep and just get this little bit correct cos that would mean, like, two more people might like the piece that we produce out of the thousands or tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people. And sometimes we're just creating the artwork for ourselves, you know?

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ANDREA COLLINS: And highly recognised colourist and famous for his work in the comic book community, Alex Sinclair. He's known for his strong collaboration with Jim Lee.

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ALEX SINCLAIR: It actually was a lot easier than I thought it was gonna be. And the results are incredible, considering what the amount of colours that I'm used to working with, this limitation. I was blown away by how incredibly close to the art the final product looks.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Jim Lee's drawings with Alex Sinclair's beautiful colouring was transformed into LEGO Art by talented LEGO designer Kitt Kossman. She created a total

of five unique images and later in this soundtrack, we'll speak to her about how she did that.

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KITT KOSSMAN: It was amazing to see the process from seeing the sketch and making the sketch, colouring in the sketch and inking it, so I was kind of, like, working in the same way as Alex and Jim are working. It was a lot of fun.

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ANDREA COLLINS: I'm Andrea Collins. Welcome to LEGO Art.

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ANDREA COLLINS: OK, Jim Lee, how did you get into the work of creating comic books? Take me back to when you went from having it as a passion as a kid to realising that it could actually be a career.

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JIM LEE: Yeah, you know, I was always drawn, no pun intended, to comic books. Erm, you know, when my family emigrated to the United States, I didn't speak any English so comic books were a great way for me to take in entertainment without, you know, understanding all the words that were in the dialogue balloons. I could just look at the pictures and understand the story. And I had always aspired, you know, I was always interested in the art so I was always drawing from as long as I can remember. And so it was a great escape, I think, from the daily stress of being in a different culture, just sitting down and getting to draw a world full of superheroes.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Wow. What about you, Alex?

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ALEX SINCLAIR: I think it came with... My brother and I used to read comics together and then when we were done reading them, we would draw them too. And I think it was around high school when I realised that someone could make a living out of this. And through college, I kind of built up my portfolio. That was very comic book-centric. It showed at conventions and I sent samples and through a talent search that Homage Studios was having, and Jim called me to invite me to come work with them at Homage Studios.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Wow. That must have been a pretty cool phone call.

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ALEX SINCLAIR: Yeah. Once you get past or realise that it's actually Jim and not one of your friends trying to mess with you.

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JIM LEE: I would always call up, "Hey, this is Stan Lee! I've got a..."

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ANDREA COLLINS: Now, you're both described as legends in the comic book industry. I would love to talk to you about each other. So, let's start with you, Alex. Maybe you can talk about Jim's superpowers.

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ALEX SINCLAIR: Superpowers. So, if you would say that I'm like Batman, that has, like, one main thing that he does. Jim's kind of a Superman at the superpower side so he's got multiple powers. So, obviously, the main one that people know about is his incredible ability to draw the heck out of whatever he wants to draw in a very dynamic and detailed and realistic way. Beyond that, he's also a very generous artist so that he's contributed to the comic book industry not just with his drawings, but by bringing in talent and growing that talent and helping other artists develop their drawing, their inking, their colouring abilities. And so a lot of the very popular, very talented artists that are out there right now in the industry really came out of the studio that Jim started. And it's a testament to his ability to not only identify that talent but to culture and grow it and give it success.

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ANDREA COLLINS: And Jim, what would you say about Alex's superpowers?

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JIM LEE: He's got super-stamina, you know. I've worked with him enough years and if we were to share kind of, like, the crazy hours that we've worked together, people just wouldn't believe it. Like, it's not humanly possible. But I would text him at three in the morning, five in the morning, you know, two in the afternoon. He's always up working and if he's not, he's always, like, 15 minutes away from the laptop. And what's great

is that, you know, you never wanna impose your own sensibilities on other people. You feel bad, as an artist, you know, and that's why I think a lot of artists are so, like, focused on their work and so hyper-focused on controlling their own art. So when you work with collaborators like Alex, you just wanna find someone that's kinda in tune with your mind-set. And my mind-set constantly shifts and changes and evolves and so I've always got, you know... When I see something, I always kind of want to tweak it just a little bit, even the stuff I've drawn myself. And Alex is so open to collaborating and revising and doing another take. It's like... And I know I drove him crazy at times, but he never lets on, you know, lets me know. But at any given hour, under any crazy deadline or pressure, Alex is always there and delivers the goods and always, you know, delivers something that I couldn't really even imagine myself, right? So in my head, maybe I have kind of a sense of what it will look like in colour but then he always delivers something more spectacular and does it with such grace and under pressure. And so that's been a big part of, I think, our working relationship, is obviously not that we are only in line kind of creatively, but in terms of our work ethic and how we approach the work and realising that, you know what, let's go ahead and just burn another couple of hours of sleep and just get this little bit correct, cos that will mean, like, two more people might like the piece that we produce out of the thousands or tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people. And sometimes I feel like sometimes we're just creating the artwork for ourselves because we're noodling such small, like, "Oh, that little corner, can you just make that ten percent whiter?" You know? And we know it has no impact to the final enjoyment of the piece, but it's just something that we both know that it will stick in our... in the back of our minds forever if we don't address it. And so it's just great having a fantastic collaborator like Alex.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Sounds like both of your superpowers are also always having your notifications on on your phones so you guys can get a hold of each other.

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ALEX SINCLAIR: Yeah.

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JIM LEE: Yeah, it's pretty insane. And look, I'll drop stuff on him, "Hey, Alex, I need this kinda soon." And he'll like, "How soon?" I'm like, "Like an hour and a half? Is that possible?" You know, and it's like Christmas Day, you know, whatever, so.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Yeah. So you guys are both such an inspiration for people around the world who wanna break into comics. Who were your inspirations growing up?

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JIM LEE: Yeah, I can start with that. You know, I was really a big fan of most of the mainstream artists. Cos I bought my comics at a 7-Eleven, which is like a corner convenience store here in the United States, you know. I would ride my bike up there and whatever they had for sale, like, my parents would give me a quarter or 35 cents. I'm really dating myself now, but you could buy a comic book with that amount of money. And that's really kinda how I gravitated to it. And so it was really the artists like Frank Miller, George Perez, John Byrne. Those were probably the biggest three artists of the '80s and '90s as I was growing up, and they were the primary influences when I was younger. Then when I got older, artists like Barry Windsor-Smith and Mike Mignola and Art Adams, Michael Golden. Again, real commercial, clean, very visceral kind of artists. Then I didn't really discover other influences until I became a professional. And I think part of the reason why I still connect with fans today is that I'm always thinking about what can I add to this recipe, this approach, that I haven't done before? And I do try to think about how to keep the work looking as contemporary and as relevant as possible.

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ANDREA COLLINS: What about you, Alex?

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ALEX SINCLAIR: My influences were very similar to Jim's, I think. Early on there was Neal Adams and John Byrne. Mike Zeck on Captain America. So all of these... a lot of my artistic influences were very, like, story-centric. Like Walt Simonson and his run on Thor. And then when you slide over to the colour side of things, Lynn Varley with her work on Dark Knight Returns, really, and Elektra Lives Again. Really just struck a really strong note with me and made me realise that a painter could do this and really push the genre into another level. So people like her, Mark Chiarello. Joe Chiodo is, in my opinion, the godfather of modern colourists, and so Joe was a huge influence on my work.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Tell me a bit about how you guys work together.

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JIM LEE: You know, we were working remotely before it became a thing, you know. Even though we all lived in San Diego. So we first started out working in person, you know, Alex mentioned Homage Studios, that was the name of the first studio we set up in San Diego. It started in a one-bedroom apartment, then moved to a two-bedroom apartment and then, I think, like, 4,000 square feet and then ten, and then 15,000 square feet at its height. And it was a combination of studio space and office space so we had editors, we had production people in there, but I think creatively, most importantly, we had a lot of other inkers and colourists and pencillers all in one sort of open space. And so we were great influences and inspirations to one another. So I got to really work with Alex in person, hands on, you know. He could see me drawing the piece, I could stand over his shoulder as he was colouring it, and we could talk about what we were trying to achieve. And I think that really set the foundation for our future collaborations when, you know, ultimately the studio closed down and we moved to different cities. Now we work remotely and we have been for years. And, you know, but at this point we don't even talk before he starts colouring. I just send him the file or he gets sent the black and white file, he does his thing and then he'll text it to me and we'll just have a conversation, kind of, before we even show it to the rest of the world or even, you know, our bosses or the editors. And, you know, again, we have this shorthand, we have worked together on so many pieces that I know kind of where he's coming from, he knows where I'm coming from, and we really don't have any sense of ego in this. If he tells me that it's not working, then I, you know, kinda bow to his knowledge and defer to his sensibilities. But oftentimes I'll get something from him and go like, "Could you, you know, think about this?" Or, "That's not actually a sun, that's actually a reflection that I meant there," etcetera. And we kinda just hash it out through texts. And that's kinda how we work together. So it has been decades of working together that's allowed us to kind of create this shorthand and it's just made for some really wonderful collaborations because, you know, you would think after all these decades that we wouldn't be able to surprise one another but, at the same time, there are pieces I go like, "Wow, this is absolutely stunning, Alex," and so, you know. But I only say that every now and then. I don't want his head to get too big.

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ANDREA COLLINS: How many decades have you two worked together? You said "over the decades."

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ALEX SINCLAIR: It's been 20... It'll be 29 years this coming March.

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JIM LEE: Almost three decades. Yeah. And I've only been in the business, like, 34 years, so, you know.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Right.

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JIM LEE: I started when I was ten.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Over that time, how has your work changed, like, the tools you use to work?

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ALEX SINCLAIR: Oh, wow. Well, for me it's changed incredibly. Since I work in the digital medium, the advancements in computers has really helped me. Initially, the computers we had were so slow that the chip on my phone is faster than the one that the computer I was working on back then was. And so time was an issue because of the equipment. The programme that I use, Photoshop, was in version 2.0 back then. They're in version 20-something now. And so a lot of the advancements of the software, the hardware, have facilitated the ability for me to not only work faster but more efficiently, to be more artistic with it. So the medium has turned... I mean, the programme has turned more into a medium than an actual application. And so it's been more of a... it has more of a feel that I'm painting now than it did before.

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ANDREA COLLINS: What goes into making a great cover? Maybe I'll start with you on this one, Jim.

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JIM LEE: Oh, well, I think making the deadline is the key, essential ingredient. I say that jokingly but I think it is a consideration, right? Like, how much time do I have? Because then, if you think about a computer, like, x period of time and then it unlocks these

possible options, right? And so that's the, sort of, the math of it. But I think on the artistic, creative side, aesthetic side of it, really, you know, there's, again, math behind it too. There's certain laws about, so the golden rule. For people that wanna learn more about it, you can just Google that, it's really interesting. Or even creating pyramid or triangular compositions in a piece, really driving the viewer's eyes towards the most salient or critical visual elements of a cover. I think all those things are important. But at the end of the day, I think it's really about capturing emotion, right? You want the person looking at that cover to feel something and so you've got, kind of, this image in your head that evokes an emotion in your heart and now my job is to take that and translate it through the window that is my hand-eye coordination to this piece of paper and then the viewer will look at it through his window or her window and are they... What percentage of the emotion that I'm putting on the page filters to them? It's not even 100 percent, so you want to put as much as you can on the page, recognising that the fan might only grab or extract 70 percent of what you're putting down there. So I do think about that a lot, like, how do I really... What is the point of this cover and how do I best bring it to life? And then I start thinking about, sort of, like, the compositional elements or tricks I can use, the golden rule, how we can use lighting and colouring later. And I'll make sort of mental notes to myself and then convey that to Alex, or sometimes I don't convey it and then we always have this funny conversation, "Well, I really meant for it to be this way." And I'm sure in his head he's going, "Why didn't you tell me that before?" But sometimes I do write little liner notes on the top so that, you know, he'll see that. Unless, you know, my inker, Scott Williams, erases it. Sometimes he does. So, you know, I think, you know, over the years, we've figured out a way to really take a final image and kind of break it down into the black and white stage and the colour stage and then bring it together in a way that feels aesthetically, like, pleasing and as if it were intended to be that way from the very start.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Right. And is the cover always the last piece that you do?

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JIM LEE: No. Usually, sometimes it's the first because, you know, you might not have the script right away.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Right, right.

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JIM LEE: So you have a sense of what the issue might be about and so you can jump ahead and do the cover. Sometimes if you have a theme for the covers for a run. If it's a 12-issue run, you might come up with a compositional theme that kind of allows you to do as many of those covers in advance. There really isn't a rule about doing covers before or later, it's just whenever time permits.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Got it.

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JIM LEE: But I think covers are the funnest part of putting a comic book together because it's all... A, it is the first impression that anyone gets of the work that you've created and your job is to really kind of grab their attention as they're walking by a row of books in a comic book shop, right, and you want your image to jump out at the viewer.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Mm. Now, let's talk about the Batman: Hush stories. It's been called one of the all-time best Batman stories. Jim, you created this with writer Jeph Loeb. Can you tell me what made it so different when it came out?

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JIM LEE: I say this jokingly but it's true. I think what made it different was that it came out on time, you know. I had a reputation, still do, of, you know, having issues, kind of shipping late, kinda. And so being on a Batman regular title, I think was the big surprise for fans, long-time fans of my work that have, you know, become patient or immunised to the delivery schedule I've sort of become known for. So every issue came out on time, so that was a big deal. The fact that it was 12 issues long, so it was a really in-depth kind of study of Batman and his world. And you really kind of just, you know, Jeph and I really brought the fans into the world of Batman as we saw it and grabbed them and held them for a year's time. And in that year's time, we kind of walked them through the incredible rogues' gallery that he has, arguably the best rogues' gallery in all of fiction. We sent them into different locations all around the world, in fictional elements, real-world cities. And just sort of moved them out and at the same time creating this murder mystery type story, a detective story. And so I think fans had fun

sort of guessing along month-to-month, like, well, who is Hush? And who's behind this storyline and who's manipulating who? So it was a real kind of... had a lot of twists and turns, which I thought was pretty engaging for the core fans.

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ANDREA COLLINS: It's been said that it's a great way to break into Batman. Why do you think that is?

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JIM LEE: Oh, I think because, you know, when we started we didn't know exactly where it would land. We worked on the book in secret for a long time. I don't think we shared it with... you know, I think there were only three or four people in DC that knew that we were working on this project. And we didn't share it with the broader DC team internally even until we had, I think, six or seven issues done out of 12. Cos we wanted to make sure that A, we were gonna do this, and then B, have it come out on time, so that mean, like, getting as much done as possible in advance. Once people know that it exists, after two or three issues, they get anxious to put it out there. They wanna sell it. They wanna, you know, share it with the world. And that could sometimes move you pre-emptively or too soon into the marketplace. So by holding on and really putting as many issues into, quote unquote, "the drawer," and sitting on those, it enabled us to have this amazing cushion so that we could continue doing and delivering the best work possible. Even as we entered into the last issues of the run and certainly by issue 11 and 12, we were just about, you know, on the deadline wire there because, you know, time had caught up with us. We were moving at a slower than monthly pace and by the time we got to the 11th or 12th issue, we were running out of time. But anyway, I think it's a great intro story because it is fairly complete. You really could've dropped those 12 issues in anywhere within the run of Batman at that time and there was, you know, we started with issue 608, so there's lots and lots of Batman stories, but it really introduced a new character, so you didn't know anything about who Hush was before, we took care of that for you, and then we kind of walked you through the who's who, the greatest hits of Batman's villains. And I think people had a lot of fun watching Batman engage with and fight his greatest rogues and seeing Jeph and my take on each of those characters.

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ANDREA COLLINS: You've created five pieces of original artwork for LEGO Art. Let's start with the square images that you can create from one set. So you can choose between Batman, the Joker and Harley Quinn. Was it a given from the start that it would be those three? How did you choose those three?

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JIM LEE: I wanna say for sure we had Batman. But beyond that there was a couple other choices. We suggested Harley Quinn in that we wanted to have a variety of characters but we also wanted to have a variety of looks, right? Nothing that looked too similar to one another. And then we also wanted to be able to unlock wider images involving other characters so we were able to involve even Catwoman, right? So another consideration for me is, like, who are the most iconic characters? And I think you have to have Batman and Joker, and so who that third character was was something that we spent some time talking about.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Mm-hmm.

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ALEX SINCLAIR: Well, I think Harley's been very prevalent right now in the media with the movies and the animated series and I think she was one of the main choices that jumped up towards the end of the conversation. I just, I love... Harley Quinn has a very special place in my heart. It's one of the first series that I worked on. I worked on the first comic book Harley Quinn series way back in the early 2000s. My youngest daughter's named Harley. And that Harley book is what caught Jim and Scott's attention. And when they decided they wanted to go with one specific colourist for Hush, that's the work that they looked at to... for me to work on Hush. So like I said, Harley's been a very big part of my career. I worked on the New 52 series, the Rebirth series of Harley and so, she definitely has been as big a part as Batman, I would say, in my career, as any other character.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Wow. When your daughter's friends ask her why she's named Harley, that's a pretty cool answer she's got.

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ALEX SINCLAIR: Yeah. And so she's gotten more popular as a character. She used to say the motorcycles and now she says the character.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Yeah, yeah. Cool. So when, now, you know, creating these images for LEGO Art, what different things did you have to consider in creating them?

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JIM LEE: Yeah, I think there were a couple interesting considerations, you know. First it was converting kind of the mind-set to a different medium, right? You know, it's still about creative inspiration and creating art but it was thinking about it in essentially as a three-dimensional object or sculpture. And also knowing that the images are in a square format, that actually was probably one of the largest considerations, right? And also that it had to be something that was fairly impactful, right, cos the, quote unquote, resolution of it all is fairly... It's not very forgiving of super-detailed images so you need to create something that's very striking and pretty clean. And my artwork tends to have a lot of lines and cross-hatching and none of that will really translate when you think about kind of the pixelisation of an image to dots. And so I had to think of... kind of convert my art style into something that was a little bolder and more chiaroscuro, like, you know, clearly black and white. But then also within the landscape or, sorry, the square format of it all, you needed to think about how do you compose something that is striking and has interesting negative spaces around essentially a pretty static square shape. So when you think about Batman, if you include all his ears or if his ears are longer, it pushes his face down lower and so now you've got a lot of weird dead space around, you know, between the ears and around the top part of the image. And so we cropped in on his face, but we needed to show the ears cos if you crop in too much it's just a blue, you know, mask on a face. And so...

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ANDREA COLLINS: Right.

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JIM LEE: We had to find, really, the right crop to essentially create something that was visually dynamic within a square space and still show the important parts to identify to the consumer who it is that's on this image, and obviously with Batman. And then

with Harley Quinn because we're doing the more... the modern version of the character where she doesn't have the harlequin mask, again, how do we... If we're only showing her face, how do we identify to the fan, like, who you're looking at? And obviously the ponytails have become a signature look for her but what other elements beyond the pink and blue dyes in the hair and the mascara, how do you do that? And so, you know, how much can we put in of the collar around her and then how do we convey her personality. And so we did a three-quarter view, chose that, and then had her, even have her in front kinda doing this symbol for, like, a heart and just really trying to bring the personalities through, knowing that we had to do a fairly tight crop on the face. And the Joker was probably the easiest because he's so identifiable. You could crop in just the eyes, you know, and you would still kind of probably know who it was, given the colour of skin and sort of the manic look in his... in his eyeballs. So he was probably the easiest of the bunch. But you want to talk about some of the colouring considerations, Alex? I know there was a lot.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Yeah.

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ALEX SINCLAIR: Yes, so I'm used to working with millions of colours on the comics that I work on and the first thing that was told down to me was you can only use 16 colours. And you have to use those same 16 colours for all three pieces. And so it was actually a cool challenge in that it became kind of like a puzzle. How can I figure this out so that I'm using the same palettes for the three and kinda keeping it down to those 16 colours? So that was my main challenge. Create the level of depth that I'm used to but only with a limited palette. And so it actually was a lot easier than I thought it was gonna be. And the results are incredible, considering what the amount of colours that I'm used to working with and this limitation. I was blown away by how incredibly close to the art that the final product looks.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Now, I'd love to talk a bit more about the three characters one by one. And let's start with Batman. He's an ongoing character that first appeared in May 1939. Now, what is it about his character that's allowed him to remain so relevant throughout so many years?

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JIM LEE: Oh. I think about this a lot because he's just so impactful and he is really head and shoulders, you know, more popular than the other DC characters and other fictional characters in general. And I think it's because, even though he was created in 1939, he's probably the most rooted in reality and still feels like he could have been created today. And, you know, he and his sidekicks and you look at the rogues' gallery, they're really reflections of things that we're all sort of seeing and experiencing in life. Sort of the fight between law and order, you know, order and chaos within society. And so I think they're manifestations of those sort of primal fears, right? And so when I think about Batman, he's a character that doesn't have superpowers, that pushed himself to achieve, you know... essentially he created sort of superpowers through his tenacity and his determination, really, at the end of the day, using his smarts and everything that he was born with. And, you know, that is something that we can all kinda connect to. It's something that we theoretically can achieve if we were, you know, so focused on something like that. But I think, you know, beyond that, conceptually the world of Batman and... and his struggle against his enemies in a city that, you know, is sort of, you know, seemingly very chaotic and in need of a saviour, is something that really is something that anyone can relate to today as much as they could back in 1939. It's still as relevant and as important today. And you can't say that necessarily about every character that's been created in the last, you know, 82 years.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Mm-hmm.

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ALEX SINCLAIR: Well, he's always been my favourite character growing up. I think it's a lot of that same what Jim brought up. He's the... he's the human that can keep up with the superpowered alien from Krypton, the princess of the Amazons and the king of Atlantis, and so you kind of tend to root for the underdog that actually can outdo these superheroes too. And I think I loved that and the whole Batman and Robin relationship, was really cool to kinda see that. If you're reading it as a kid, you kinda see yourself as, hey, I could be Robin, you know, fighting with this guy. So growing up, you know, my brother was always a Superman fan and I was the Batman fan and we always kinda argued about who was better. But he was definitely the character that I always loved to not just read about but draw. I drew him, painted him as much as I could. And then, you know, such a great kinda full circle thing that now I'm working on him as a professional.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Yeah, no kidding.

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JIM LEE: Yeah. Look, I think we have to give a big tip of the hat to Bill Finger, you know, who really kind of created the look that has persisted all these decades. And, you know, he's just a bad-ass looking character. There is, you know, beyond the conceptual stuff, aesthetically he is just a beautiful character that really kind of straddles the world between light and darkness and is essentially the character in the shadows that's sort of always our guardian angel looking out for us, you know, within this chaotic world. So I think, you know, that's super important but I also think that he just looks really cool. He's got an amazing costume and then when you look at his world of gadgets and the utility belt, these are things that really are, like, you know, catnip for little kids, right? And I just remember just always being fascinated with the world of Batman, even as a seven, eight-year-old, you know, I remember buying the Corgi Batmobiles and I was watching the TV show, the Adam West TV show. And, you know, I took it all very seriously. It's just a fascinating, colourful, creative world in which, you know, good and evil were facing off and it was just something that immediately made me a fan for life.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Catnip, I like that.

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JIM LEE: I should have said batnip, I should have said batnip.

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ANDREA COLLINS: OK, let's talk about the Joker. How is the comic book Joker different than the one we might see in Hollywood movies?

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JIM LEE: Oh, gosh. There've been so many different expressions of the Joker in movies. The more recent trend has been to lean into the more sort of realistic, dark side of the character but he's always had a very mirthful kind of absurdist quality to him. He's a very nihilist character, obviously. But again, kind of speaks to a lot of stuff that's sort of troubling modern-day society. People on the fringes that feel alienated. And it's interesting when you see film-makers taking their, you know, bringing their

interpretation of the character to life and obviously they're drawing upon their own nostalgia, their own connection with the character that they probably read or saw or interacted with as a kid and kind of bringing it to life in the modern day. And it's interesting, like, what looks like essentially a clown-like character is something that's very scary when you think about it in real life and so I think that's kind of the fascinating part of the character is, again, like Batman, who straddles the light and darkness, Joker straddles that kind of, you know, that childhood memory of circuses and clowns and obviously this darker force of anarchy. And so I think there's something to that and then when you combine Batman and the Joker, they're really kind of flip sides of the same coin, and they've acknowledged that in the storytelling themselves. They almost kind of need each other and that they almost live to battle one another and Joker has flat-out said, like, "I can never kill you, Batman, because what would I do without you? My life would be senseless." And so I think it's just a fascinating kind of, you know, character relationship that has been built up over all these decades of storytelling.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Mm-hmm. And I know we touched on Harley Quinn but I just want to circle back with one more question. Jim, I've seen you refer to her as the fourth pillar in the DC publishing line. What makes her so special?

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JIM LEE: Well, I think, you know, that she's fairly new to the mythos, right, she wasn't created in the '30s or '40s, it was much more recent, in the '90s. And so it's strange or unusual to see a character really spike that hard with the audience that late into it. But I think again, she represented... she's a sort of agent of chaos but in a more Catwoman way. And by that I mean she's not necessarily clearly on the side of the rogues. She kind of again straddles being a villain and a hero, especially given her origins. And I think also her origin is also something that is very rooted in modern times, right? It's a therapist or a psychiatrist who works at Arkham Asylum who's basically kind of drawn to the dark side through her interactions with the Joker. And I think that that speaks to kind of modern-day society and sort of our focus on mental health and what does that mean. And so I think in her core origin there are things that feel very modern. And then I think in terms of being a fourth pillar, you think about, you know, how characters instantly sort of glom on and embrace a character and I just saw that really in spades. Obviously in Batman: The Animated Series and then in the movies, you just see, you know, fans old and young alike embracing Harley Quinn. She was the most popular Halloween costume

in recent years for both kids and women. And so you can see really kind of the impact it's had and it's, again, it's a character really without superpowers and... but at the same time very much empowered and a force to be reckoned with. And I think that's... those are the elements you need in the core kind of characters that represent sort of the pillars of your mythology.

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ANDREA COLLINS: I'm gonna bring Kitt into the conversation now. LEGO Senior Designer Kitt Kossman, who was working with Jim and Alex on these images. Kitt, what was it like, working with Jim and Alex?

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KITT KOSSMAN: It was actually so nice and so easy. They are very... both guys are so easy to work with and they were so professional. I just really had the feeling that if I had a problem, I could tell them about it and they would solve it for me. There was times like where Jim was just, like, while we were having a work call, he took a screenshot and he changed something directly and then after the meeting he sent it back to me and I could implement it in the document I was working in. So he was a huge help. And also, like, Alex, at one point I had trouble with a Harley Quinn ponytail and he mentioned it to me and seeing that ponytail today, I'm just so grateful that Alex mentioned it back then because I would have been annoyed with it now if I hadn't changed it then.

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JIM LEE: Kitt's being very gracious but I know I probably drove her nuts, though, cos I would take the image with the dots and then I would put dots on them but I was just freehanding the dots and I was putting the dots kind of wherever I felt like the dots should go. And she probably looked at it going like, "There's really not a space to put a dot here, I don't know what you're, you know." So, I was just trying to approximate it all. But then she had to deal with the actual reality of the spaces. Cos sometimes I'd put like three dots into a space where there's only two dots, right, so anyway.

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KITT KOSSMAN: That is true.

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JIM LEE: I know, I know, but, you know, I was just... That's not my responsibility.

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KITT KOSSMAN: Exactly. And, but, yeah, but on the other hand, you didn't come back and say, "Oh, I put it there and there." Like, you kind of agreed with what the decision I made after that.

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JIM LEE: Right, right.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Kitt, did you even in your wildest dreams think that it would be original art by Jim Lee and Alex Sinclair?

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KITT KOSSMAN: No, I didn't have imagination to imagine that we were going to work together with two artists like Jim and Alex. But the reason why we wanted to do Batman is that there is an anniversary coming up in 2022 and what better tribute could we make than to actually launch a product with original artwork from the two of them?

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ANDREA COLLINS: Mm-hmm. What did you learn about the process of creating comic book art, you know, from everything from colours to the sketches, what did you learn?

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KITT KOSSMAN: I didn't know that there were so many processes and that it was more people who was actually sitting doing it together. Like, I'd actually never given it a second thought. So seeing that, all the work that is behind it, like, when I saw it, everything made perfect sense. But I would say especially the inking part, that that was done in the end, that was really, really new to me. So... But yeah, it was... it was amazing to see the process. And also being part of the process because that's also how we work together. I was actually taken through the whole process from, like, seeing the sketch and making the sketch, colouring in the sketch and inking it. So I was kind of like working in the same way as Alex and Jim are working. So that made perfect sense when I did it and it was a lot of fun.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Alex and Jim have talked about the challenges of Batman's face. So did you feel that challenge as well, trying to fit it all in?

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KITT KOSSMAN: Yeah, Jim mentioned there was a challenge with the cropping of Batman's face because with his mask and with his ears, he is longer than the format that is chosen for it since it is a square. So it was, like, the three figures kind of have to match each other in size, that was one thing, but also there needed to be enough ear in the picture to actually capture that it was a mask. But I think we found the best solution to that, so today you would kind of imagine that the rest of the ears are there when you look at it.

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ANDREA COLLINS: The colouring from Alex normally has lots of shades and nuances and you're working with 16 colours in your palette. So does that make your job more challenging?

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KITT KOSSMAN: Oh, yes, it does. Yeah. So when I get an image that is coloured in, what I do is that I take that image and then I turn it into pixels and then I sit manually and decide what colour in the LEGO colour palette that I have decided on becomes what colour. In Alex's image there might be 20 shades of turquoise and I have to make that turquoise into one turquoise. So it's pretty much like really sitting there and then with my eyes, like, considering, should it become this blue or this blue? Or this red or this dark red? So it's very manual. But it's also, like, I really like it. It's like painting with pixels in my universe. And I don't mind the limitation of actually having a certain number of colours to work with and I think actually that's the fun part. So, yeah, it is a challenge but it's also fun.

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ANDREA COLLINS: The three portraits are so different in their colour schemes. Batman is mostly blue and black. The Joker, white green and purple. And then Harley Quinn, she's got a lot of blue, red and golden tones. So was it a fun puzzle to find the perfect combination of colours for these unique portraits that would work well for all three?

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KITT KOSSMAN: It was a bit of a puzzle because the colour schemes of them are very, very different from each other and there was, especially, like, Joker, he has, like, a certain colour scheme. You can't make Joker with another hair colour than green, like, and he is wearing a purple jacket and purple gloves, and that's just how it is. So those colours were kind of put aside to him. And then to make a stroke, I wanted to, when I did the strokes in the last process of making the images, I wanted the stroke to have life. I didn't want a dead, like, stroke that had the same size all the way around. I wanted it to look like as if it was hand-drawn. I wanted it to look uneven. And to create that illusion, I needed more shades of grey to actually be able to do that. So those colours were also given. I needed black and I needed white as well. So suddenly there wasn't that many colours to choose from. So it took some trials and errors before I got there but I think actually the colour palette worked out really well and also, of course, I had to consider the Ultimates, where there is a purple sky in the background behind Catwoman and Batman. And on the big Ultimate of Batman, he also has this green light that shines on him. I also needed a green for that. So all in all, a puzzle but a fun one.

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ANDREA COLLINS: No kidding. And how do you catch the sketch strokes with fine black contouring lines of a Jim Lee comic book design when you don't have the resolution to do it? How did you pull this off and still make it look like a Jim Lee sketch?

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KITT KOSSMAN: Yeah. That was actually... it was hard and it actually helped me a lot that I coloured in the images before from Alex's colourings, so I could really experiment with that. I learned a lot doing the process because there was certain limitations to how I could make it look like gradients of grey that I had to kind of use to make it look like as if it was a stroke that was getting thicker and thicker. But it's not like something you can think your way, you can't make a diagram and then use that. You have to, like, try a bit, walk away from it, look at it, not good, going back, delete. That's pretty much how it is. It's a lot of work and a lot of moving away from it, asking colleagues, "Please can you look at this, there's something wrong here. There's something I can't quite determine what it is but with your fresh eyes, can you then see it?" So it was a bit like painting with pixels again. It was really like moving away from it, seeing where it's heading. And also it didn't make it any easier with the dark background because the sky is black or it's like very, very dark. It's not black, it's actually gunpowder grey, I think we call it. So

also, to make the differentiation behind the background and the stroke visible enough, that took some work, yeah. And also I didn't want... Cos, like, there was a point where I'd been working on Joker and Joker had, like, really had just, like, even stroke around his face and Alex and Lee, Jim Lee, was looking at it and they said, and at that time I was actually really proud of it, they don't know that, and then they said, "There's something with Joker's face, it's actually... it's becoming really white. You know, it's really round, compared to the original drawing." And I'd stared myself completely blind on it, I couldn't see it myself. But, like, as soon as I looked at it again I could see, "Oh, my God." It's actually, the contour of it has actually moved outside the figure. So I had to move the whole thing a pixel in on both sides to make his face slim again. So they were completely right but I at that point couldn't see it. So yeah, it was fun doing the stroke.

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ANDREA COLLINS: So, also, a lot of taking three steps back?

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KITT KOSSMAN: It's a lot of taking three steps back. I have a very big screen on my table, so yeah. It's nice to walk away from it once in a while. And also there's a lot of my colleagues who is walking behind me and we are working in an open office so sometimes you can feel that somebody's looking behind you and then it's like, "What?" And they go, "Mm, you might wanna change that." Thank you.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Tell me about the backgrounds. Was that a collaboration as well?

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KITT KOSSMAN: Yeah, it was, it was a collaboration with Jim and Alex. The background, in the beginning, when we got the colourings from Alex, were kind of showing the attitude of the character. And what we wanted to achieve was actually that if you were hanging the three images up together, that they were being a family, that they would have some kind of connection. So actually, by doing this lightning, that we agreed on would be the most dramatic background we could choose from... actually how it looks right now, no matter if you choose to just have one or two or three and if you choose to hang them next to each other or above each other, it would look as if they're in the same thunderstorm. So I think actually the lightning was a very good solution to the background, to keep them connected. And also that keeps them a bit in family. This

way you can kind of create the illusion of them being in a line-up, because the thunder is actually moving from one side to the next image, like, from one image to the next image. So this is to kind of bring them all together.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Let's talk about the Ultimate build with Catwoman and Batman. Jim and Alex, can you tell us what's happening in that scene and why you chose that scene?

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JIM LEE: Yeah, it's an homage to, I think, Batman cover 50, which really has Batman and Catwoman touching foreheads in the rain. And again, I don't know how you would... we could have really driven Kitt crazy by saying, "Try to create the illusion of rain using these dots." But so... that was the source inspiration of it all but then we wanted to make sure it looked different, right, that it wasn't just a slavish copy of that, so we reversed the positioning of the characters, some of the attitude of it all, and incorporated a background that was different from rain falling, that could be expressed, you know, through the tools and the palette that we had. So there was a number of different challenges. How do we make the background look like buildings? How do we create depth between the foreground figures and that background? And how do we bring Catwoman and Batman's costumes to life in different colour schemes?

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ALEX SINCLAIR: Regularly, I would use glows and special effects to create depth and spatial relationships between the foreground and that middle ground, that background element, and as I was starting to do that I realised, "Wait a second, I can't. I have to do this in the palette that I have." And so it became more about just treating them as single images that sat in three different spaces, so that using that palette to accentuate the value differences between that sky and that cityscape and then the two characters that are in front of that. And Kitt was incredible about it. And I believe halfway through it, she just said, "Hey, can I try something to help the cityscape look better?" And what she did with it was perfect.

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JIM LEE: Yeah.

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KITT KOSSMANN: Thank you.

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JIM LEE: Cos essentially you have blacks, greys, like, light purples or whatever, in all... both foreground characters, with Batman and Catwoman, and then the buildings too, right, in the background. So, like, how do you... how do we create that depth using essentially kind of flat colour was, I think, the chief challenge. And Alex and Kitt did a phenomenal job of creating that depth.

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KITT KOSSMANN: Thank you.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Kitt, you've worked on several LEGO Art projects now. How was this one different?

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KITT KOSSMANN: Like, the whole process is different from what I'm used to. Normally I would be given an artwork and then I, from that artwork, have to make the best version of this. But this collaboration with Jim and Alex, actually I then had the opportunity to come with input if there is something that... that would... that I thought would be better. As an example, like, the background of it, in the beginning, the background that was drawn on it was pretty much related to the attitude of the characters. But this was actually tying the whole things together. So yeah, I was... I was very happy that they took my input and we could make that dramatic background on it.

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ANDREA COLLINS: And Jim and Alex, what was it like, seeing the work that Kitt did for the first time? I mean, it's kind of, you know, taking your baby and putting it into a whole different medium. What were your initial thoughts?

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JIM LEE: I was blown away by what I saw. Cos, you know, when you think about 16 colours, you think, "What... how closely can you bring our style to life using that limited of a palette? And it was amazing, seeing it both at a difference and close up, just how

you were able to take kind of these limited choices and create something that felt more... fuller, fuller than that. And certainly it didn't feel like it was just 16 colours at the end of the day. And so it really... I thought the style came through and the clarity came through. Especially in Batman's eyes. Like, you could have chosen to just make them all white. But again, because of the triangular shape, how do you do that using essentially kind of square... even with circles, they're inside essentially a square kind of shape. How do you do that? And Kitt really used a grey and a white to really kind of bring that to life. And then also she was really responsible for the background kind of lightning strike that connects both or all three, Batman, Harley Quinn and Joker. And again, using maybe two or three different shades of black, grey... white, I think? It was just amazing. Because A, it connected all three, but it also gave the background some depth and some character because it was asymmetrical throughout the three. So it really felt like that piece really made it feel like a triptych and pulled all three together in a really striking way.

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ANDREA COLLINS: What's it like, holding the final LEGO Art set in your hands and seeing the final product?

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ALEX SINCLAIR: Oh, they're incredible. I remember seeing the first pass of everything and just staring at it, thinking, "Oh, my God, it actually looks like a Jim Lee drawing." And then, you know, going through the really, like Jim mentioned, really small kind of tweaks that we were making, really, literally, moving, like, dots over. And this finished product is just... it's incredible. Everyone in my family keeps coming over to see it again cos they really enjoy it.

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ANDREA COLLINS: They look amazing.

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JIM LEE: Yeah, our hats off to Kitt. You know, she really brought it to life. And what's interesting about it is that we have our style and so how do you translate it, given these parameters, and still make it look visually, aesthetically cool but also recognisably ours? And I think that was, you know, a big hurdle and then once we saw what Kitt was doing with the images, realising that every dot was critical to that inspiration, what we were

trying to achieve, and just by creating that dot in a place or moving it over one dot over, or one brick over, made a huge difference. And so it was fascinating seeing not only the work that we did, her style and translating it into this LEGO style, but then also seeing how they then brought it to life and how critical each placement was and how nuanced it was. And so it was an interesting and fascinating process from start to finish.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Mm-hmm. What a collaboration of so many sides. So, Kitt, how do you think Jim and Alex would be as LEGO designers?

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KITT KOSSMAN: More than welcome. I think I would appreciate it. But I know a lot of my colleagues are big fans of both of you. So when I spoke to them and talked about you guys and said that I was working together with you, they were like, "Why are you working with them?" So I think just come over. Like, I'll send a plane now.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Well, hey, it was so amazing speaking with all three of you, and what an incredible collaboration it is. Just... Just shows what can be created when people from different expertise all come together with one vision in mind. So thank you so much for chatting with us today.

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KITT KOSSMAN: Thank you.

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JIM LEE: Thank you.

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ALEX SINCLAIR: Thank you very much, yeah.

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ANDREA COLLINS: Thank you for listening to the story behind the LEGO Art Batman series. How's your piece of art coming along? Are you getting ready to hang it on the wall? Maybe you're ready to break it apart and build another version. Or even create your own. My name's Andrea Collins. This has been an original soundtrack from LEGO Art.