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# BEYOND STYLE

*Character Evolution Through Fashion Illustration*

*a chapter by*

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## Introduction

Discovering the theme of "Beyond Style: Character Evolution Through Fashion Illustration" involves fashion illustration that highlights individuality, diversity, the expressive nature of the art form and how it relates to fashion illustration. In the context of fashion illustration, this theme portrays the unique characteristics of the subjects, and the creations infuse with the identity and spirit. Fashion illustration becomes a testament to the belief that style is a deeply personal expression, and each stroke of the artist's brush is a verse to the multi-layered nature of humanity. It is an acknowledgment that beauty is not confined to a singular standard but is found in the myriad shapes, sizes, colours, and cultures that make up our diverse world. Fashion illustrators have embraced "character" more than artistic technique. It becomes a philosophy that challenges norms, redefines beauty standards, and appreciates the richness found in the authenticity of individual stories. The journey through the intricate lines and vibrant hues captures the style of character in fashion illustration. Character is not just a stylistic choice; it is a powerful assertion of thoughtful impact of personal expression within the art form.

## Definition of Character in Fashion Illustration

Characters in fashion illustration are more than just clothing as they embody a fusion of artistic expression and individual identity. Fashion illustrators skilfully breathe life into their characters, showcasing diverse personalities and unique attributes. These characters are depicted with elegance and simplicity.

Fashion illustration goes beyond mere depictions of garments; it captures the essence of the individuals wearing them. Artists infuse their creations with the spirit and identity of the subjects they portray by making each illustration

a testament to the deeply personal nature of style. The strokes of the artist's brush acknowledges that beauty is subjective and can be found in various forms.

Characters in fashion illustration challenge norms and redefine beauty standards. They invite viewers to appreciate the authenticity of individual stories and foster a philosophy that goes beyond artistic technique. The characters invite audiences on a visual journey and encourage an exploration of the reflective impact of character celebration on the very essence of style and expression. In essence, characters in fashion illustration become powerful symbols of diversity, self-expression, and the unique tapestry of humanity.

## Historical Perspective - Evolution of Character in Fashion Illustration

Art Deco Era (1920s-1930s): The Art Deco era in fashion illustration showcased characters with a sense of sophistication and glamour. The illustrations featured sleek, geometric lines to capture the vibrancy and dynamism of the Roaring Twenties. The characters exuded a spirit of modernity and luxury to reflect the societal changes and artistic innovations of the time. The few renowned artists during this time are Paul Iribe (Figure 1), George Barbier and Erté.



Figure 1: Plate from *Les Choses de Paul Poiret* (1911) Pochoir print by Paul Iribe

Post-World War II: The 1940s reflected resilience, while the 1950s showed a return to femininity and grace. In the 1960s, the characters became youthful and dynamic to mirror the rise of youth culture and the shift towards innovative and bold designs. René Gruau (Figure 2), and Christian Bérard are influential fashion illustrators known for their distinctive styles and dynamic characters with elegance and stylish ensembles.



*Figure 2: Original illustration of Christian Dior for cover of L'Officiel, (1948)  
Courtesy Galerie Bartsch & Chariou.  
by René Gruau*

### Bohemian and Hippie Movement (1960s-1970s)

The characters in late 1960s and 1970s reflected the bohemian and hippie influences. These fashion illustrators played a vital role in translating the bohemian and hippie fashion movements into visual representations to showcase the emphasis on individuality, unconventional styles, and the rejection of mainstream norms. David Downton (Figure 3), a British artist, gained recognition in the 1970s for

his distinctive and expressive illustrations. His work often embraced the bohemian spirit of the time, featuring characters adorned in unconventional and free-flowing attire.



*Figure 3: Jean-Paul Gaultier  
(1999) Artist's Collection by David Downton*

Antonio Lopez (Figure 4) continued to be influential in the 1960s and 1970s by capturing the diverse and dynamic styles of the era.



*Figure 4: Yves Saint Laurent  
(1983) Courtesy Galerie Bartsch & Chariou.  
by Antonio Lopez*

## The Minimalist and Avant-Garde

The 1980s and 1990s fashion focused on simplicity, clean lines, and essential elements. Technology always improves fashion illustration, but the latest trend focuses on traditional methods for a safer approach (Morris, 2006). The artists who specialize in this style often reduce the use of colour palettes and details to convey the elegance and essence of fashion. However, some illustrators often push the boundaries of traditional design by experimenting with innovative concepts and embracing unconventional styles such as David Downton (Figure 5). Downton's loose and expressive lines capture the essence of the subject in a unique way. Downton always keeps the spark of the tactile medium alive when technology and the fashion industry are evolving (Scarborough, 2018)



*Figure 5: Valentino  
(1999) Black ink and oil pastel on red paper with acetate  
overlay by David Downton*

## Contemporary and Digital Age (2000s-Present)

Characters in fashion illustration are diverse and dynamic in the contemporary era. The digital age allowed for a variety of styles and representations ranging from realistic portrayals to abstract and experimental approaches. Characters in fashion illustrations today convey a sense of individuality

such as Graham Rounthwaite (Figure 6). Some fashion illustrators use digital media as a primary tool for their work. Digital illustration offers a range of benefits including flexibility, the ability to experiment with different styles and techniques, and efficient workflows. These illustrators contribute to the visual language of fashion and explore new artistic directions and push boundaries with the bold and experimental nature of the fashion trends of the period.



*Figure 6: Advertisement for Levi Jeans  
(2000) Adobe Photoshop by Graham Rounthwaite*

Contemporary illustration prioritizes conveying personal emotions over delivering an exact depiction of its subject through drawing (Dawber, 2011). For example, Piet Paris (Figure 7), is known for his distinctive and elegant style by using a combination of bold lines, bright colours and a deep understanding of design. This illustration shows that characters play an important role in expressing style and fashion even though the drawing has been styled without spoiling the image. There are also other famous fashion illustrators from this era such as Marcos Chin and Jasper Goodall.



Figure 7: Shawl 1  
(2003) by Piet Paris

Jason Brooks (Figure 8) is known for his glamorous and stylish illustrations. Brooks has made significant contributions to the fashion industry through his work with major fashion houses, magazines and brands. Brooks is recognized for his distinctive style which is characterized by sleek lines and vibrant colours to capture the beauty and elegance of the fashion world. Brooks often combines traditional hand-drawing techniques with digital media to create a modern and dynamic aesthetic. Traditional handwork illustration is enjoying a revival with fashion illustrators often referring to the past for stylistic inspiration. Fashion illustration that is grounded in classic methods has managed to survive alongside those created by more modern processes (Goethe-Jones, 2019).



Figure 8: Versace for Vogue pelle  
(2003) by Jason Brook

## Conclusion

Each era introduces unique characteristics and style shifts in the evolution of character particularly in fashion illustration throughout different periods. Illustrations are characterized by the emphasis on geometric motifs, sleek lines, and luxurious details, portraying slender figures adorned in lavish clothing that reflected the elegance of the Roaring Twenties. On the contrary, the Hippiess Movement features illustrations of carefree individuals dressed in bohemian styles with vibrant colours, embodying the countercultural principles of peace, love, and individuality. The Minimalist and Avant-Garde period focus on simplicity, neutral tones, and innovative shapes that represent a pursuit of originality. The Contemporary and Digital Age embrace a diverse range of styles by blending elements from both vintage and modern fashion while promoting inclusivity and body acceptance. Characters are depicted as dynamic and multifaceted to reflect the rich diversity of today's society. In addition, the Digital Revolution has transformed fashion illustration through digital platforms by introducing techniques such as digital painting and 3D modelling which integrate technology, fashion, and personal identity. As fashion illustration continues to evolve, it remains a dynamic art form that captures the essence of culture, societal values, and artistic movement in each era.

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