



SHOWCASE

The colors Vittoria uses in her illustrations, like *Nothing Is Private*, are inspired by her surroundings growing up in rural New York.



DESIGNING WOMEN

Amber Vittoria creates illustrations for brands like Marc Jacobs and Adidas that challenge beauty standards

By Mara Sassoon

Illustrations by Amber Vittoria

Women's contorted limbs stretch the limits of the composition in many of Vittoria's pieces, like this one she created for *Dope Girls* magazine.

Below: Vittoria's *Off My Body* accompanied a 2019 *New York Times* article about abortion legislation.

Right: *Fresh Face Filter*, a personal piece. "Having fun with the work I make is a top priority for me now," Vittoria says.



Amber Vittoria is dissatisfied with the way women's bodies are often portrayed in the media—airbrushed, photoshopped, hairless, held to an unrealistic standard. So, the illustrator has channeled those frustrations into her artwork, crafting colorful, abstracted depictions of women that go against the beauty ideals promoted in advertising and on-screen. In her illustrations, women's contorted limbs stretch the limits of a composition, folding into themselves, threatening to burst out of the space they occupy: their bodies

are covered in a smattering of technicolor hair, their arms and thighs undulate. Vittoria ('12), who has collaborated with brands like Adidas, Snapchat, and Gucci and has had her work grace the pages of the *New York Times* and *Teen Vogue*, was recently named to the *Forbes* 30 Under 30: Art & Style 2020 list. She highlights—celebrates even—what the mainstream media tries to mask.

RELATABLE ART

For a while, Vittoria was part of that media agenda. Soon after graduating from CFA's graphic design program, she'd landed a job as a web designer for Victoria's Secret. Part of her role involved editing images, she says, and she quickly became disillusioned.

"I loved everyone I worked with, but retouching images of a very specific type of woman, and not being able to relate to that type of woman, was pretty tough on my self-esteem," she says. Around this time, she also started to notice the problematic depictions of women she'd see in artwork at museums and galleries—it doesn't help that "a lot of these painted and sculpted women were painted and sculpted by men."

Vittoria quit her job and spent a few years working in a digital advertising agency and as an in-house digital designer for Avon, building up her client list as she did freelance illustrations on the side. In late 2017, she decided to freelance full-time. She was determined, she says, to make work that she and other women could relate to.

"It's important that I'm able to approach every piece from a place of vulnerability, but also from a place of joy. I make sure that while I'm making a piece, I'm having fun, while trying to tell an authentic story," says Vittoria. "Even if the final output is more abstracted, or very colorful or very bold, I hope the essence of the piece is something that is honest."

The importance of having fun with her work was emphasized during Vittoria's time studying graphic design at BU. She says she learned "to really just play with the idea of design" from Alston Purvis, a professor emeritus of graphic design, and was also inspired by Kristen Coogan, an associate professor of graphic design, whose "approach [to art] was also really playful. Having fun with the work that I make is a top priority for me now, and I definitely think that is something that I derived from her teaching."

Vittoria's use of color is loud, emphasizing the confident tone of her work—some of the women's curvy bodies





Above: An illustration for Marc Jacobs' Daisy Love Eau So Sweet fragrance.

Right: K-Swiss x Amber Vittoria Shoe; *This Space Is For You*. Vittoria makes illustrations both digitally and with ink on paper.

are decorated with multicolor flowers in full bloom, some have limbs rendered in bright blue and green. The distinctive color palette is inspired by her surroundings growing up in a rural town in New York.

"Nature is something that's always made me happy. I find pulling the brighter hues from natural elements is a great starting place," she says. Red and pink are prominent in her work and most of the colors she uses are ever so slightly tinted with white. "I try to not put too much pressure on myself and let the colors develop naturally. One or two colors might be added in, a color or two might be taken away, and then slowly the piece will evolve upon itself."

FROM SKETCH TO SHOE

When she started freelancing, Vittoria would reach out to companies whose aesthetic she enjoyed or whose messages she liked, but now more and more brands are contacting her.

When creating work for clients, she starts off with sketches, and once a sketch is approved, begins working on refining shapes and colors. Vittoria makes illustrations both digitally and with ink on paper. Sometimes, she'll combine the two techniques by printing out pieces she's worked on digitally, adding details with ink by hand, and then scanning them for further digital manipulation.

Last year, Marc Jacobs commissioned Vittoria to create illustrations for the social media campaign launch of its fragrance Daisy Love Eau So Sweet, which presented her with the challenge of communicating the essence of the scent through her art. The company describes the perfume as a combination of "sparkling white raspberries" and a "soft floral airiness and delicate musk." In this case, Vittoria's use of color was deliberate. Each of the six illustrations she created for the campaign feature "warm musk coloring," a muted peachy pink, to recall the scent as well as the perfume's distinctive pink bottle. The illustrations

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in the collection each depict an abstracted woman who looks as if she is trying to stretch out of the confines of the rectangular composition she occupies. Vittoria drew the women's limbs ruffled and cloud-like, a nod to the "airiness" of the scent. Some of the illustrations include a repeated daisy motif while others incorporate patterned accents that resemble the seeds of a raspberry.

In 2019, Vittoria also partnered with the shoe retailer K-Swiss to create a limited edition sneaker in honor of International Women's Day. The collaboration came about when an image of a shoe popped up in her Instagram "Explore" feed that caught her eye. "I clicked on it, thinking 'Oh, that's pretty.' And then I realized that it was from somebody who worked at K-Swiss. Based on his feed, I assumed he was a designer. I later found out that he is a vice president there," she says. The two traded messages, and she pitched doing some social media illustrations for the company, but after looking at her work, he proposed the sneaker collaboration.

The special edition women's K-Swiss Classic 88s have leather dyed in a pink and orange gradient, two colors prevalent in Vittoria's work. Her illustration *This Space Is For You*, depicting a barefoot woman with a rainbow of hair—both on her head and on her legs—is visible through the sneakers' clear rubber soles. Vittoria says the piece "celebrates the space women have made to express themselves both physically and emotionally." Viewing the left and right soles side by side gives the full image. Like in many of Vittoria's works, the woman in this one fills the entire composition, her fingers and toes almost touching the edge.

"A goal of mine has been to make more product-based pieces, leveraging my illustration. That way people feel like they have something beyond just art—not everyone can afford artwork, but if they need a new pair of shoes or a candle that happens to have artwork on it, it kind of pays off twofold," she says. "My hope is that when people look at my work, they're like, 'Oh, yeah, that's definitely been me too.' I hope that it resonates with them in some way." ●



Courtesy of Amber Vittoria and K-Swiss (sneakers)