

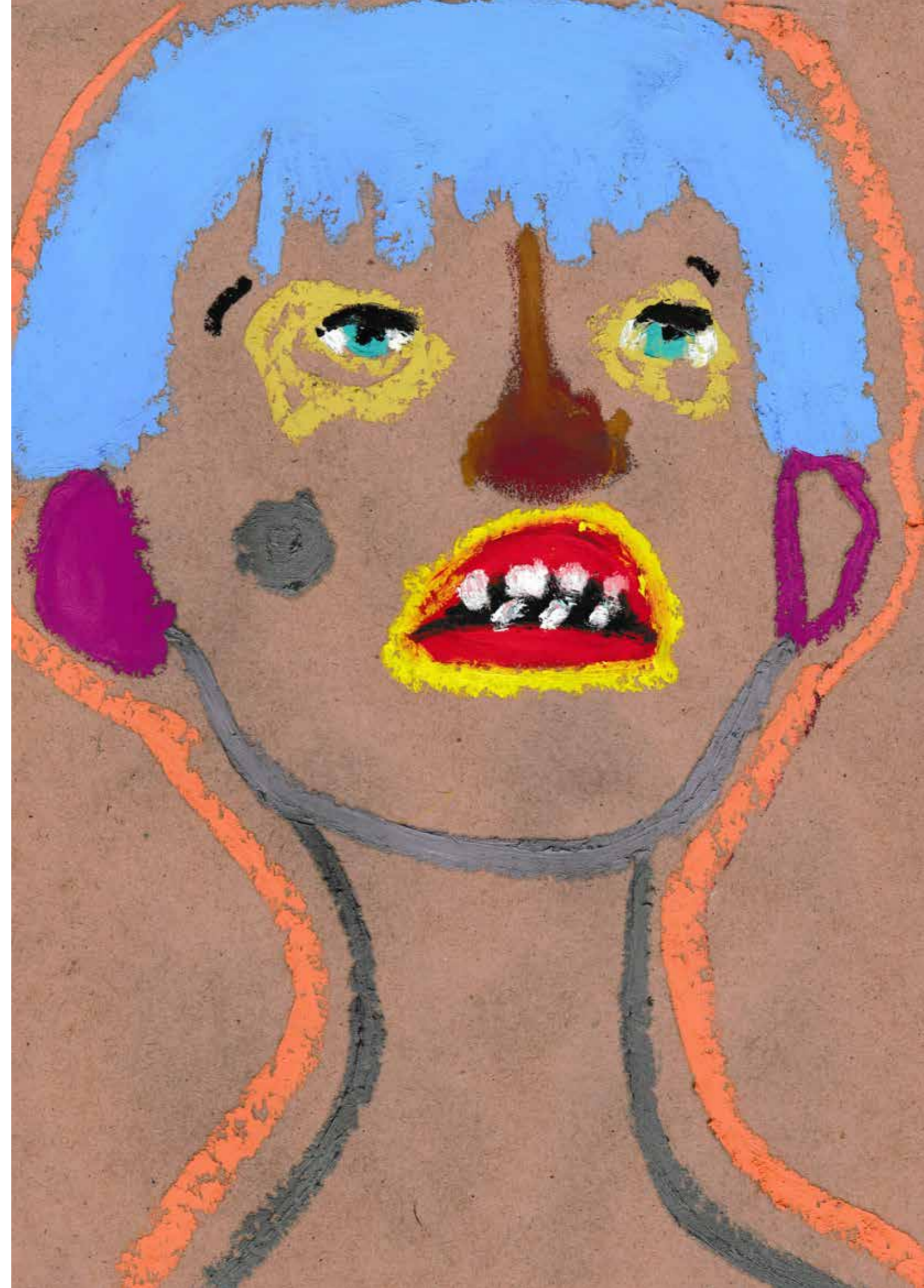
SHOW CASE

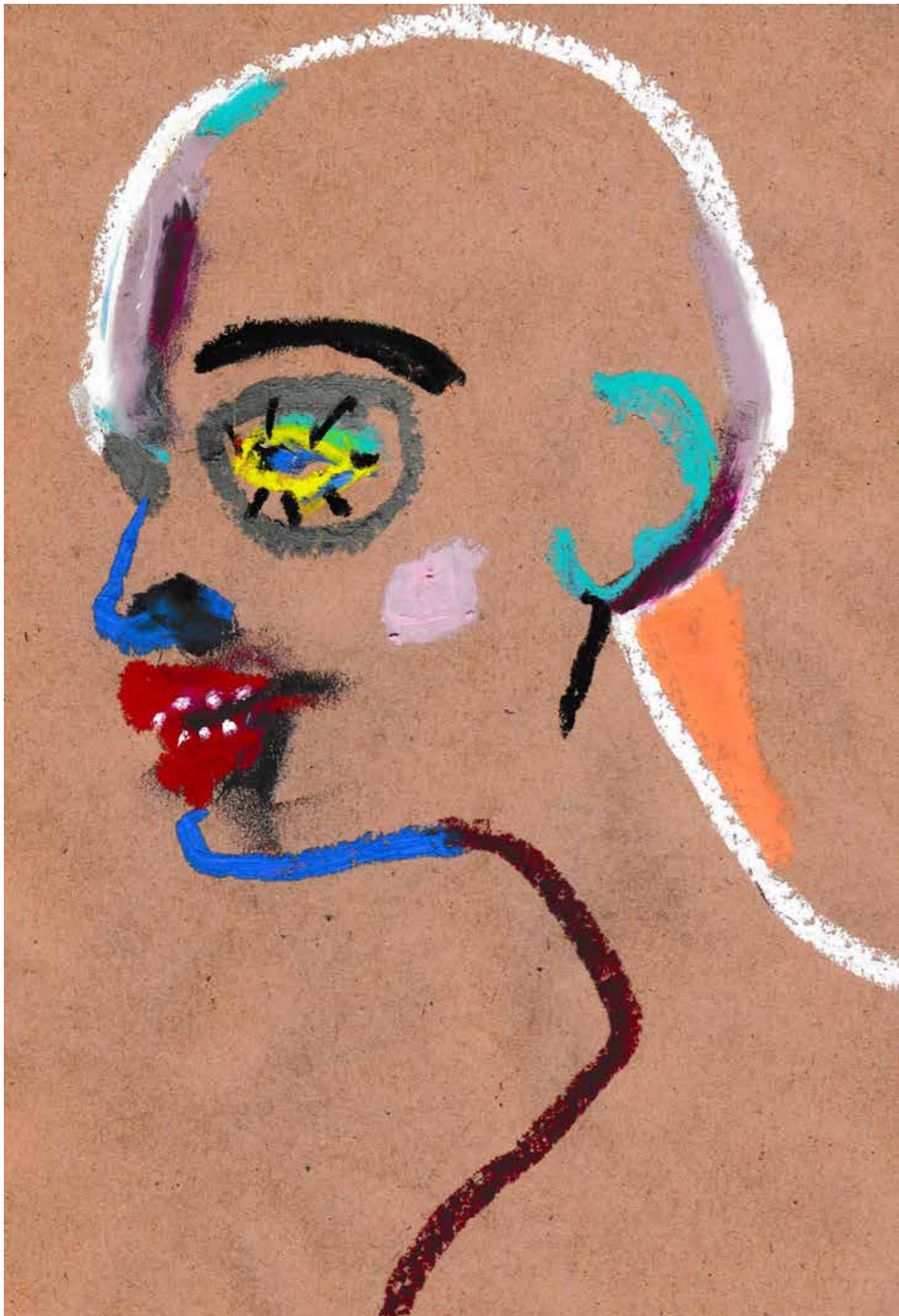
The second issue of Zine opens and closes with the vivid and emotive images by artist February James. These works, created especially for Zine, perfectly capture the energy and excitement that currently surrounds the world of modern-day fashion illustration.

Text Rosie Robertson

Fashion illustration goes in and out of the public eye, but regardless of its presence in the magazines and adverts, illustration is an eternal, and integral, part of the industry. No matter the decade or the designer, fashion starts with drawing; clothes are dreamed up in pencil on paper.

Sketches and designs record the designer's thoughts in a way that is both direct and uniquely personal, and so there is a poeticism in returning to this medium to re-present the garment after its making. The beauty of drawing as a means of representation is that it is truthful without needing to be accurate.









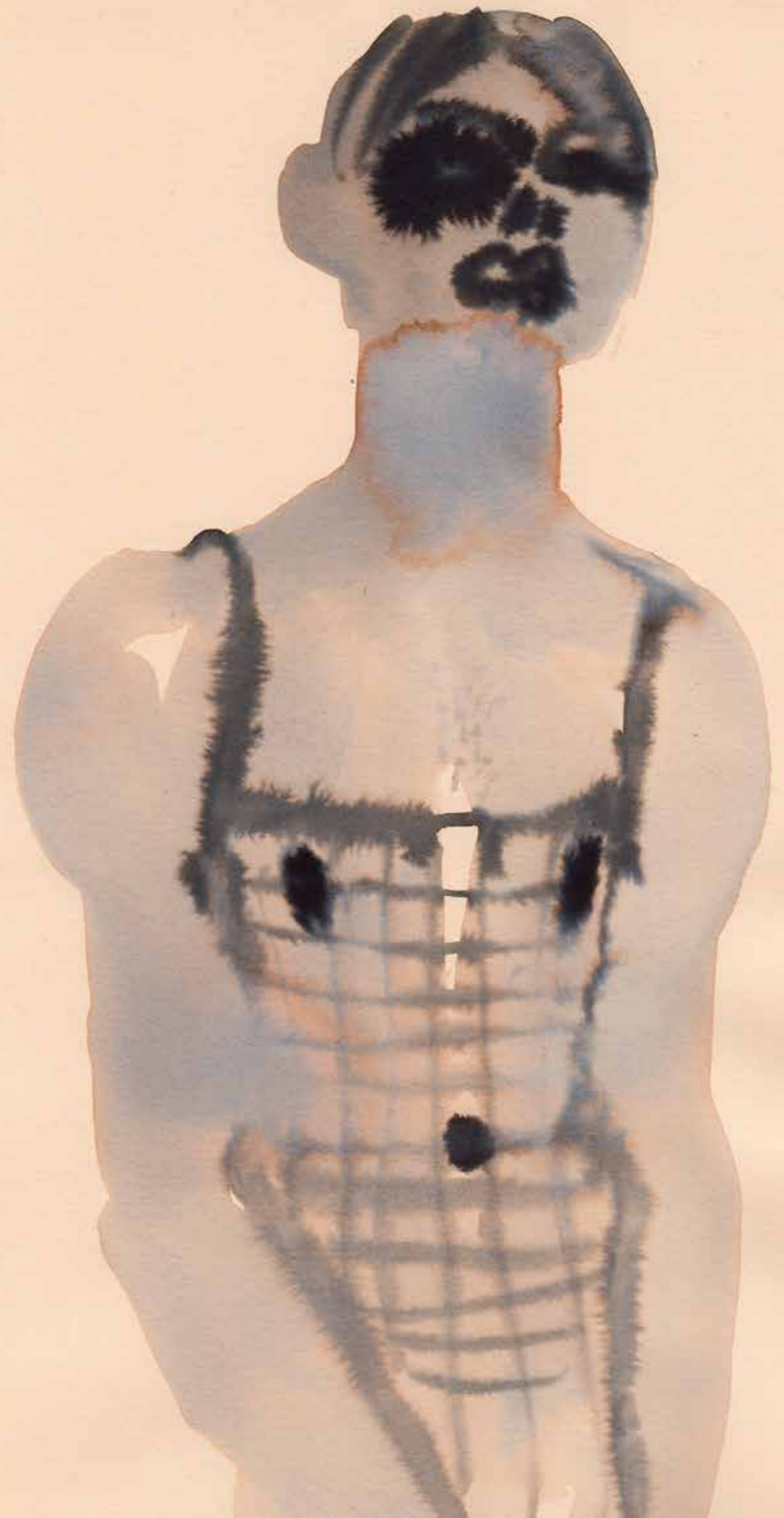




Nicasio Torres Melgar



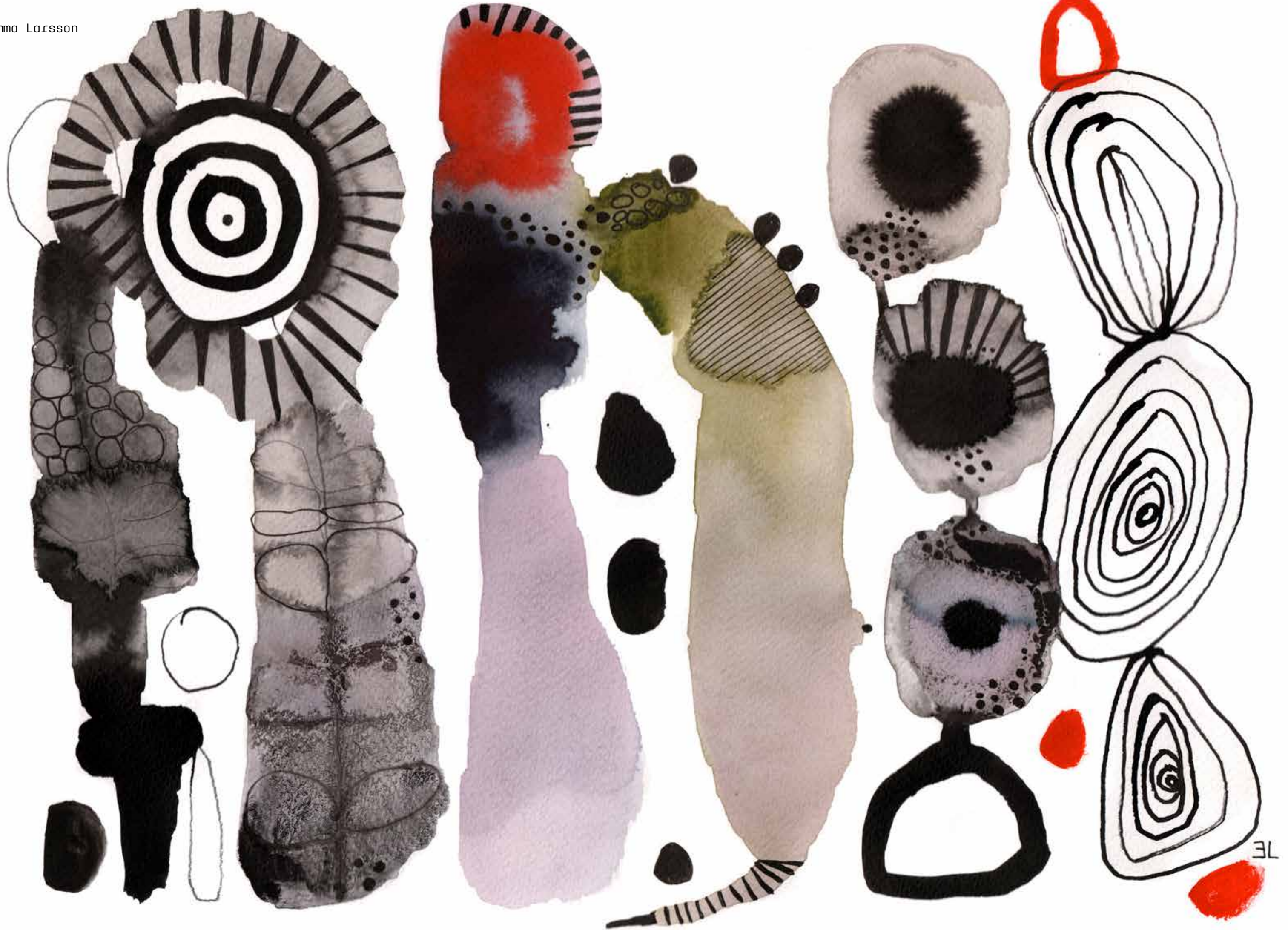
Gill Button





Gill Button

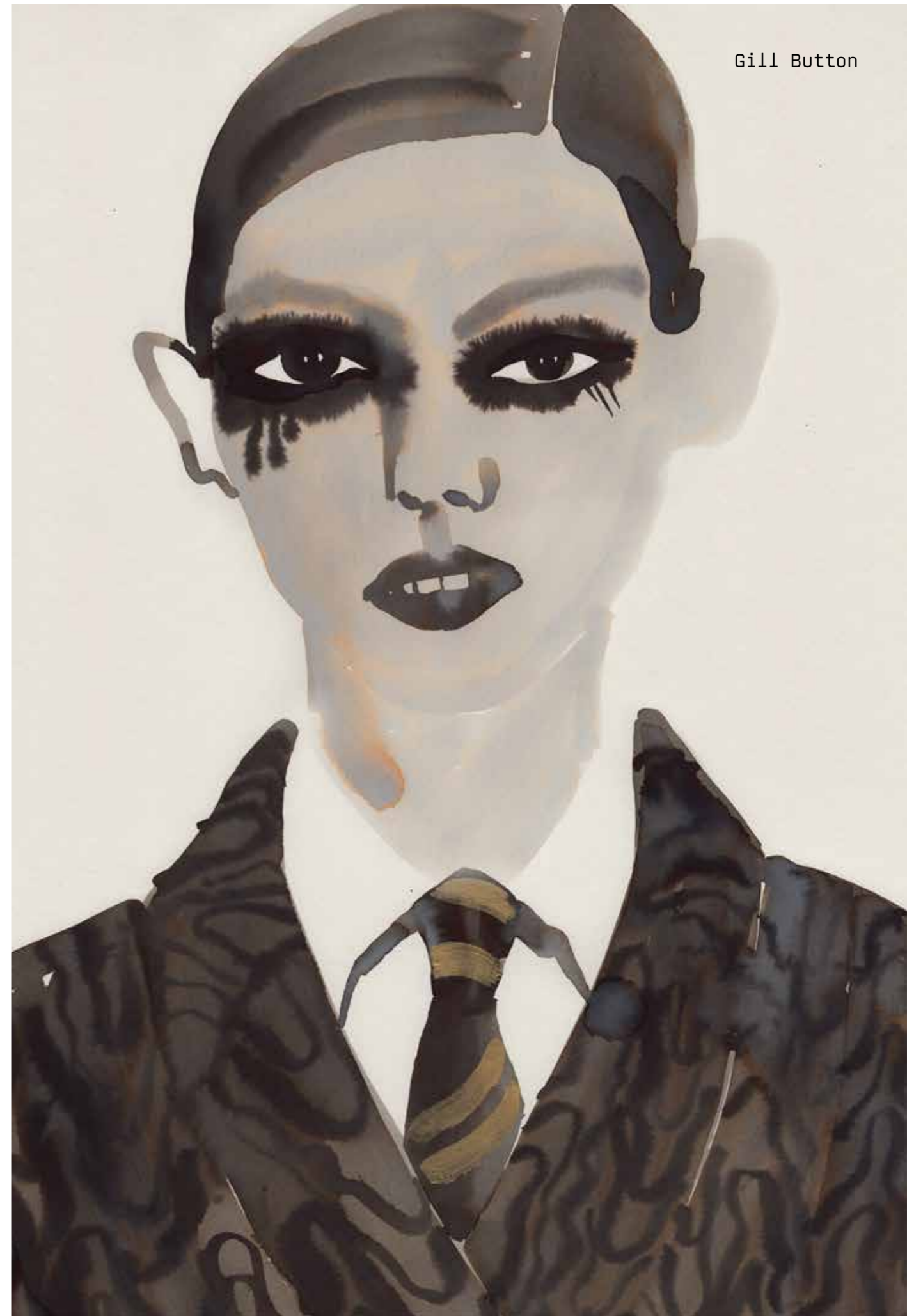




Emma Larsson



Gill Button







Fashion illustration was a significant part of the fashion world of the 1950's – it was the dominant form of imagery in both marketing campaigns and magazine content at the time. However, as the availability of photographic equipment grew, so too did the fashion industry's dedication to photography, which seemed unwavering for many decades, with magazines and advertisements almost exclusively being photographic. But – like everything in fashion – it is cyclical.

A great proponent of fashion illustrations current popularity is SHOWstudio, the multidisciplinary fashion platform founded by Nick Knight. SHOWstudio represents and collaborates with the best of established and up-and-coming talent in the industry, and their roster of illustrators exemplifies the diversity of what fashion illustration is, and can be. Zine brings you a SHOWcase of work from the SHOWstudio fashion illustrators; from the abstract and highly interpretive to the composed and stylized, Zine presents a snapshot of contemporary fashion illustration.

February James's illustrations are raw and immediate. Her work plays with ideas of complexity and simplicity, combining childish naivety and sophisticated minimalism. In James' language, the component parts of the face become simplified shapes that stand alone; a blue triangle for a nose, a pink semi-circle for an ear, a peach arc for an eyebrow. The non-representational colour palette is reminiscent both of tribal masks and of childhood crayons. Texture is an essential element of James' work as it reminds us of the artist's hand; the thick sweeps of oil unflinchingly trace her movements. Drawn on butchers paper that has a rough and textured grain, James' confident marks are delicately scattered around the picture plane, with areas of high colour and high-density contrasted with large expanses of emptiness.

John Booth has a similarly playful way with colour, using an over-saturated and ever-changing palette throughout his work. Blocks of solid colour share space with scratchy, quick lines and their combination creates a great sense of movement and energy in his work. Colour seems to escape outside of the lines in many of Booth's illustrations – the singular black line that outlines the figure is imaginatively and vividly coloured-in. He often includes collage elements in his work, the cut-outs add texture and pattern much like fabric, and are pinned to the figures in a way that is reminiscent of pattern cutting and drapery. Booth's charming illustrations are a fine balance between his kaleidoscopic colour palette and his expressive mark making.

Working in watercolour, Emma Larsson lets her illustrations take shape by embracing the fluid and unpredictable nature of the medium. Larsson's images seem to emerge effortlessly from the paint, but the casual, playful feel of her work belies the skill involved in making coherent images in watercolour. Larsson's illustrations do not occupy themselves with the details of the garments – her paintings do not show how many buttons are on a particular item of clothing – instead she foregrounds atmosphere and mood, to which she adds a smattering of fashion details. With a penchant for including footwear and accessories, such as glasses and neck-ties, Larsson nudges her painterly abstractions towards their function as forward-thinking fashion illustrations.

Nicasio Torres lets his chosen medium dictate the image and style. When working in oils, Torres uses thick, expressive strokes that combine to create the image. Working in this way requires conviction – composing an image from thick swathes of paint that have a subtle multitude of shades requires Torres to accept chance as an integral element of the work. Although Torres often uses a limited colour palette, the pinks and reds

in his most recent work read as both sugary pastels and as viscerally fleshy. Torres's works are raw and vulnerable, bold and ambiguous.

It is common for fashion illustrators to use photographs as the basis of their illustrations, but Italian illustrator, Marco Rea, uses photography in his work in a far more direct manner. Rea uses pages from magazines as his canvas – the fashion editorials and adverts – abstracting and blurring them. Their original function is disguised, hidden beneath Rea's marks that give the images an entirely new meaning. Working exclusively with spray paints, Rea has developed a technique that reads as something between finger-painting and digital manipulation. He cleverly leaves details of the original image which displays a restraint and an innate understanding of what makes a successful image and equally an intriguing statement.

The illustrations of Gill Button manage to be both atmospheric and detail-oriented. Her closely cropped images focus on the head and shoulders of the sitter, which provides an opportunity for Button to both convey the mood of her subject – often painted with large, dark eyes that stare out at the viewer – and then to frame each face with the fabrics, textures and colours of their clothing. Button's paintings give a sense of the sitter in the way that a classic portrait does, which feels unusual and compelling in a fashion illustration context. There is a darkness, or moodiness to Button's works despite their obvious prettiness, and there is a distinctly 'back-stage' atmosphere due to her subjects un-posed and unselfconscious expressions. It seems that for Button, illustration is simply a way to access the faces and atmosphere that make up the fashion world.

It is interesting to note that for the most part, fashion illustrators have chosen not to embrace technology – despite the array of tools that are at their disposal, it seems that for the illustrator, the role of digital is in sharing the finished article. Platforms that allow easy access to the work of artists and illustrators across the globe, such as Instagram, have been crucial to the success of many of the current big-name illustrators.

Illustrators have acknowledged the need for there to be a tactile quality to their drawings; paint and pencil are the perfect tools for the job. Paint can convey huge swathes of fabric in just one stroke, and pencil can hint at, or fully articulate, fine details. Illustrations capture clothing in a way that photography can't – it is an impression rather than a document, an emotional response to the colours, fabrics and people. In our digital age, the purity and simplicity of pen on paper can make a striking impact.

Although the materials remain largely the same, the style and function of fashion illustration has developed, moving away from commerce and closer towards artistic compositions. Each drawing seems to be more an expression of the illustrator's own style and impressions rather than a slavishly reproduced designer garment. The great stylistic freedom that is now afforded to fashion illustrators is underpinned by an in-depth knowledge of their subject – how the body moves, how fabric falls. As Picasso suggested, 'learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist.'

Fashion is the ultimate zeitgeist; tracing the interests and desires of the public so that it can give us what we want before we know we want it. The industry's collaborative, cross-disciplinary nature focuses not only on clothing, but on hair, makeup and set design that each add to the textures, colours and atmosphere. Illustrators bring their unique sensibility to this scene, picking out areas of interest or combining them all in a highly personal way; there are endless possibilities with the high-octane world of fashion as your subject.