



Illustration in Fashion Publications and Retail Store Advertising in America: The Artist behind the Look and the Resurrection of the Fashion Illustrator

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Fashion illustration has had an extensive, yet tenuous, relationship with publications and clothing stores' commercial advertising throughout its history. In this essay, I explore the role of illustration in promoting retail stores and the evolution of artists who have combined simple media and modern technology to create unique advertising campaigns. I examine the styles and significance of illustrators J. C. Leyendecker, Andy Warhol, Antonio Lopez, Kenneth Block, Steven Stipelman, Mats Gustafson, and Jean-Philippe Delhomme. In 2008, artist-illustrator Ruben Toledo and photographer Ruven Afanador's three-dimensional vision for retailer Nordstrom's advertising campaign took fashion illustration to a new level. Illustrators Jason Brooks, Lisa Henderling, and Lisa Evans use digital technology to conjure visually stimulating campaigns for publications and retail store advertising. Ultimately, the epitome of fashion illustration in retailers' advertising can be realized when artists, no longer just illustrators, experiment with media, collaborate, and transform their styles into a commodity that transcends the status quo.

Fashion illustration has had an extensive, yet tenuous, relationship with publications and commercial advertising for clothing stores throughout its history. From the inception of fashion magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar* in 1867 and *Vogue* in 1892, and of the trade journal *Women's Wear Daily* (WWD) in 1910, retail stores have relied heavily on fashion illustrations to convey their image and merchandise. Leafing through a December 1945 issue of *Harper's Bazaar* swiftly establishes how vital fashion illustration once was. Of 199 pages, 81 pages depict the current fashion trends or display a retailer's advertisement with an artist's sketch. Comparatively, in the May 2009 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*, only two of 179 pages illustrate fashion with a sketch. The decline in popularity of fashion illustrations became evident when *Women's Wear Daily* fired the members of its

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studio in 1992.¹ An illustration has the power to enchant the viewer with beauty, sophistication, or wit, persuading one to desire the lifestyle revealed. So why then have publications abandoned this form of marketing? Who are the artists behind the looks that have defined eras in fashion? Can fashion illustration emerge once more as a dominant force? By mingling conventional forms of advertising and innovative exploration, fashion illustration may reinvent itself.

The commercial artist Joseph C. Leyendecker (1874-1951) created one of the most famous advertising icons of the twentieth century, “the Arrow Collar Man.” In 1905, with his distinctive brush using highlights within the shadows, Leyendecker created a sophisticated, handsome young man. His images were a symbol of the new working-class culture of the American man, the masculine, white-collar executive. Using handsome models as his muse, his images were considered the counterpoint for the Gibson Girl, creating such a stir among female fans that some woman “offered marriage proposals.”² His symbolic illustrations turned Arrow into “the largest collar/shirt brand in America.”³

The legendary “Pop” artist Andy Warhol (1928-1987) used his sense of color and line to create whimsical fashion illustrations. He started illustrating shoes for the “fashion magazines *Glamour*, *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar*.”⁴ Then in the mid-1950s, the I. Miller Shoe Company hired him to revitalize its business. He started playing with repetition in his images for the newspaper advertisements for I. Miller. Illustrating the shoes from the back view only, showing high detail that became almost architectural, Warhol’s work became iconic. Using ink and aniline dye, which revealed brilliant transparency, helped produce high-impact illustrations. Tiffany & Company and Bonwit Teller caught on to his wit and hired him to design window displays for their stores.

As photography began flooding the fashion industry in 1963 and became the choice form of advertising, Antonio Lopez (1943-1987) found a way to remain buoyant. He started his career illustrating for Fairchild’s *WWD* and then moved on to the “Fashions of the Times” supplement at the *New York Times*.⁵ Later, he refocused his attention on freelancing for the fashion publications *Vogue*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Elle*, and *Interview Magazine*. He formed an alliance in 1964 with the master couturier

¹ Veronica Horwell, Obituary for Kenneth Paul Block, “American Fashion Illustrator Whose Work Shone with Technical Brilliance,” *The Guardian*, 12 May 2009.

² Martin Morse Wooster, “Recent Studies,” *Strategy and Business*, <http://www.strategy-business.com/press/16635507/17445>.

³ Jim Vadeboncoeur, Jr., “The Vadeboncoeur Collection of Images,” Issue 2, 2001.

⁴ Simon Doonan, *Andy Warhol Fashion* (San Francisco, Calif., 2004).

⁵ Michele Wesen Bryant, *WWD Illustrated, 1960s-1990s* (New York, 2004).

Charles James, serving as “his most eloquent delineator” and capturing an illustrated record of his designs. Using various media (pencil pen, charcoal, paint and even Polaroids), Antonio was constantly reinventing his style to encapsulate the culture of the moment.⁶

Elegant, gestural lines flowed from the hands of the great fashion illustrator Kenneth Paul Block (1924-2009). His illustrations were sought after by socialites and fashion designers and commercially by specialty stores such as Bonwit Teller, Bergdorf Goodman, Bloomingdales, and Lord & Taylor. The fashion designer Oscar de la Renta commented that Block “gave a life and movement to the clothes far beyond what the clothes actually were.”⁷ His amazing watercolor images of “society icons like Babe Paley, the Duchess of Windsor, Jackie Kennedy. . .” captured the essence of their being with his flowing lines and hits of color.⁸ What Block possessed that no camera could realize was the ability to sketch a collection from verbal description alone. This skill proved to be invaluable to *Women’s Wear Daily* when the editors were banned from some of the French couture shows in Paris. His ability to sketch swiftly, conjure up looks on paper from mere description, and keep in step with the latest methods of illustrating, using charcoal, Japanese brush, markers, and gouache, helped to push Block into the forefront of fashion illustration during the latter half of the twentieth century.

The sophisticated, ethereal images depicted by the fashion illustrator and teacher Steven Stipelman (1944-) have graced publications since the 1960s. He first illustrated for the specialty store Henri Bendel and then moved on to *WWD* in 1965 to begin an illustrious career covering the international collections, gala parties, and receptions.⁹ His female figures instill the delicate feminine idea, with their pursed lips, elongated necks, and sloping shoulders adjusted ever so slightly to reflect the “perfect proportion at a given time.”¹⁰ His freelance work awarded him the opportunity to work on an extensive list of accounts including Hanes, Estee Lauder, Charles of the Ritz, Orlane, Clairol, Marshall Field, Lord & Taylor, and Du Pont.¹¹ Stipelman teaches and lectures on fashion illustration at prominent fashion design schools in the United States, and he won the Chancellor’s Award for teaching at the Fashion Institute of Technology in 2000. His painterly style combined with nuanced line echo the look of the moment, his hand the intermediary forming otherworldly appeal.

⁶ Richard Martin, *Charles James* (New York, 2006), 9.

⁷ Rosemary Feitelberg, *Woman’s Wear Daily* (24 April 2009), 4 and 6.

⁸ James Brady, “Block on His Art,” *Forbes* (14 Feb. 2008). URL: http://www.forbes.com/2008/02/13/brady-media-block-oped-cx_jb_0214brady.html.

⁹ Nicholas Drake, *Fashion Illustration Today* (New York, 1987), 172.

¹⁰ Steven Stipelman, *Illustrating Fashion Concept to Creation*, 2d ed. (New York, 2005).

¹¹ Drake, *Fashion Illustration Today*, 173.

Spare yet expressive, Mats Gustafson's (1951-) minimalistic watercolors, pastels, and cut-outs of fashion reveal their essence through the simplistic silhouette. One of his pastel works for Italian *Vogue*, 1997, makes one feel as though one is gazing through a dense fog, seeing the figure of a nondescript woman moving forward wearing a design from the Japanese fashion line, Comme des Garçons. Gustafson's work first appeared in British *Vogue* in 1978.¹² More work followed with American *Vogue*, *Marie-Claire*, *Interview*, the *New York Times* and, more recently, *Visionaire*. He has collaborated with a long list of designers and brands including Comme des Garçons, Chanel, Yohji Yamamoto, Galeries Lafayette, Nike, Bergdorf Goodman, Hermès, and Tiffany & Company.¹³ His pared-down aesthetic and expressive use of watercolor give his work dream-like qualities that are admired by many in both the fashion and art worlds.

Jean-Philippe Delhomme (1959-) creates whimsical illustrations with a tongue-in-cheek attitude for fashion publications, brand campaigns, novels, and animation. He launched his illustration career by creating a series called "Polaroids de Jeunes Filles" for the French edition of *Glamour* in 1987.¹⁴ The series displayed pretend characters with satirical text depicting the pretentious attitudes of the time. He went on to illustrate for British *Vogue*, *Vogue Nippon*, *Vogue Paris*, and *House & Garden*. In 1993, his campaign for Barneys New York, which previously had used photography for its projects, set in motion a colorful, playful liaison. Illustrating with gouache, he painted characters wearing major designers' fashions accompanied by witty headlines that stated their new "sometimes" theme—for example, "Sometimes you're an original work of art."¹⁵ His illustrations for Barneys went on to become clever billboards and animated advertisements for television.

Surrealist Ruben Toledo (1961-) walks in the fashion world in life and in art. He frequently collaborates with his wife and muse, the famous fashion designer Isabel Toledo, on projects such as their book and 1999 museum exhibition titled "Toledo/Toledo: A Marriage of Art and Fashion" at the Museum of the Fashion Institute of Technology.¹⁶ Known as a

¹² Ibid., 167.

¹³ The Fashion Illustration Gallery, Mats Gustafson bio. URL: <http://www.fashionillustrationgallery.com>; Art and Commerce, Illustrator, Mats Gustafson, www.artandcommerce.com.

¹⁴The Mark Hotel, Jean-Philippe Delhomme bio. URL: http://www.themarkhotel.com/nav/ensemble/credits_delhomme.php.

¹⁵ Stephanie Strom, "The Media Business: Advertising; Barneys Touts Its New Store on Madison Avenue with an Eye-catching, Artistic Campaign," *New York Times*, 17 Sept. 1993. URL: <http://www.nytimes.com>.

¹⁶ El Museo Delbarrion, Press Office, Ruben Toledo Cigars. URL: http://www.elmuseo.org/Press_new/pr_rubentoledocigars.html.

sculptor, painter, illustrator, author, chronicler, critic, and filmmaker, in 2004 he completed an animated history of French fashion titled “Fashionation.”¹⁷ He has created illustrations for magazines and journals like *The New Yorker*, *Vogue*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Town & Country*, *Paper*, *Visionaire*, *Interview*, and the *New York Times*. However, it is his iconic illustrations for Nordstrom’s advertising campaigns that have brought his work into the forefront of fashion for all to see. For the 2008 campaign, Toledo worked with the photographer Ruven Afanador and painted 20-by-30-foot walls, which created a whimsical backdrop for the photo shoot. Toledo felt inspired to paint directly onto the models’ faces and bodies as Afanador captured the moment. This spontaneity, according to Nordstrom’s executive vice president Linda Finn, exceeded their expectations.¹⁸

Welcoming in digital technology, illustrators can now be seen tapping into the fashion world with their Wacom digital pen tablets in hand. From illustrating the London club scenes, to Hed Kandi album covers in 1999, Jason Brooks developed his sleek, modern digital muses. Brooks uses his pen, ink, and Adobe Photoshop to generate sexy and glamorous fashion figures for such clients as *Vogue*, *Elle*, *Coty*, *Express Jeans*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Visionaire*.¹⁹ Lisa Henderling uses the computer to create a flirty, fun fashionista for Nordstrom, the *Country Home* magazine’s Shop Girl, and Macy’s billboard and print ads in Tampa, Florida.²⁰ Known for her wonderful imagination and charming animals, Lisa Evans has invented dreamy scenes for Nordstrom’s Christmas advertising campaigns. Nordstrom’s loved her illustrations so much that she was asked to work with Nordstrom copywriter and author Randy Schliep to create the heartwarming book “Once Upon a Holiday: The Moon Fell Out of the Sky.”²¹

Is there room for original illustration in fashion promotion and advertising? With the ubiquitous use of photography, one might think that illustration is dead. Charles Hively, publisher and director of the magazine *3x3*, suggests that the decline of art in advertising is ultimately the fault of art schools. “Students are encouraged to search for stock images and never

¹⁷ Savannah College of Art and Design, News, 22 April 2009. URL: <http://www.scad.edu/news/2009/isabel-ruben-toledo.cfm>.

¹⁸ Jim Shi, Nordstrom’s Painted Pictures, *Fashion Week Daily*, 28 Jan. 2008. URL: <http://www.fashionweekdaily.com>.

¹⁹ Fashion Mission, Illustrator Jason Brooks. URL: <http://www.fashionmission.nl>.

²⁰ Lisa Henderling, bio. URL: <http://www.lisahenderling.com>.

²¹ Nichole Shell, Nordstrom News Releases. URL: <http://Nordstrom.com>.

consider using art—original or even stock art.”²² Art directors are not trained to present illustrations as options for advertising or publication layouts. Yet, we are a society that is ever-evolving. When we become oversaturated with one thing, we crave something new. So, is fashion illustration dead? The much-admired fashion illustrator David Downton thinks otherwise. In an interview with Cathy Horn for the *New York Times*, he stated: “It’s never been a better time to be a fashion illustrator. Because, in fact, there is no universal style; there’s no prescribed way of working today.”²³ With innovative marketing teams like that at Nordstrom’s who embrace experimentation and benefit from the inspired efforts of their artists, and publications like *Visionaire* that offer a forum to display the artists’ work, it appears the time has come. Fashion artists, no longer just illustrators, must ultimately experiment with media, collaborate, and transform their styles into a commodity that transcends the status quo.

²² Steven Heller, “The Fall and Rise of Illustration: An Interview with Charles Hively, AIGA, 1 May 2006. URL: <http://www.aiga.org/content.cfm/the-fall-and-rise-of-illustration-an-interview-with-charles-hive>.

²³ Cathy Horn, Q & A: David Downton, *New York Times*, 30 Nov. 2007, <http://runway.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/11/30/q-a-david-downton/>.