



# Liquidum

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In this work, I created a series of four digital illustrations incorporated within a zine which showcase feminine and masculine bodies in relationship to each other when depicted in poses and clothing that counter popular visual expectations. I explore these popular visual depictions of feminine and masculine bodies to swap their poses as well as parts of their clothing with digital illustration. Through this, the viewer is exposed to the complexity of how pose and clothing combine with the body to influence perceptions of femininity and masculinity. This project aims to subvert the traditional western expectations of both traits and the associations with their visual roles.

I researched existing fashion photography containing both masculine and feminine figures and sketched the base of their body and pose before altering the bodies. After their placement in the composition was swapped, I added my own rendition of themed clothing and background for the images. These illustrations were then printed within a zine, laying out the progression of the project, and poster size for viewing.

## Exhibition Documentation

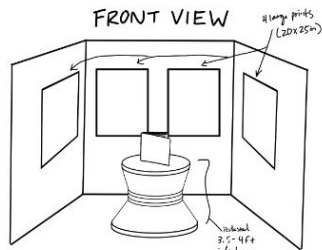
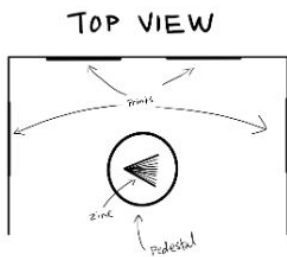
The exhibition design went through many levels of iteration before the final setup was decided on. I originally planned for the three walls to have only the posters and beginning pose sketches. After receiving feedback from peers during a mock exhibition, I decided to add a wall of process images. The poster sized illustrations are 20in x 25in on glossy paper and hung up with rare earth magnets.



Initial sketch of the exhibition layout. The four posters are shown distributed evenly among the three walls. The original ten pose sketches were also to be featured above the posters - three on both the left and right wall, and four on the center wall.



Three walls of the exhibition and center pedestal which showcases the zine.



Sketches submitted for the exhibition form - cleanly illustrates and labels the top and front views of the exhibition space.



Left and center walls display poster sized digital illustration; also featured in the zine.



Right wall shows the process stages of all four illustrations - each figure and combining them onto a background.

## Exhibition Documentation - Final Space



Final Exhibition space with lighting



## Contextualization - Imagery

Prior to physical creative making, in my research of precedent work that were relevant to my topic, I came across a series of work by David Talaski-Brown. The series of works showcased illustrations of a variety of male superheroes in pin-up model poses - specifically classic female poses. Large muscular male bodies were placed in feminine pin-up poses and emphasized parts of their body that are not often seen or sexualized in popular media through those poses. My own observation of the work did not deduce awkwardness, but rather a sort of confident sexuality within the figures. As Talaski-Brown describes in an interview with BoredPanda, he loves vintage pinup drawings because "it walks the line between erotica and comedy". Erotica within the work was easy to see as it seems tied to skin exposure and the historical

context behind the poses, and comedy I felt related to the work's subversion of an existing gendered pose. His works were helpful to my understanding of how to approach dressing the male figure in a way that does not erase the underlying physique as they highlighted the fabric, pattern, and body. Another work that greatly influenced the direction of the project were chapter cover illustrations done by Hirohiko Araki for his manga series "Jojo's Bizarre Adventure". His works reference "high fashion" poses for his characters, which are mainly hypermasculine men. Araki's rendition of these poses challenge the typical stiff sturdy demeanor of male poses, revealing new unusual twists and turns of muscles on the muscular male bodies.



Talaski-Brown, David "Loki". 2019. Digital. Instagram



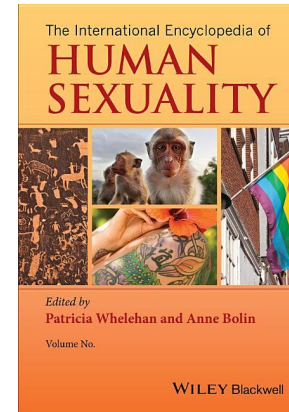
Araki, Hirohiko. Jojo's Bizarre Adventure. 2001.

## Contextualization - Text

In “Drag Kings” by Donna Troka, Troka describes Drag Kings as a fairly recent phenomenon where mostly queer women and transgender men perform masculinity on stage. The history of drag king culture connects closely with historical cross-dressers and gender impersonators - theatrical, but not actually a performance done in a theater. Drag kings often performed in bars, community centers, festivals, and art galleries. Within their performances, the goal is to successfully “pass” as a man on stage or display the markers and trappings of masculinity. Physical changes to their appearance that are often made is the addition of facial hair, creating a bulge in the pants, breast binding, and masculine coded clothing. I found these physical changes to the appearance to be an important consideration in my project as I

needed to figure out what elements of a feminine body form can be added on to or shifted to put forth a more masculine presence. Body language is also employed to express the drag king’s interpretation of masculinity. For my project, body language will be translated with the pose and expression of the figures on the cover. This source brought in some ideas of masculine characteristics for me to consider implementing into the illustrations. Secondary sex characteristics such as facial hair and breasts are definitely strong notable traits that many identify as masculine or feminine. These characteristics factor into the type of masculine or feminine body types I want to portray. There are certainly men with clean shaven faces and a variety of breast sizes that women can have, so thinking about what bodies I want to match with the gestures and expressions of the figures can hold a lot of weight in

how feminine or masculine they are seen to be. The reading also points out the role which the Drag King’s interpretation of masculinity plays in how the character is portrayed. As the artist, I am in a position to use my own interpretation of what masculinity or femininity is to illustrate a new interpretation for my audience.



Troka, Donna. 2015. “Drag Kings.” In The International Encyclopedia of Human Sexuality, 312–13.; Tyler, Carole-Anne. 2015. “Drag Queens.” In The International Encyclopedia of Human Sexuality, 314–17. Hassenstab, Christine M., Ramet, Sabrina P. 2015. “Androgyny.” In The International Encyclopedia of Human Sexuality, 1-111.

## Contextualization - Text

For the project, "Drag Queens" by Carole-Anne Tyler allowed me to entertain the idea of an exaggerated depiction of feminine qualities through a male body. The incorporation of wigs and makeup was something I had thought about, but unsure of whether it is something I want to add to the male figures I illustrate. Although it is something to consider, I feel that adding too much and overdoing the look would be taking the project into a different direction than I had intended. I believe that overloading the male figure with feminine qualities would push the main idea into a performative, theatrical, or even comical realm rather than a middle ground where the highlight is on the figure's unforced relationship with the clothes being worn. This would, for me, avoid the implications of the figures rejecting their male or female identity. The source also touches upon Drag Queen's

relationship on homophobia and misogyny which I would like to avoid in my illustrations. To do this, I plan on carefully deciding the pose and expressions of my figures in a way which suggests a normal comfort. I will keep in mind however, that these would be my own interpretations of what I can do to avoid this, and that it is very much possible for audiences to view the project under a different lens.

"Androgyny" by Christine M Hassenstab and Sabrina P. Ramet goes over the definition of Androgyny and describes the history of this concept as well as how it fits within the biological, cultural and social, and political contexts. In the description of androgyny, male and female gender traits are blurred to suggest neither or both through mannerisms and clothing. Many pop culture icons such as Lady Gaga and David Bowie are

mentioned as examples of people who have experimented with this blurring. Historically, the idea of androgyny has been used by Greek philosophers and featured in Greek myths to explain the origins of sex and gender. One of the key parts that I believe are relevant to my project are the cultural and social relativity of what counts as masculine or feminine. The source makes a point about current fashion accessories such as boots in Spain designed for men but marketed towards women as a female fashion item, and jewelry in India that was commonly worn by men. This element of cultural and social context will be important when considering who my audience is and what context they are accustomed to when viewing my work. Another key point that is brought up in the source is the distinction between "androgyny" and "gender-bending". While androgyny focuses on being

## **Contextualization - Text**

gender-ambiguous, gender-bending looks at women dressing more masculine and men more feminine. For my own project, these two terms will certainly play a role in describing the figures illustrated on the covers.

The source led me to think more about the cultural and social context which the project will be viewed within. Although the plan is for the end products to be printed and showcased within my studio for anyone in the area to view, I do plan to upload the final covers online as a portfolio piece. With that, a wider range of audiences from different backgrounds will be able to view the work, and their interpretations of what is feminine or masculine will change how the project is visually consumed. I am currently planning to base the gender ambiguity on my own knowledge and experience of

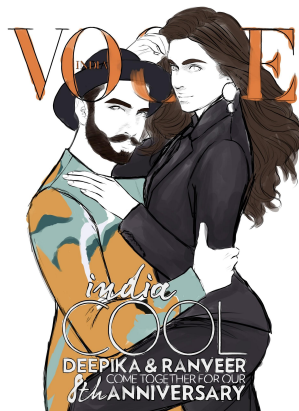
American culture and society within the themed covers. The source also brought up the idea of “neither or both” which influences my ideas of how to approach positioning and dressing my figures within the composition. I think that this aspect heavily depends on the theme attached to the clothing styles (ballroom, cyberpunk, lolita, academia, and traditional east asian) as certain themes have a stronger distinction between what is considered to be a feminine or masculine article of clothing and accessory. “Neither or both” will definitely change depending on which cover is being looked at.





## Creative Process

In exploring the possibilities for Liquidum, I started by taking an existing magazine cover that featured a man and a woman posed in masculine and feminine positions (respectively), and switching up elements of their composition. To find what specific aspects I wanted to highlight, I experimented with their positions, clothing, accessories, and mizes of all three.



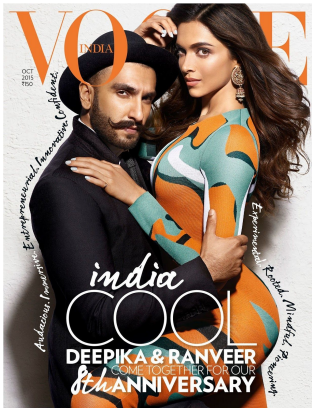
Clothing Swap



Position Swap



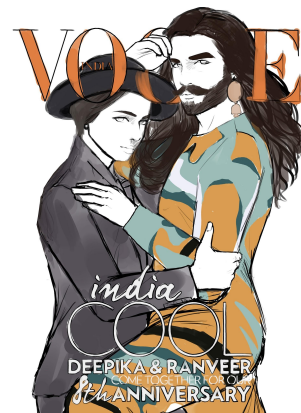
Clothing + Position Swap



"Vogue India Cool Deepika & Ranveer 8th Anniversary" 2015. Photography. Vogue.



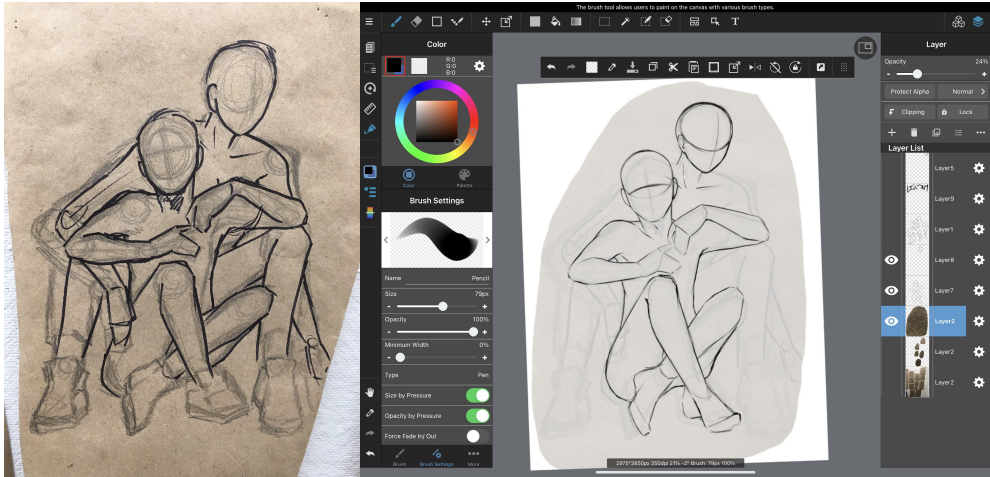
Position + Clothing + Accessories Swap



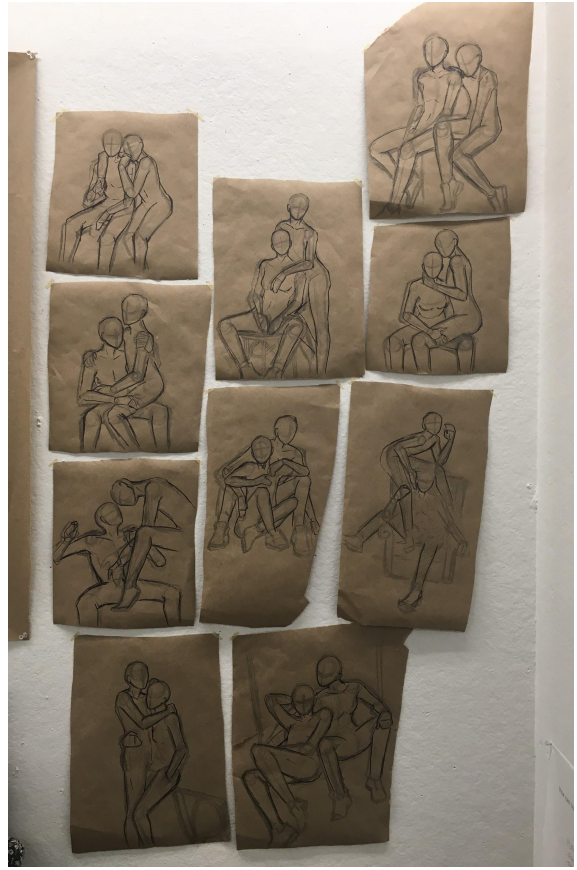
Position + Clothing + Accessories + Hair Swap

After deciding to focus on the position and clothing aspects of the swapping, I went through a variety of photoshoots online featuring similar compositions that emphasized femininity and masculinity. Using the photos as reference, I sketched out the

compositions on paper. These sketches were then adjusted with black sharpie marker to show the poses with swapped bodies. I then selected a few compositions that I was interested in developing further and transferred them to a digital format.



Transferring sketch to cleaner lines digitally - prepped for addition of clothing



Ten total referenced sketches that were adjusted to have swapped bodies

## Digitized Poses

Five compositions were chosen with the plan to create five final illustrations, however, the fifth illustration was cut due to time constraints.



Base pose for Cyberpunk



Base pose for Ballroom



Base pose for Lolita



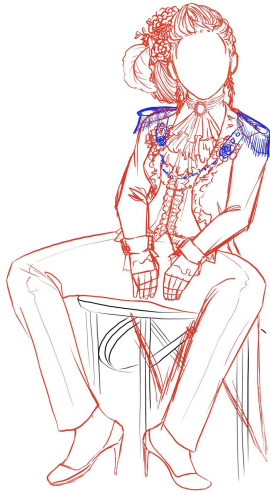
Base pose for Academia



Base pose was cut from the final group

The first illustration I worked on for the series was “Ballroom”. Through the process of clothing research, sketching, lining, coloring, and combining the individual figures, I learned the most efficient (and non efficient) methods of digital illustration and how to pace myself throughout the drawing. This process was also

one where I learned to accept and move on to the next part of the piece in order to allocate a reasonable amount of time for the rest of the illustrations. Although I was happy with the way the final works came out, I would definitely want to go back and refine areas of the background and lighting for the pieces



Sketching clothes onto the female body and coloring



The completed illustration with background and lighting.



Clothing sketches for "Cyberpunk"



Progression of coloring for  
"Academia" masculine figure



Work-in-progress coloring stage for  
the feminine figure



The completed illustration for "Cyberpunk"

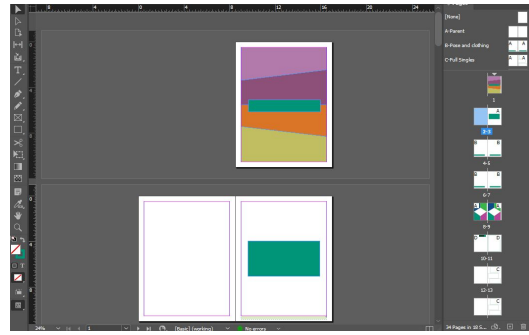


The completed illustration for "Academia"

For the creation of the zine, I used InDesign to layout my pages and focused on showing progression of the illustrations as well as the experimental work done to reach that point. In my mock exhibition, I created a physical mock up of the zine to outline the contents of each page and easily shift materials to finalize the pages. Once the pages were ready, I printed the spreads tabloid sized and folded them in half to fit together as a book.



The mock up

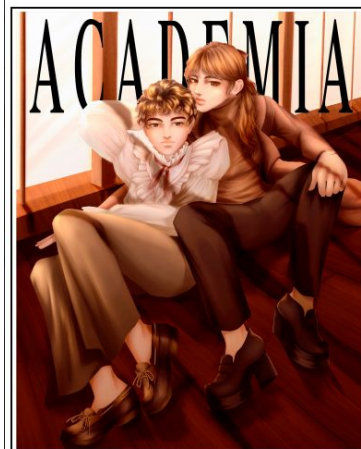
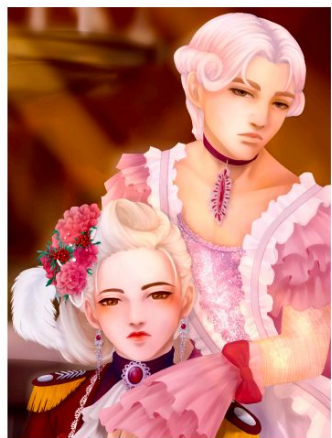
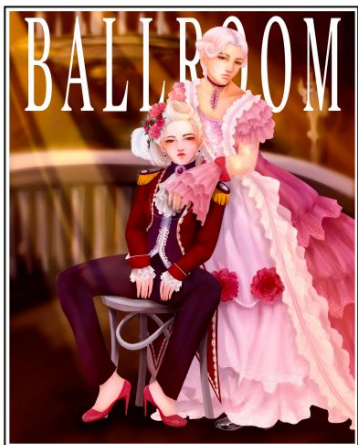


Page layout in progress



Front and back cover design

## Zine Full Illustration Spreads





Feminine and masculine are two opposing concepts that I have always been familiar with while growing up. All the implicit and explicit content from popular media as well as social situations within families and strangers influenced my understanding of what feminine and masculine look like - what was considered “acceptable” and not according to traditional popular standards. In creating this project, I was able to take note of and better identify these different visuals connected to both traits and challenge their associations through body, pose, and clothing visuals.

While progressing through the illustrations, I have observed my own nuances in the purposeful treatment of lines, colors, textures, and details dependant on the body of the figure and my intentions. It has helped me realize how much my visual experience has influenced my biases toward certain design decisions in the process. Notice of this purposeful treatment also allows for more calculated design decisions on my future work depicting human figures and ways of illustrating that surprises myself as well.

For me, this project has the potential to continue in the future with new poses and clothing styles that subvert gender expectations for me and my audience.