

## Richard Kilroy: The Force of Illustration

One of contemporary fashion illustration's most pivotal figures

By [Benjamin Burns](#), Former Acting Fashion Editor  
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In the early twentieth century, illustration married with fashion to become a respected art form in itself, rather than just a necessary means of representation. However, photography served as the other woman and, for a time, she won; but who said fashion had to be monogamous anyway. The industry is once again enchanted by illustration, due to the level of skill it requires, and the uniquely identifiable signature that is left by its creators.

Richard Kilroy's work is a central focus of this renewed enchantment. Just two years after graduating from Leeds College of Art, he has been commissioned by Vman, Topshop, Onitsuka Tiger and, perhaps most impressively, by Dior—a pivotal figure in the initial rise of fashion illustration. As if this were not impressive enough, Kilroy has single handedly created Decoy, a newspaper which provides a medium for "discussion and exposure on illustration within the fashion industry".

I met Kilroy to gain insight into the mind and motivation of one of contemporary fashion illustration's pivotal figures.

### **How do you feel about current fashion photography, and its relationship with illustration?**

Fashion photography inspires illustration, and vice versa, but people see photography as illustration's nemesis. Photography is of course the main medium: no-one is going to look at an illustration and say "I want to buy that piece". What people are going to see though is an artist's inspired interpretation of a piece. Illustration thereby creates a narrative of desire in the viewer's mind, and sells brand image. Richard Gray's work for Alexander McQueen is the perfect example of this.

### **Is it fair to say that fashion illustration is undergoing a revival?**

To say that fashion illustration is undergoing a revival conjures up the false image that it is dated. Fashion illustration has always been around, and continues to flourish, just not in the medium that we once knew: it's used for exhibitions, campaigns, articles and more.

**Now on to your work! How long has it taken for you to hone your skill, and how time consuming is your more detailed work?**

I'm always going to be practicing my skill: the day you think you've achieved it is the day you start to become lazy! But in the broadest sense, I've been drawing from early childhood. Through A-levels, I became more focused, particularly in drawing fabrics on the human form. I studied the likes of Alphonse Mucha and have always loved the loose line work and roughness of Julie Verhoeven, as well as the incredible detail of George Stavrinos. Then halfway through university I decided to pick up a pencil and see if I was capable of photorealism...I'm still very happy with my first attempt!

As for the length of time it takes, I average two days per illustration. Interestingly, I usually find that the quicker the work, the better. Too much labour can stiffen it.

**How did your signature style come about-the marriage of simplistic, outlined areas with photo-realistic detail?**

Well, my fear of becoming a human photocopier with no room to explore, and my love of illustrators who can create so much suggestion through expressive line-like Gruau and Dowton. I also wanted to energise my illustration by finding a middle ground between abstract simplicity and dense detail.

**Is there a reason for your general preference of monochrome over colour?**

My work has always leaned towards a simplistic style, and so has my wardrobe, with only the odd bolt of colour to break it up. With my illustration though, it's probably more to do with the fact that I find it hard to blend colour with photo-real pencil work-an aim of mine for sure!

**Who has really inspired your work?**

My holy trinity of fashion illustrators are David Downton, Richard Gray and Julie Verhoeven. Fantastically, I've met them all, and have had the fortune to have Gray and Verhoeven produce originals for Decoy. Beyond this, I have far too many influences to list them all! Photographers like Peter Lindbergh and Herb Ritts have played a big part for sure.

**Your illustrations tend to be of menswear. Is this a conscious decision?**

It's interesting, I still don't consider myself a menswear illustrator, I usually just draw my favourite looks and the hottest models! But menswear is going through so much progression that I find it hugely inspiring. I'm dying to interpret the fantastic proportions of Juun. J, then there's Raf Simons, who is legendary, and Lou Dalton-I love the english sensibility but fresh youthful appeal of her tailoring.

**Being chosen as one of five illustrators to produce work for the exhibition 'Dior Illustrated: Rene Gruau And The Line Of Beauty' is a huge achievement. How did it come about?**

I received a call out of the blue from Somerset House, who told me that I'd been chosen. It was possibly the most surreal conversation of my life as I have no idea how they came across my work...I hadn't even graduated yet! When I was sent a book of Gruau's work, I was blown away. I'd seen some of his work before but, shockingly, had never put a name to it. The exhibition has helped to remind people of his importance, and it's inspired me to return to using looser, more fluid elements.

**What motivated you to create Decoy?**

Initially, Decoy was a university project, inspired by the rise in zine culture and a disappointment at the lack of promotion of fashion illustrators. I can't believe the names that have been onboard, and have become good friends with a few of those featured. The next issue will be in magazine form, and I'm aiming to stock it at select stores. Though publishing is losing out to the internet, what it can provide is something collectible.

**Do you have any exciting projects coming up?**

Yes! As well as new work, I'm writing a large volume book overviewing the best of contemporary fashion illustrators, which will be released internationally in 2013. The plans for issue 4 of Decoy are coming along nicely, and I've been asked to assist tutoring menswear students at the Royal College of Art...daunting but exciting!



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