



**A Study of Fashion, Culture, and Society  
through Fashion Illustration**

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"Clothes are inevitable. They are nothing less than the furniture of the mind made visible."

- James Laver, *Style in Costume*

How do you consider fashion? What role does fashion play in our society?

For thousands of years human beings have communicated with one another first in the language of dress. As semiotics becomes fashionable, biologists tell us that fashion too is a language of signs, a nonverbal stem of communication. The vocabulary of dress includes not only items of clothing, but also hairstyles, accessories, jewelry, make-up, and body decoration (Lurie).

Fashion is how you present yourself. As long as fashion has been in existence, what you wear is what you are. It is a silent communication with others and with the society where you belong. The field of fashion is an infinite world for exploring and expressing the countless people with different characters, backgrounds, perspectives, personal values, and social status. Fashion is the most sophisticated way of infinitely expressing and appreciating art and human beings at the same time. It is a medium not only to represent one's ideas, emotions, and personal views but also to identify one's social and cultural backgrounds. I believe that clothing is part of the future. There are unlimited ways of expressing ourselves. However, fashion is the most powerful, and at the same time, the most heartfelt and empathic tool to satisfy each person's unique tastes and values.

The fashion and style are constantly changing. New ideas and phenomena demand new adjustments and styles. Occasionally an old style is revived, often with a somewhat altered meaning. As clothing has developed through ages, and has made most of its artistic progress, women's fashion has progressed tremendously.



Illustrates a princess fashion in Chosun Dynasty (1392-1910)

Media: Ink / Marker / Photoshop CS3



Illustrates a Korean geisha known for a fashionable and artistic entertainer  
Media: Korean Ink / Watercolor / Photoshop CS3

For my senior integrative project, I wanted to study how fashion, including clothing, jewelries, hair styles in an artistic, cultural, and social perspectives, developed and used, particularly in the Asian, Korean society by using different mediums, techniques, and styles to create illustrations of fashion, culture, and my ethnic background. What truly interests me is to see how different creative ideas and designs are combined with each other, built into a practical garments, and applied into our daily lives as a form of fashion. Fashion enthralls and attracts me, therefore, I hope to further study about fashion design and illustration including study of colors, designs, patterns, and fabrics through this Integrative Project.

When I first started studying about fashion and clothing culture, in general, I mostly focused on clothing's basic purpose and usage such as superficial beauty, fabrics, colors, styles, basically its outlooks. However, as I study further about Korean clothing culture and historical backgrounds, I noticed that fashion in the society plays a greater role in identifying and signaling one's class, social status, and moreover, representing the spirit of the nation. Clothing has played a crucial role in conjuring with and negotiating the power relations of status and identity. Reaction to the challenges that such identities made to conventional morality regarding class and taste pushed fashion and style develop further, constantly absorbing more convenient styles.

Therefore, I expanded my project to more social and historical perspectives. The primary goal for this project is to further explore my interest in fashion and the Korean clothing culture in history, and more specifically, focusing on its role and significance in the Eastern culture and society. This project is focused not just on the appearance and style of

Our clothes tell a lot about us. Our clothes tell us who we are in society and tell others about our personalities, needs, talents, dispositions and destination. Clothing is truly a silent but powerful communicator. It can camouflage or cover up, it can build or destroy an image.

Fashion is certainly a prominent facade of our well-being in society. At times, clothes are the only visible clues to an individual's personality and perspective. People respond and relate to the way we wear our clothing and clothes have now become a means for one person to evaluate another. Therefore, the evolution of fashion may be parallel to social development.

The *hanbok* has been the Korean people's unique traditional costume for thousands of years. The beauty and grace of Korean culture can be seen through women's fashion styles. Before the arrival of Western-style clothing one hundred years ago, the *hanbok* was worn as everyday attire. Traditional Korean clothing has its roots extending back at least as far as the Three Kingdom Period (57 B.C. - 68 A.D.), as evidenced by wall paintings in tombs dating from the period. The Korean *hanbok* represents one of the most visible aspects of Korean culture. The top part called a *jeogori* is blouse-like with long sleeves with the men's version being longer, stretching down to the waist. Women wear skirts while men wear baggy pants. What is most significant about the clothing is its role to proclaim people's class and social status. Commoners wore white, except during festivals and special occasions such as weddings. Clothes for the upper classes were made of bright colors and indicated the wearer's wealth and pride. Various accessories such as foot gear, jewelry, and headresses or hair pins completed the outfit. The French call it "color of mystique" and fantasy." The *hanbok*, which is Korea's traditional outfit has one of the richest, most vibrant colors of all traditional Korean things.



Illustrates traditional outdoor fashion for upper-class women  
Media: Pencil / Korean Ink / Photoshop CS3



## *Artistic Inspiration*

As I have taken on a practice, closely following in the footsteps of several well-known fashion illustrators and designers, I could create my own style of techniques for illustration. One of the greatest inspiration for my interest in fashion illustration was Kareem Iliya's works. Iliya's work is usually described as being 'ethereal' and 'mystical'. He works with watercolor and ink on paper, often through which figures and objects seem to burst and radiate. Iliya's images are hauntingly full of grace and mystery, well balancing positive and negative images. As shown below, these mysterious, yet elegant and feminine art illustrations captured my eyes and fascinated me into its beauty at once.

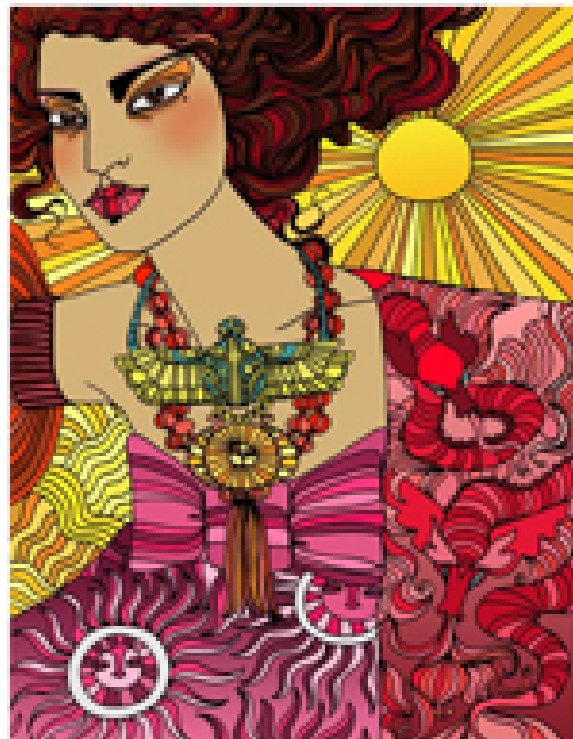
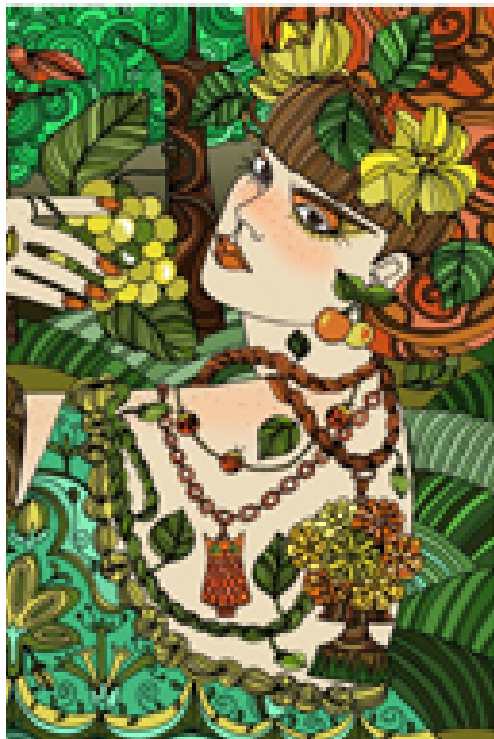
Another big influence on my project was David Downton. He is a famous UK-based fashion illustrator, whose work I find to be absolutely stunning and fashionable. It is the minimal use of lines and the elimination of certain, expected elements that makes his art so unique and eye-capturing. He usually uses Indian ink on acetate or paper. Even though his illustrations look spontaneous, they are planned ahead, practiced through dozens of drawings to take the best out of it. In order to leave something out, he first puts it in and understand how every stroke works. After doing a multiple drawing on to layout paper, he starts to eliminate and deconstruct the elements, leave the minimum figure.

Kareem Iliya's Illustrations  
Media: Watercolor / Photoshop

## Artistic Inspiration

Third important inspiration for my project was a Swedish fashion illustrator Liselotte Watkins. Her art nouveau illustration style is just mesmerizing. On her drawing technique, she makes an outline on a transparent paper with a special kind of pen from Japan and the coloring is done in Photoshop. Her illustration uses detailed, vivid colored patterns, human figures have exaggerated gestures and facial expressions. It is like magic. When I look closely into the little details of her illustrations and follow the flow of color streams, I find myself fascinated and enchanted by its beauty and power.

My intention with this project is not only to further study about fashion illustration as a communication between fashion and art but also to deeper understand my cultural background and history.



Liselotte Watkins's Illustrations  
Media: Japanese Ink / Photoshop



David Downton's Illustrations  
Media: Ink / Watercolor / Photoshop

## Citations

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