

When I thinking of the saying, “Do what you love and you’ll never work a day in your life”; I think of Michael Whelan. This man has redefined the science-fiction realm. He has worked with so many talented authors and musicians. He has won so many awards, I lost count after the 15th Hugo award. He not only cracked the code in the book cover industry, but in life. He is a mostly self-taught artist and self-taught business man. He is an icon to the sci-fi industry and the illustration world.

Born in 1950, Michael Whelan grew up in a family that bounced from town to town. He didn’t have a close group of friends to share in adventures with because his never had the time to build those bonds. (I am not setting him up to be this future serial killer in the making, I promise.) Although he never had the greatest relationship with his parents, they did introduce him to his future love of science-fiction. Once he saw his first sci-fi movie he was hooked. “Every time they would move, he would go right to the local library to see if they had any flying saucer books he hadn’t read yet. He still remembers the Dewey Decimal Number then assigned to UFO books – 629.1388” (Unknown). Whelan started drawing aliens and UFOs at a very young age. In ‘65, Whelan was able to take a figure drawing summer class and his fate was sealed. After graduating from high school in ‘68 he went to San Jose State University to start a pre-med track. Fortunately, the allure of the arts pulled him back in after taking a few drawing and painting courses as electives. “By his junior year, he changed his major to art and he graduated as a President’s Scholar with Honors in Painting” (Unknown). Whelan then went to the Art Center College of Design for almost a whole year. The grueling course load and the lack of funds were weighing Whelan down. Luckily Whelan found a way around scholastic training. He entered the 1974 San Deigo Comic Con sci-fi art contest. All of his work that he entered in the contest sold. He had a new wave of confidence and tested the waters by sending a portfolio to DAW Books. He landed a contract to start doing book cover illustrations. And things only were just getting started.

Whelan made waves in the book cover industry and the science-fiction genre. He kept his work circulating the sci-fic convention circuit. Which opened the doors to opportunities to work with publishers like Marvel Comics, DAW Books, LunaCon, Ace, and Del Rey Books. Soon he was working with authors like Stephen King, Poul Anderson, Clifford Simak, Anne McCaffrey, and so many more. He also created album covers for musicians like Michael Jackson, Meatloaf, and Sepultura. He has won many awards for his work and his contributions to the sci-fi field. In the early 2000s, Whelan was diagnosed with prostate cancer. He wasn’t down for the count for long and has been in remission since. In the late ‘80s Whelan thought something was missing in his life. He wanted to start to make more personal work. It took him a long time to find a balancing routine for his personal work and his illustration work. As of now, Whelan spends half the year working with publishers and other commission work and the other half of the year he dedicates to his personal work. Whelan is the definition of success.

Whelan’s work is something to behold. His pieces have more themes to them than just sci-fi. Most of the time his pieces have a lot of vast open space. He likes to have a center balance to his compositions. His use of color is very soft but bold. His use of an airbrush helps to give his pieces another worldly look. Even though his aliens and monsters are just from Whelan’s imagination, there is a depth of understanding and almost scientific approach to their creation. Overall, Whelan’s work is on a whole other level. He found his niche and dominated it.

In the end, Michael Whelan has done so much and isn’t slowing down anytime soon. He has set the bar high for all illustrators. Whelan is proof that were there is a will, there is a way. The greatest

lesson that I have learned from Whelan is to figure out what your niche is and don't stop. Whelan is going to go down in the history books not just as an artist, but a pioneer for the sci-fi world.

Work Cited

Unknown. "BIOGRAPHY." *The Art of Michael Whelan*, 2012, www.michaelwhelan.com/biography/.

Autor's Note: For more up to date announcements about Michaels Whelan's work and exhibitions check out: <https://www.michaelwhelan.com/>