

THE IMAGINARY BODY

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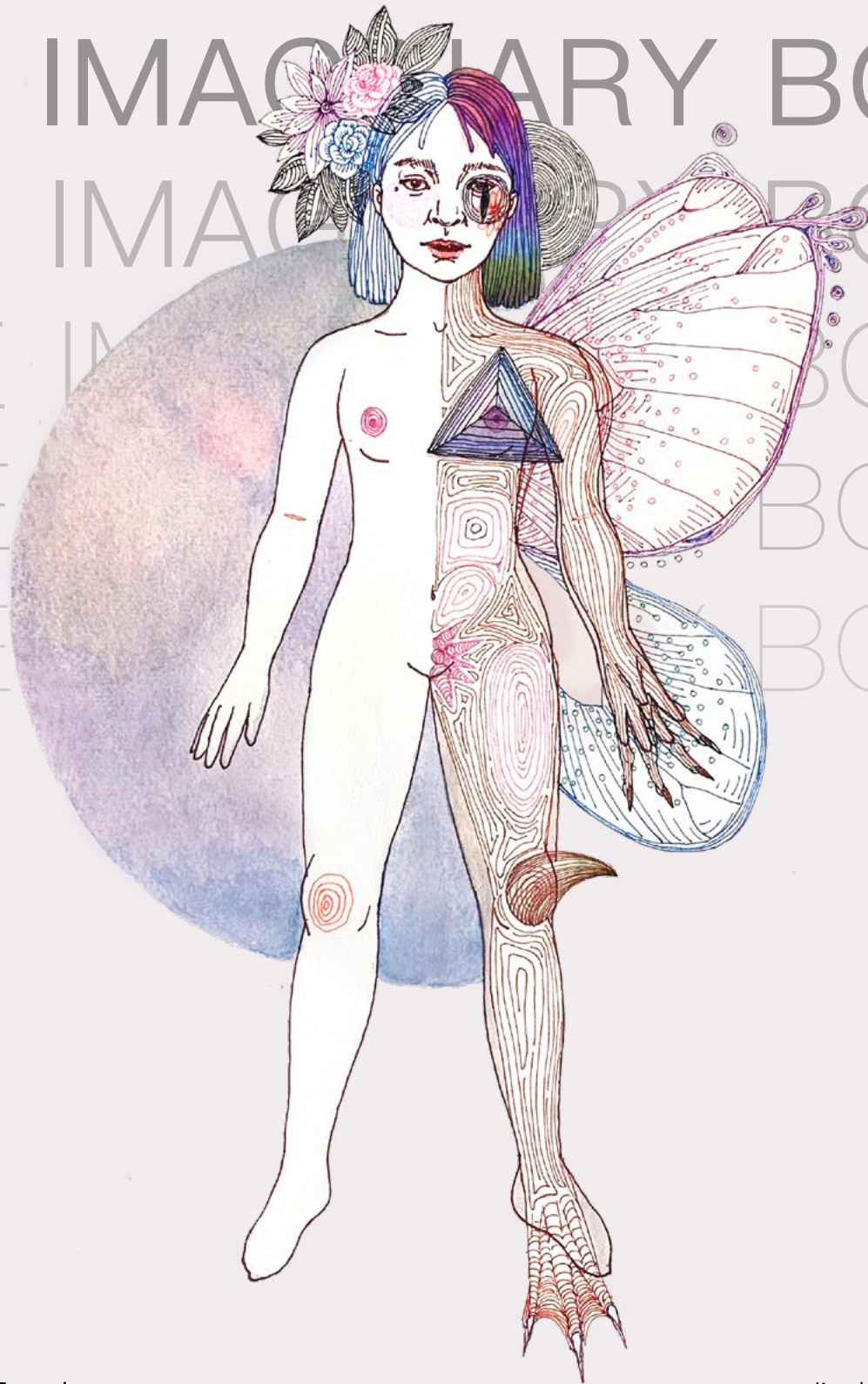
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A Discussion of Female
Body's Beauty Standards in
China using Imagination and
Illustration

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of Art+Design

1. Abstract

“The Imaginary body” series of illustrations is the core visual output of my thesis research. It is a way for me to express, think and acquire knowledge. It is also a means for me to critically respond to the social problem that I am concerned about: the stereotyped and dogmatic beauty standards of women’s bodies in modern Chinese society; how these standards come into being under the political purpose of gender oppression; and how they seriously affect the establishment of the positive and benign self-identity of modern Chinese women.

In the research process, the studies I involve include how women internalize social aesthetics and establish self-identity, sexual objectification, body-image, and transfeminism. Nourished by these background and secondary researches, I develop some conversation directions and prompts, with imagination as the core. With their help, I have some conversations with some close friends of mine (Chinese women of similar age). These dialogues provide me great inspirations so that I can take my illustration creation as a reflection to visually show and communicate my thinking and critical response around this research topic.

The illustrations that emerge are fantastical, hybrid, grotesque and powerful. These monster bodies constitute an offence to the existing relationship between the individual and the collective with their peculiarity. Through these illustrations, I ask questions about how should we reflect on our relationship with society and ourselves, and how could individuals build stronger and more independent

self-identity in the modern patriarchal heterosexual ruling system.

Keywords: Beauty standard, Feminist, Imagination, Sexual objectification, Body-image, Illustration

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3. Acknowledgement

It is an important and unforgettable experience in my life to study in Canada for nearly two years. I still remember how nervous, shy and full of expectations I was when I set foot on this land. At that time, I didn't expect how difficult as well as fascinating this journey would be. I own my gratitude to my supervisor Cameron Neat for his generous help in my research and studio projects, as well as his enlightening and practical advices in the writing of this paper. I would also like to thank all the faculty in Emily Carr, especially the instructors of the courses, for every conversation with them has greatly benefited me.

In the hard time of the epidemic, each of us is fighting against the fear of the virus, the constrained life and the loneliness caused by it. MDes2021 is a great group. Thank you all. Our working together is the best consolation. I want to especially thank my compatriot in the group, as their company and encouragement are the driving force for me to go through the hard time. I would also like to thank my families on the other side of the ocean, for their gentle care dispels the haze in my life.

4. Introduction

In this thesis research, I take illustration as a tool to research the issue of Chinese female body aesthetic in relation to body-image.

From the theories from critical design, our works can be used to reveal the harmful ideologies in our lives and make the viewers think critically, in the hopes of bringing social justice, equality, and emancipation. Generally speaking, the harmful ideologies here refer to certain values and systems that the dominant social classes disseminate and encourage the working class to buy into in order to maintain the firmness and stability of their rule, even they are against the working class's interest. Those values are often generalized through products like movies, magazines and designs (Reference1, Bardzell, J. & Bardzell, S., 2013). In this research, the specific harmful ideology I am concerned about is the mass beauty standards on women's bodies in China—which can be summarized as “white, thin and young (白瘦幼)” and “the Internet hot face (网红脸)” etc.—and the objectification oppression on women hiding in those standards. These beauty standards define women's value by the commercialized body in order to weaken women's power and consolidate the system. We live in this cultural environment surrounded by commercial advertisements and products implying the values, so we accepted them with our brains washed, lacking substantial awareness of how they are divergent with our well-being, comfort and confidence. I think about expressing my concerns and responding to this issue in a graphic designer and illustrator's role and appeal for more consciousness and introspection. This thesis

aims to convey an idea: how to answer the question of who I am from within, rather than seeking recognition by external evaluation. It asks people to break some notions we take for granted probably for our whole lives, and that is why imagination is involved and becomes the core of my work, for it gives us the ability to think independently, breaking the restrictions from society.

Centered around the concept of imagination, I have developed my own practice method. Its foothold is the insights and critiques of the sexual objectification reality, and the direction of thinking it provides to the viewers is how to regard and feel your body from the inside subjective feels, to see it as a expressive entity of yourself, instead of evaluating it from the perspective of a internalized social view. Next, I have dialogues with my friends, in which I give them the idea of changing their body images freely and creatively. Then I use these conversations as my inspiration and create illustrations to reflect the possibility of defining our bodies from within.

In this thesis, imagination and illustration as my main methodological guidance and visual communication, are the two most important cores. For myself, they happen at the same time and merge into one: the imagination in my mind creates illustrations through my hands, and illustrations are the entities of imagination. Imagination takes me to break the limitation of reality, break the stereotype of “what human body should be like”, then naturally there is no “what aesthetic about the female body should be like”, which is

5. Context & Framing

my criticism and response to the existing aesthetic. Through talking with others, I build perceptions of their inner feelings and expectations, and I create illustrations of “imaginary body” on this basis. The illustrations mixes the inner thinking with outer body appearances to give a visual scheme of what if your body is only up to your own mind. Through them, we can picture a speculative world where everyone’s body is unique due to their personalities and ways of thinking are unique . It means we are free from social relations, and we become “an ultimate self–untied at last from all dependency” (9.Haraway, D. 1985, p67), “a woman in space.”

5.1. Background & Personal Experiences

Since around 2015, the term “ Internet Hot Face” has become popular in China. It refers to “big eyes, pointy chin, white skin” as the standards of a set of social media “beauty face” models. Since then, Chinese social media has given a set of stereotypical standards of “What kind of women is beautiful,” which can be summarized as “white, thin and young.” It has been magnified and commercialized online, like in entertainment news and commercial advertisements. It strongly defines the basic notions of female beauty in many young men and women’s minds, which includes myself.

In my growing years, especially during adolescence, as I began using and indulging in social media, the external voices regurgitating the beauty standards for women seem to be everywhere and hard to refuse. After unconsciously internalizing these stereotyped beauty standards, I began believing that I was “not beautiful.” This brought me a great sense of shame and a lack of value. However, at that time, I would only blame myself. Until now, many years later, I still struggle with these self–deprecating voices in my head. As living this way for many years, I realize that this is not a fight of my own. Similar anxieties and inferiority complex are pervasive among Chinese women. Many of us have a negative relationship with our bodies, leading to different levels of anxiety, low body self–esteem, continuous and compulsory body monitoring, and even mental illness.

5.2. Reflective Self & Sexual Objectification

As mentioned above, most of us agree that the existing social aesthetics of the female body are problematic. But not many people can separate themselves from its influence. From stereotyped beauty standards to women's acceptance and internalization, those become an important index of self-worth judgment, ultimately causing negative body image and self-identity. It is a detrimental interactive process with a deep historical and political foundation. We are trapped in this tide, lacking critical insight and self-examination. In order to observe and better understand this process so that I can design interventions in the next step, several questions arise in my research: how do women internalize these external evaluation criteria? Under the influence of these criteria, how do they tend to view their bodies? How does the perception of the body affect the establishment of self-identity?

Firstly, the interpretation of our bodies and the establishment of self-identity are under containment of certain cultural conditions and happen in social interactions, built on the basis of seeing and being seen. Therefore, "the body as an object cannot be separated from the body as a subject; they are emergent from each other" (21, Waskul, D. D., & Vannini, 2006). In Cooley's looking glass self theory, he thinks that the process of people building self-consciousness is reflective, which has three elements:

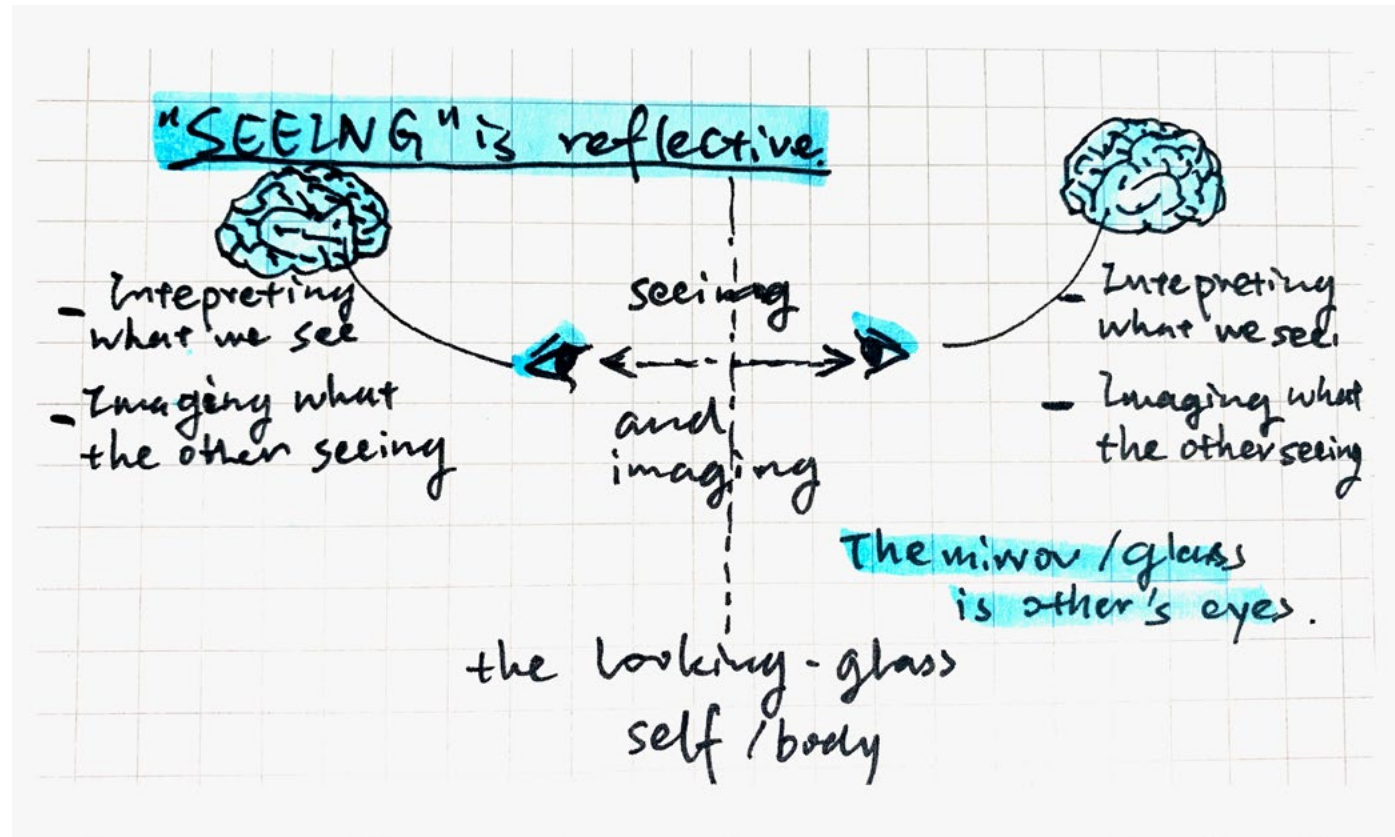
- 1.The imagination of our appearance to the other person;
2. The imagination of his judgment of that

appearance,
3.Some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification. (4, Cooley, C. H., 1902, p152)

Secondly, in the artificial environment, the body is more than a piece of flesh built with blood and muscles; it is vested with symbolic meaning and value as being gazed at and discoursed. Our senses of identities are constructed in such concoction of human interaction, which can be "behavioural, socially emergent, problematic, variable, and in fact arbitrary"(2, Brissett, D., & Edgley, C.1990), for on great content it depends on what information and values the culture and society trying to feed us. When driven by various political economy, society sets specific evaluation criteria for the semiotic value of the body—which can be called as the mass aesthetic of the body— then some of the bodies would be regarded as having more value than the others. The bodies with higher physical capital then reflect their power onto other bodies, which then attempt to emulate the former's performance and appearances. In part, these are the dynamics by which the construct of "body image" is constituted (21, Waskul, D. D., & Vannini, P., 2006).

Body image refers to an individual's cognition and evaluation of his or her body. It is the earliest part of an individual's self-consciousness and a fundamental part of self-identity. Body intention is multi-dimensional and multi-layered, and it shows different characteristics with age. Meanwhile, body-image is also dominated

by social culture and evaluated by essential others. In feminist theory, women's negative body-image is closely related to the social environment of sexual objectification. Bartky put forward the theory of sexual objectification in 1990, which means that women's bodies, body parts or sexual functions are separated from themselves and become pure tools or represent women themselves. That is to say, when being sexually objectified, women will be regarded as bodies, and the value of their bodies is only to please and used by others. A sexually objectified society leads to the self-objectification of women without their own awareness. Continuous media guidance and long-term objectified experience (being evaluated of body value) in real life will induce women to internalize "a third view" to observe the body/self, focusing on controllable physiological characteristics, rather than paying more attention to invisible physical mental from a subjective perspective (16, Roberts, T., & Fredrickson, B. L., 1997). So far, we begin to unconsciously imagine ourselves as a representative of a group of others. Countless eyes are examining and evaluating our bodies through our own eyes. However, as the sovereignty of the body owner, the feelings and wishes of "I" are lost.



The self is reflective



The self is objectified

5.3. Borrowing from Transfeminism

“There are as many ways of being a woman as there are women.”
—Koyama, 2001, The Transfeminist Manifesto, p2.

The subjectivity of women regarding body images and the uniqueness of every individual mentioned above largely coincide with the principles of Transfeminism. Accepting theories of Transfeminism provided this research with strong theoretical support and design inspirations. This section aims to explain the theory and the hopes it will help the readers to understand the methodology clearly.

Transfeminism is an essential part of the third wave feminism, which enriches and extends the intention of feminism greatly. Although it comes from the voice of trans women, it is of significance to the emancipation of the all-women group, especially on the issue of body-image. In Koyama’s The Transfeminist Manifesto, she expounded on the body dilemma of transgender women. Because society makes no provision for the existence of people whose anatomical characteristics do not neatly fit into male or female, they are mutilated routinely by medical professionals and manipulated into living as their assigned sex. It unnecessarily violated the integrity of their bodies without proper consent (10, p4). Furthermore, “this practice is oppressive to trans and non-trans women alike as it denies the uniqueness of each woman. (10, p2). The dilemma faced by transwomen in appearance evaluation can be regarded as the deduction and extreme of the dilemma of non-trans-gender women. they are pretty similar, which

is confining women’s self-expression in the body with stereotyped gender concepts and stifling individual’s uniqueness and the unquestionable right to define their own identity.

As non-trans women, the oppression we face on the body-image issue is that female bodies have to fit in specific standards to be admitted as beautiful. This cognition exerts anxiety and shame on the relationship between us and our bodies, and it makes many women tend to reform their bodies via various means after internalized. This behavior has not aroused widespread vigilance—we might be even less alert to the imposed physical identity and physical modification than trans women. Transfeminists believe that both sex and gender are artificially constructed. These constructs help the ruling class maintain the stability and firmness of the patriarchal binary gender system. This concept reminds us to be alert to the binary gender concepts that we often take for granted, both physically and psychologically, for they are likely to become the source of oppression. It does not mean that Transfeminism or myself deny that there are differences between men and women, but we emphasize that there are differences between individuals in essence, which are much more important than gender differences. Recognizing this is an essential premise for us to break down gender oppression.

My practices are loyal to this understanding. However, I must note that I do not mean to guide the anyone I make conversation with to obliterate or ignore their sex/gender,

as “no one is completely free from the existing social and cultural dynamics of the institutionalized gender system” (10, Koyama, 2001). Emancipation does not mean that we require everyone to deny gender, but everyone has the right to choose equally. Gender, as well as sex, is an essential basis for many people to construct their self-identities. Similarly, I do not emphasize gender in the conversations either. It depends entirely on how big and vital gender/sex plays a role in their lives as in their awareness. Even as a woman, every individual is different; as it is said,” there are as many ways of being a woman as there are women” (10, Koyama, 2001). The action of imagining the monster body focuses on free will and choice. All the imaginary elements appear in the conversations, whether mechanical or natural, to satisfy specific personal interests. I am making attempts to break the traditional way of looking at “self,” which is no longer to build a self-image through the reflection of others but a somewhat subjective way to achieve the integration of body and self and close the rift between the self-role of social significance and the inner identity.

6. Method & Methodology

6.1. Illustration = Imaging

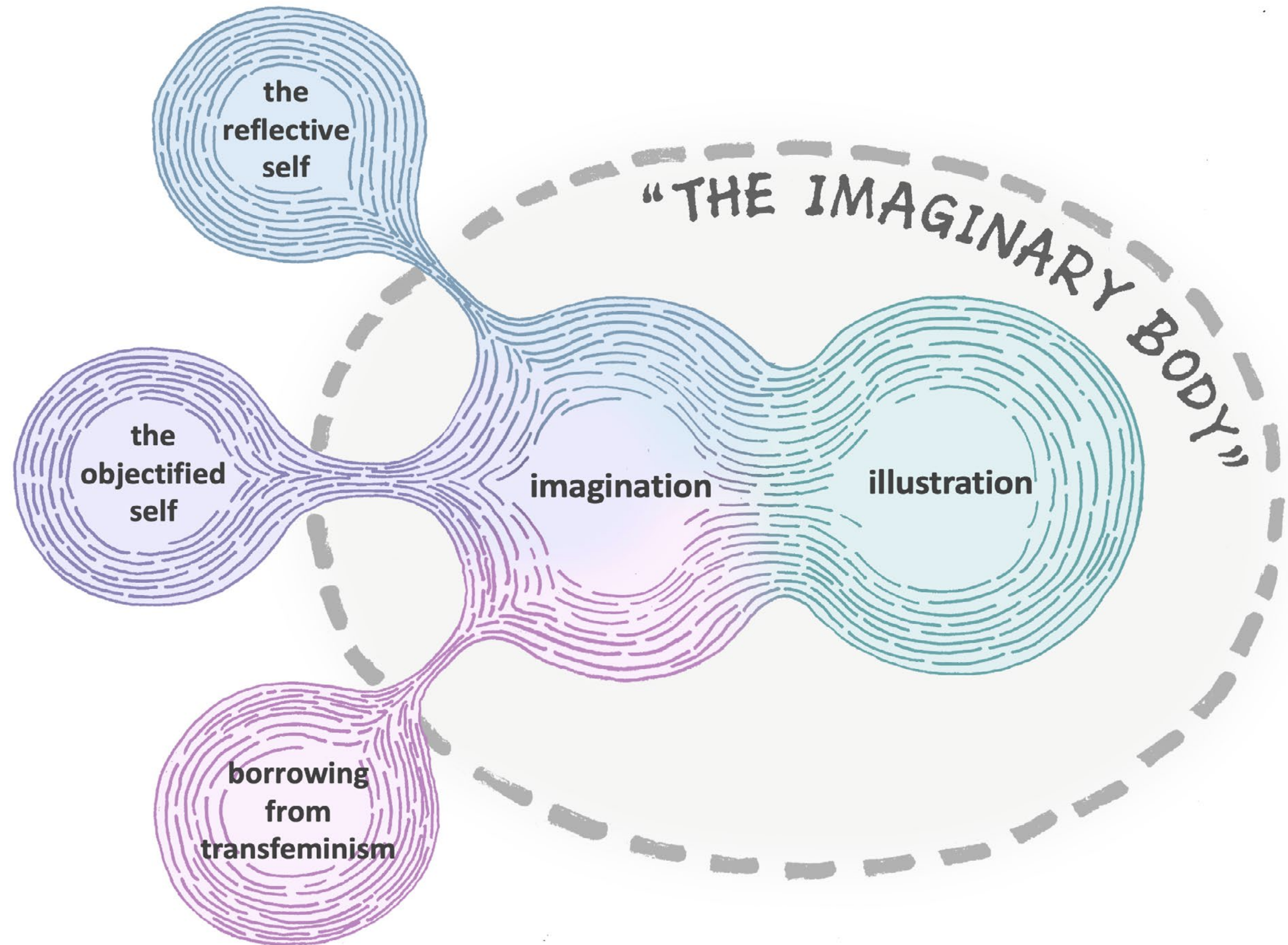
In the previous research, I gain basic insights into the process of people building self-identity and internalizing external evaluation. Then the question of “how to raise a new idea of how we regulate ourselves, no longer through the evaluation and reflection of others, but driven by the feeling and perspective of “I” as the subject?” has emerged. Through the study of transfeminism, I have established a important value orientation of my own work, that is, the respect and emphasis on individual uniqueness. But what does it mean the uniqueness of each woman, and how to dig into it?

For the external environment, there are deep historical and political reasons behind the existence of these standards of beauty. It is unrealistic to change the environment. Moreover, it is also difficult to directly change people’s way of looking at themselves, such as reflective self and objectified self I mention above, because these thinking patterns exists in our cultural environment and education. Therefore, the nature of this research problem determines that it is not a problem that can be “solved” with traditional design thinking. So I set my role as to put forward an idea to invite people to engage with through visual communication. This is not a method of education, but a critical rhetoric and a creation of a reflective thinking space. At this stage, I rediscovered my role as an illustrator, and I use illustration as a medium to explore and reflect on my inner world. Through this action I find “imagination” as such a way to enlighten thinking and interaction. The reason why imagination can be critical is that it is

an independent thinking ability. It is contrary to the traditional way of thinking in the prescribed framework of reality. It encourages people to break the rules; The reason why imagination can be reflective is that it reflects some wishes, interests and beliefs in people’s hearts. The picture it outlines is often far from the reality, highlighting where and why the reality is disappointing. However, as researchers and creators, the way we carry out our works is always converse: we need to discover where and why reality is disappointing, and then use a creative means to inspire the user or viewers’ imagination to picture a visional scene, thus get them to think about how the reality is unsatisfactory as well. It is a significant methodology in my thesis, which is achieved by drawing.

As mentioned above, I am one member of my research target group. So in the bottleneck period of research, when I don’t know how to answer my research questions, I try to take self exploration as an a means to seek for further research and practice direction. Personally, I have been trained with drawing skills for many years since childhood, which determines that drawing is a familiar and free technique of expression for me. So in the summer of 2020, I did a lot of illustration exercises, which directly brought imagination into my vision of this research. Defined as an artistic activity, drawing is a liberation of the mind. The action of drawing creating and imaging are an integrated and simultaneous process. To a certain extent, the sensibility, multi-level and mystery that cannot be expressed in words coincide with the subtlety

and complexity of “self”, and imagination also puts forward a new thinking direction for some problems that are not solvable in reality. Drawing is the way I communicate with my own inner world, but the value is more than that. It is full of possibility of change. It is guided by a vague ideas in mind. With every line or color I draw, it makes the idea concrete, and meanwhile points to a new unknown direction, asking “what next”? Thousands of new ideas enmerge in that certain moment. Thus, it is an action guided by thought, but it also widens the area of thought. This dynamic interactive significance exists in the process of my own drawing, which leads me to explore the visual possibilities of human body creatively and rebelliously. This significance also exists after each drawing work is completed. As the creator, I am able to reflect and clarify my own ideas through reflecting on the drawing; and for the viewers, the drawing works can arouse different stimulation and inspiration, emotionally or intelligently.

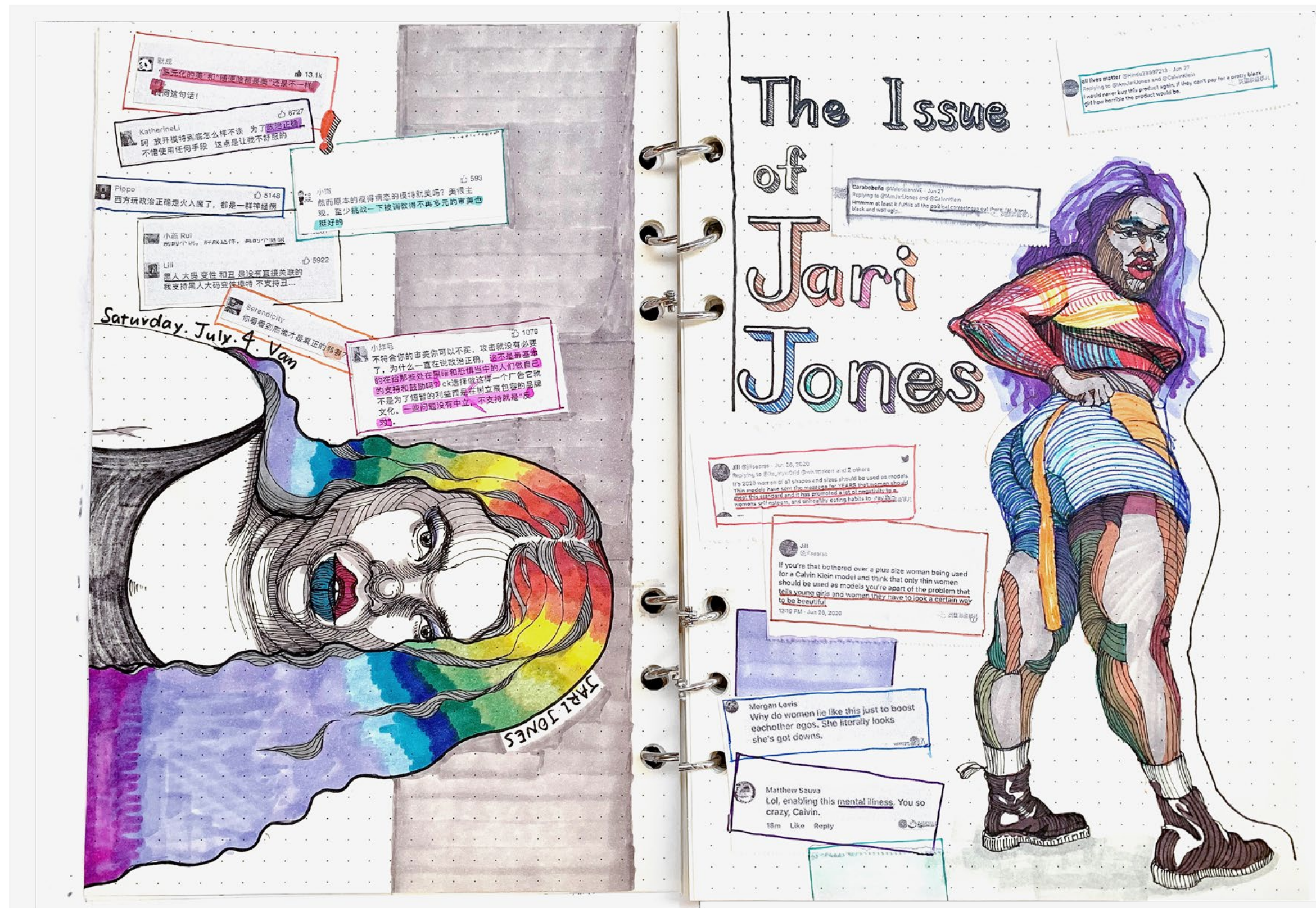


6.2. Summer Exploration

Here I elaborate the significance of the illustration practice in the summer of 2020 to me. These illustration practices are perceptual products without clear intention and logic. Because of this, they show the possibility of transcending logic, which is the mockery and digestion of reality by imagination. Generally speaking, they are a tool for me to explore myself, constantly challenging the boundaries of some common sense of mine about beauty, gender, and self.

For example :

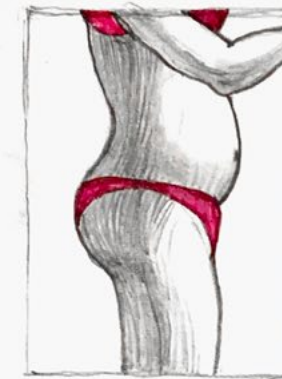
A drawing of a fat, bearded woman. I add gorgeous colors and smooth rhythmic muscle contours to her body;



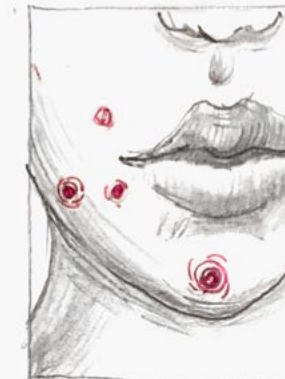


“Chinese girls’ preferences in photo retouching: what we want to be and what we want to hide.”

Monday, Aug. 17th.



Fat belly



Pimples



Stretch marks



Thunder thighs



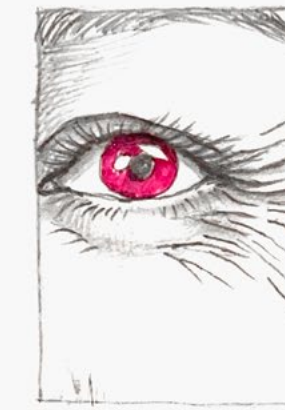
Armpits



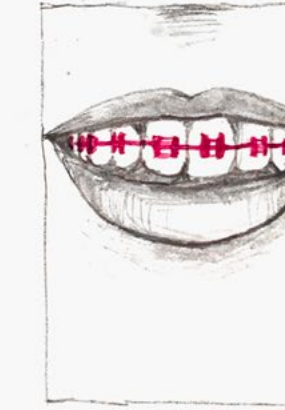
Scars



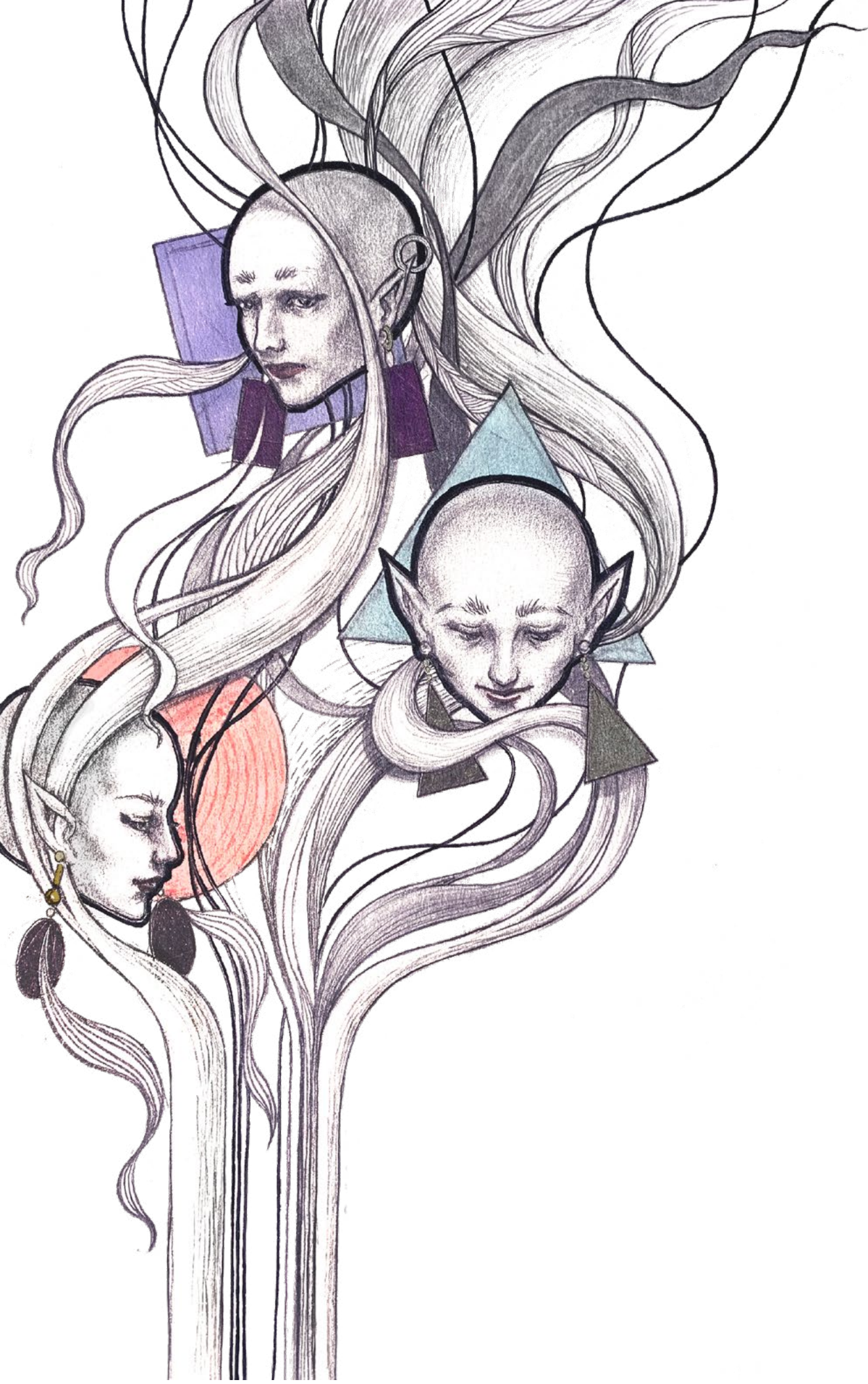
Birthmarks



Crow's feet



Braces

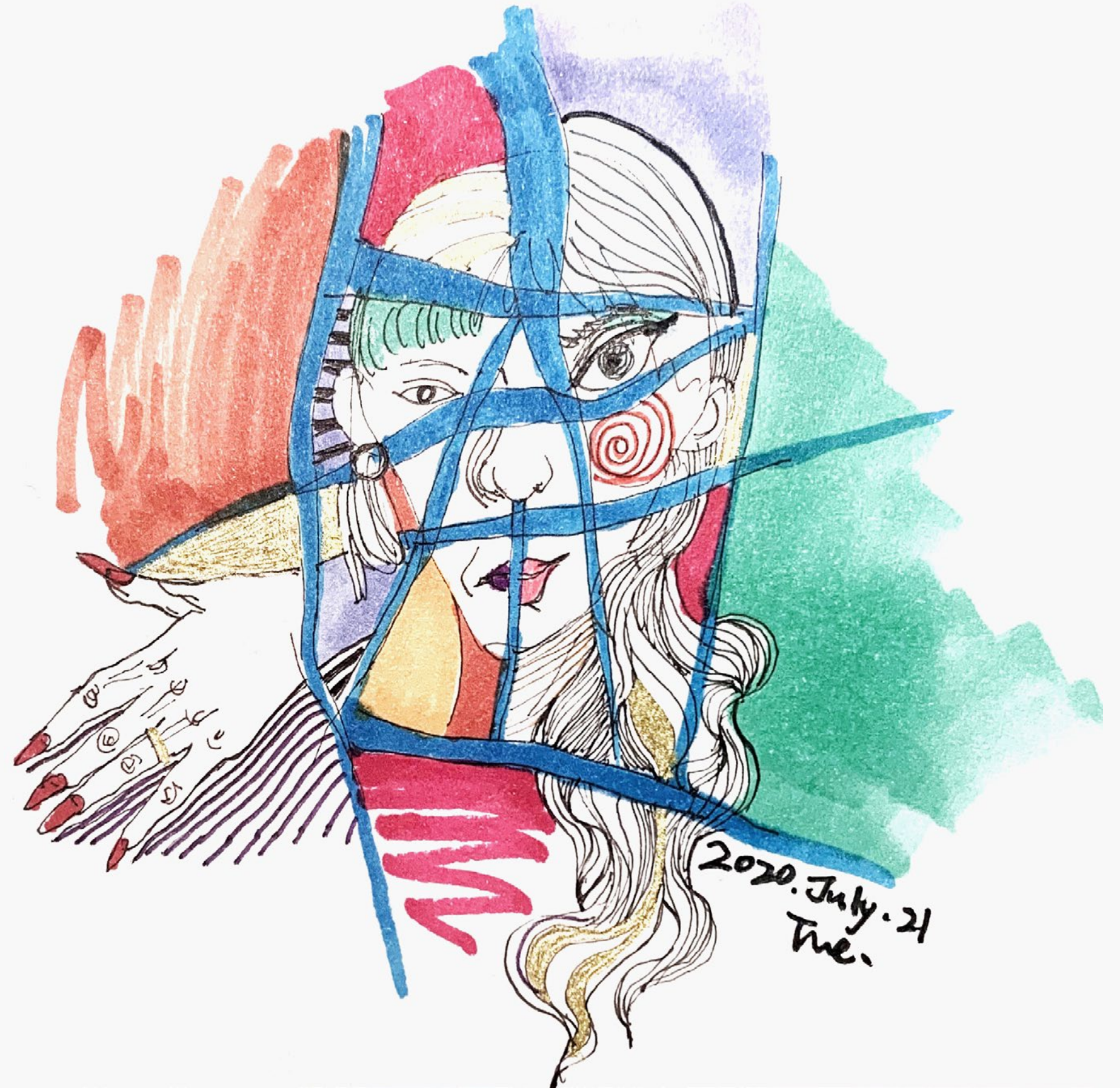


A decorative drawing with human face as
a decorative element



One more decorative drawing with human face
as a decorative element: Old is beautiful

Decorative drawing of cutting and deconstructing human face



“How far am I from a Loli”

Loli subculture is popular in East Asia. It is an aesthetic that appreciates the beauty of female children. In its development and variation, many women tend to dress up teenager-like. Female children and teenagers, or any young looking woman can be called Loli in general.



THE IMPRESSIONS

How Far I am From Becoming a Loli ☺☺



LOLI. IMPRES
SION

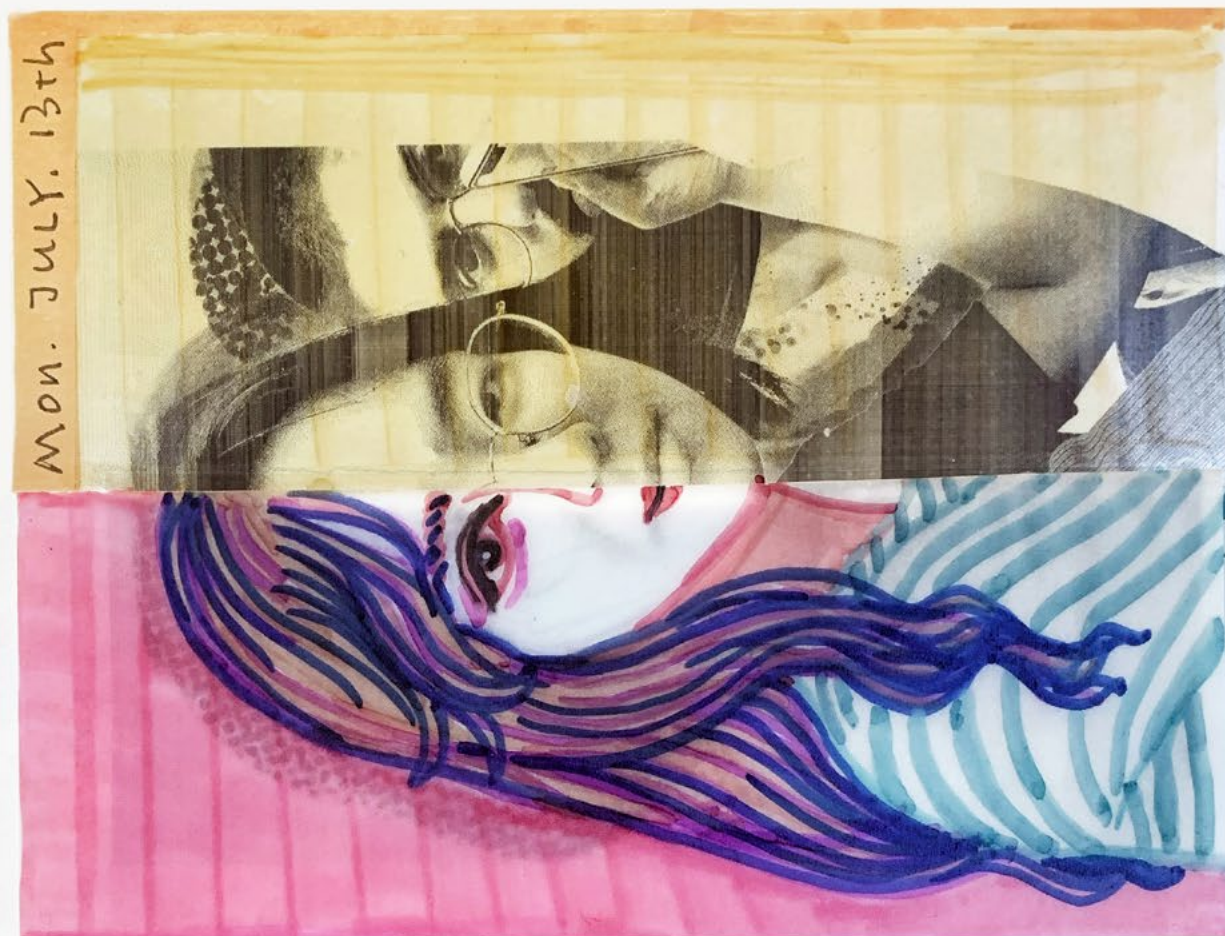
WED. JULY. 8. V



FRIDAY · JULY 10 VANCOUVER

To take more
selfies in differ-
ent places, and
try diverse ways
of recreation,
to beautify (what
standard?) uglyfy,
and deconstruct,
etc.

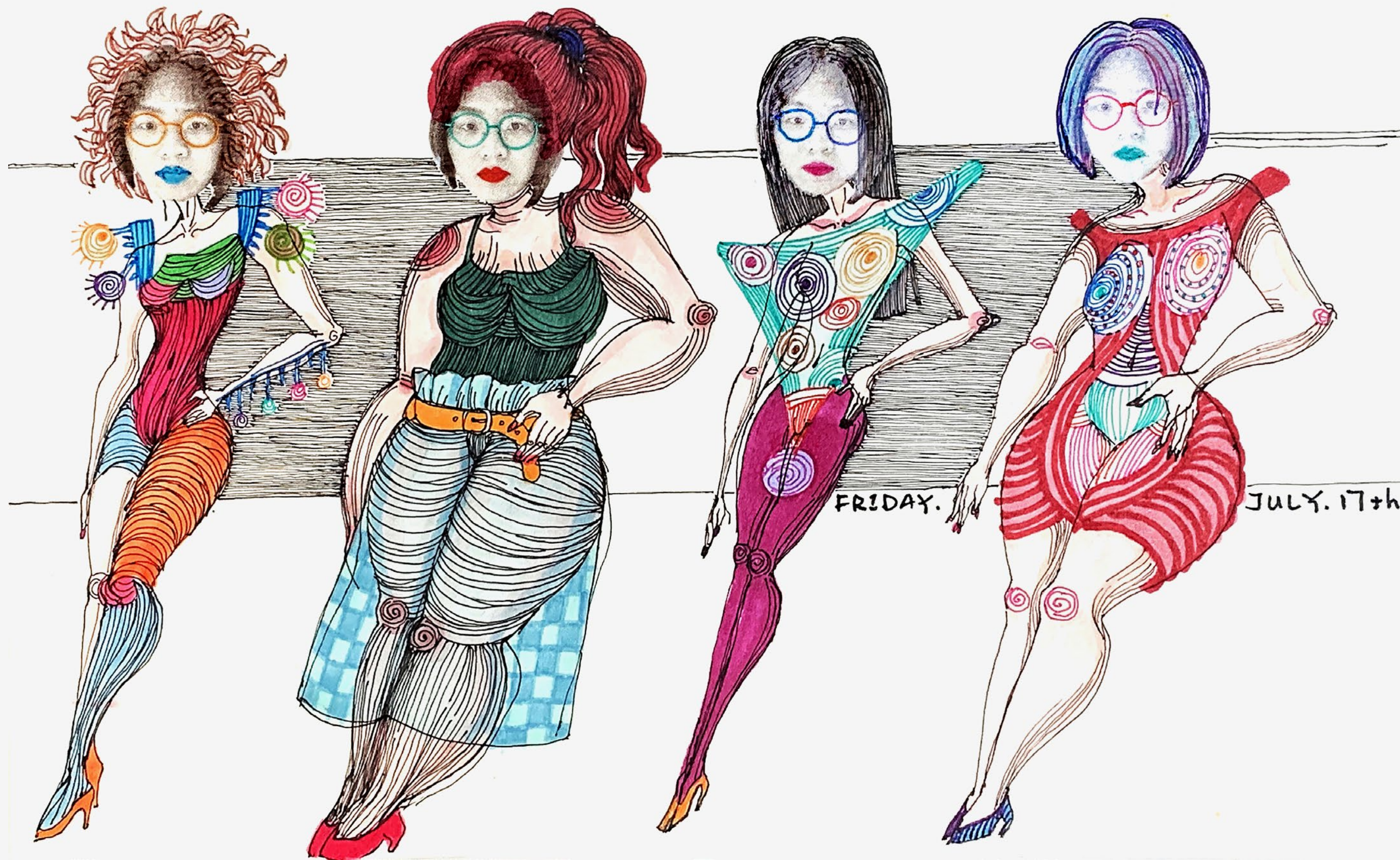
-Tue.
July: 14th



Mon. JULY. 13th



WED. JULY. 12 VANCOUVER



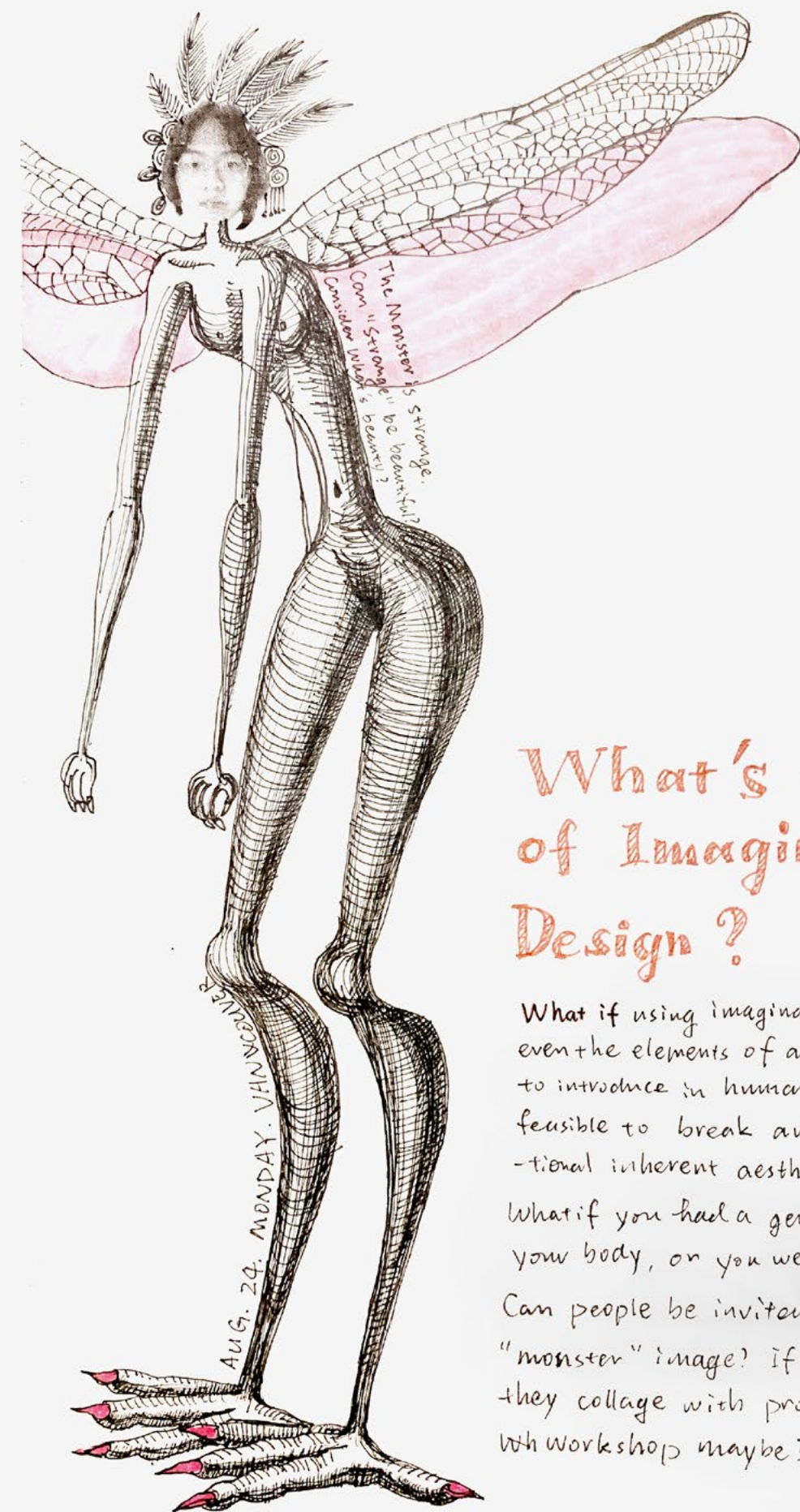
I match my face with different bodies: fat, tall, thin, muscular and weak. Each of them seems to have a different personality, but they all have my face, look at me with my own eyes and talk to me.

Play this on other people

('s headls ~o~)



2020. JULY. 28
Tuesday.



What's the Role of Imagination in Design?

What if using imagination, extremism, or even the elements of animals and monsters to introduce in human body image? Is it feasible to break away from the conventional inherent aesthetic of human body? What if you had a genetic mutation in your body, or you were actually an alien? Can people be invited to create their own "monster" image? If they can't draw, can they collage with provided materials? Wh workshop maybe?

— Aug, 24th

Every drawing comes from a vague idea produced in a flash. Sometimes myself as the creator have not think it through clearly, when it already exists on the drawing paper on its own. I have to stare at the drawing and think about its meaning to me. They becomes my reflection tools: the discomfort brought by drawing an ugly woman is a challenge and mockery to the concept of beauty and ugliness constructed by myself from the social stereotype; deconstruction of a human face is a deconstruction and perspective change of our inherent way of looking at human body; taking selfie photos from different angles and states is an exploration of self diversity; and all the collages of my face with different bodies, they symbolize that my physical appearance can be changed by my curiosity and willingness at a certain moment, and nothing else, in a diversified and wonderful virtual world -- that thin piece of paper. Drawing can go beyond technical and aesthetic display and become a tool for thinking and knowing.

In the series of self portraits, I transformed my body from various human bodies to a completely free imaginary "monster body", with insect wings, crooked legs and big claws. This is my rebellion and response to human body aesthetics in reality. In the illustration, the body is not merely a biological physical entity, and it does not have to undertake any function of pleasing others and gaining social recognition. I want it to go beyond function and sociality and become a carrier of characteristics and demands of each individual soul. If we can arbitrarily

change our body according to our own wishes, then the relationship between us and our body will reach an unprecedented state of harmony and unity.

6.3. Practice Method

These early illustrations become the proto-types of my imaginary body project. I want to get more people's views on my research and get to know the relationship between them and their own bodies, in order to create more "monster bodies" by building perceptions of other people's imagination, and use these illustrations to propose and communicate a new way to establish body-image and self-identity. Therefore, based on the background research, I put forward several potential directions to stimulate imagination, including visualizing the inner emotion and personality, subjectively transforming and grafting the human body with superpower, and giving the body new symbolic and relational meanings. I have designed a series of interview cards, and as the interviewee of myself, I create the first illustration out of my imagination. After that, I consider the potential of applying this method to more audiences. But for the sake of ethical review, I can't directly invite them to participate in my creative process. So what I do is to proceed chats and conversations with others. The experience of self interview has provided me with guidance and preparation for the conversations with my friends, enable me to draw nutrition from each different conversation and create imaginary bodies. This also confirms with the knowledge I gained from transfeminism. The uniqueness of these illustrations reflects the uniqueness of each person's thoughts and personality. Through them, I convey to the world my excavating and respecting to the value of individual differences transcending gender differences. After the completion of each illustration

creation, I show it to my friend, as to inspire more thinking in these second round talks. Generally speaking, this is a process of dialogue—>creation—> dialogue. I use illustration as a medium to initiate two exchanges of ideas. The first is between my friends and me, and the second is between them and these drawing images. And since these dialogues are the process of stimulating ideas and knowledge around a specific problems, and the illustrations are their translation, variant and reflection, which makes the illustrations a communication symbol of attitudes.

7. Phase1: Body–Image Drawing

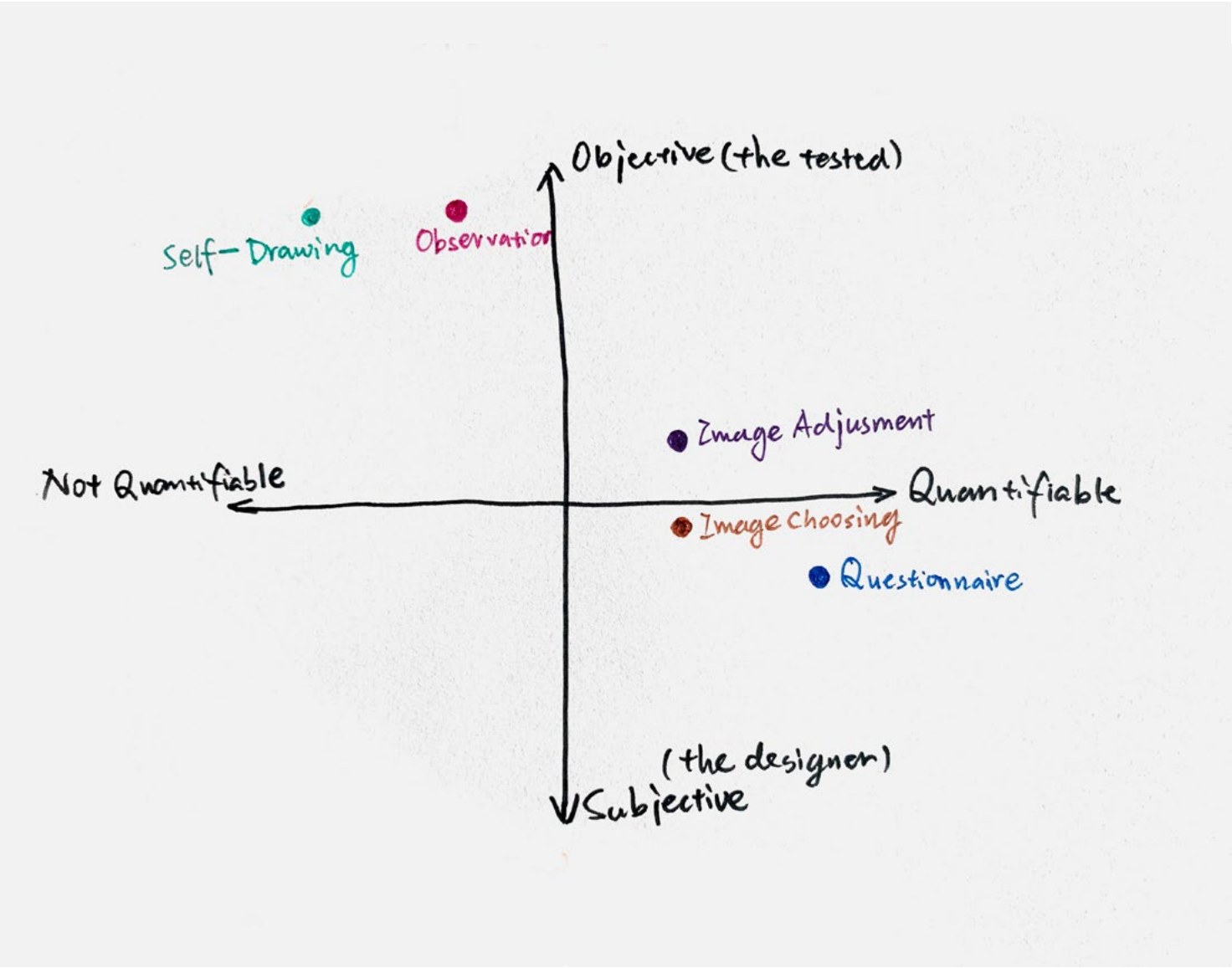
7.1. Drawing Tool

Throughout my inquiry I explored many re–search directions on the topic of female body aesthetics and self–identity. I tried different directions, such as refuting the single modern aesthetic standard by exploring the diversity of gender aesthetics in Chinese history (seen in appendix) and redefining the standard of female cuteness by designing a virtual Festival (seen in appendix). These studies are generally aimed at the external social reality. I have accumulated some background knowledge from these projects, but I am still looking for a breakthrough to be closer to women’s psychological feelings and thoughts. The concept of body image I encountered in summer research provided this opportunity.

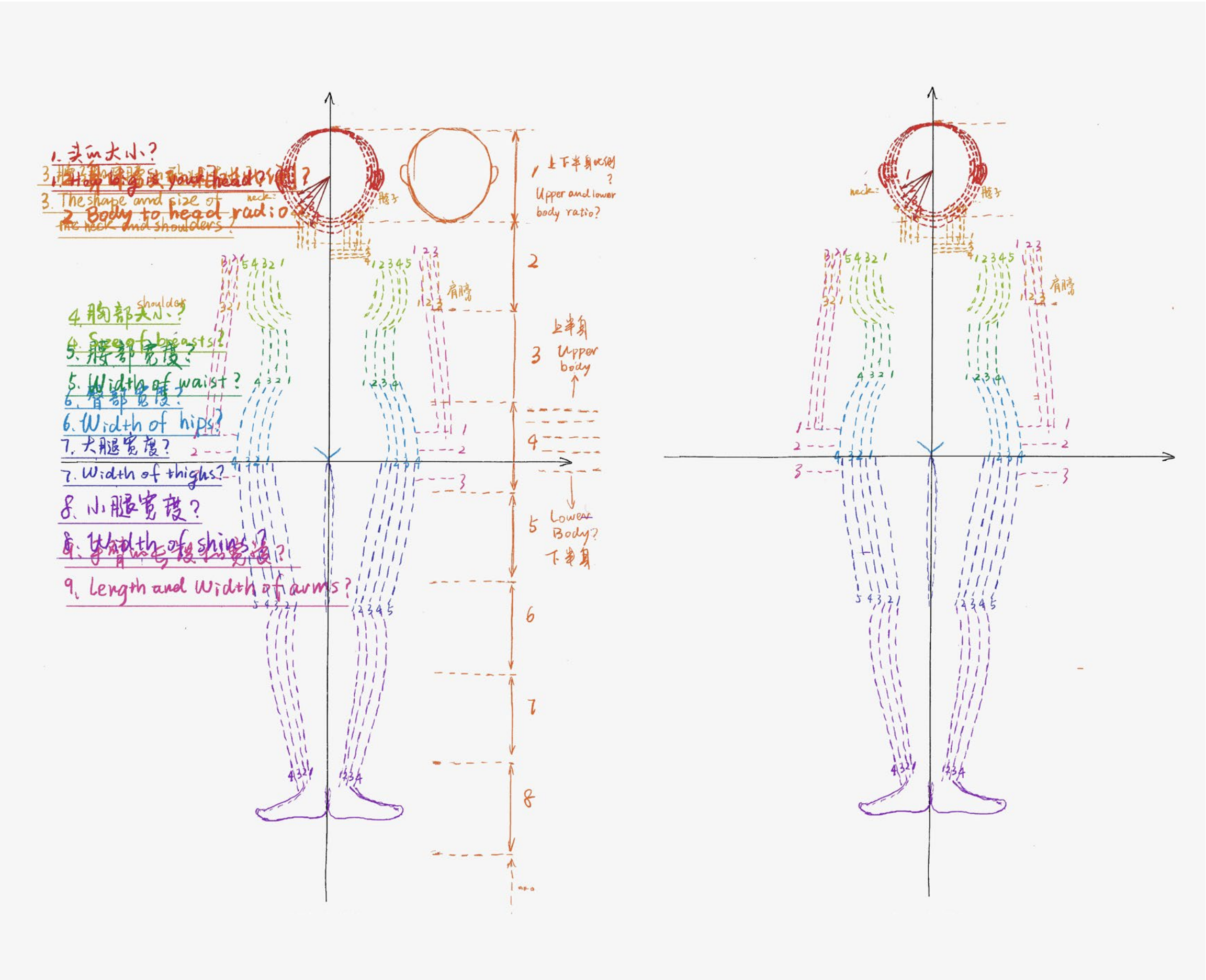
Body–image is a broad and centralized concept about the relationship between people and their bodies, including their views, beliefs and emotional attitudes towards their bodies. A negative body–image will make people want to change their bodies. This concept has strong extensibility, and the extended related concepts include but are not limited to body–anxiety, body–satisfaction, eating disorder, body–monitoring, appearance orientation, body–evaluation, drive for thin–ners, etc. Various theories centered around body–image, and they explore the different elements that affect people’s body–image. Important theories include social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), social culture theory (Thompson, 1999), objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), symbolic interaction theory (Mead, 1934). Among them, the social culture theory and objectification theory have the most vital inspiration for

me. They all emphasize that the external social gender oppression is transformed into female self–oppression through the process of individual internalization, which nourishes the unhealthy relationship between us and our body.

The exploration of body image is easy to lead to a question, that is, how to transform a vague and abstract idea about one’s body into a specific visual image. Because only when visual images can be established can it be possible to carry out group research, collect samples, analyze the common trends, and provide design intervention schemes as designers. Thus, I intend to design such a tool to help visualize the body–image. For that, I studied the existing quantitative methods of body image in the fields of psychology and medicine, including questionnaire, observation, self–drawing, image selection and image adjustment. The advantages and disadvantages of the methods can be measured by two dimensions. Firstly, how much is affected by the subjective inference of the designer. And secondly, whether the result can be quantified.



The body-image quantitative tool I designed mainly comes from the combination of image adjustment method and self-drawing method. The image adjustment method, also known as the contour estimation method, provides an auxiliary tool to get as close as possible to the subjective judgment of their bodies by adjusting the size and image distortion. On this basis, I provide a tool for drawing. To make it easier to operate, I add a coordinate axis and options like: “from small to large 1–5” or “from wide to narrow 1–5”. Each participant would choose an option based on their subjective perception of their body parts. Finally, I would flexibly combine all the options to form a complete body contour and then invite the subjects to make final adjustments based on the difference between this contour and their perceptions to make the final result as close as possible to the subject’s cognition of their bodies. At first, I use a stack of transparent paper to facilitate stacking and combination. Later, out of consideration of the epidemic, I have made this tool into a digital version.



1. 头的大小?

1. How big is your head?



2. 身体与头的相对比例?

2. Body to head ratio?



2 上下半身比例?
Upper and lower
body ratio?

3 Upper
body
↑ 上半身

4
--- 4:6
--- 4.5:5.5
--- 5:5
--- 5.5:4.5
--- 6:4

5 Lower
Body
↓ 下半身

6

7

8

9

3. 脖子和肩膀的形状大小?

3. The shape and size of the neck and shoulders?

shoulder

3 2 1

neck=

4 3 2 1

1 2 3 4

脖子

1 2 3

肩膀

4. 胸部大小?

4. Size of bust?

5 4 3 2 1

1 2 3 4 5

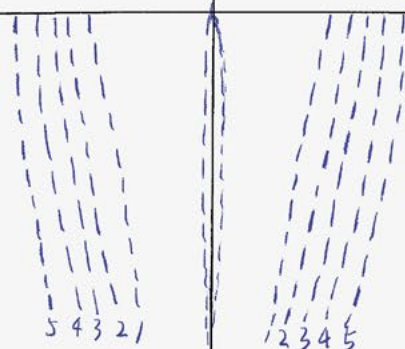
5. 腰部宽度?
5. Width of waist?



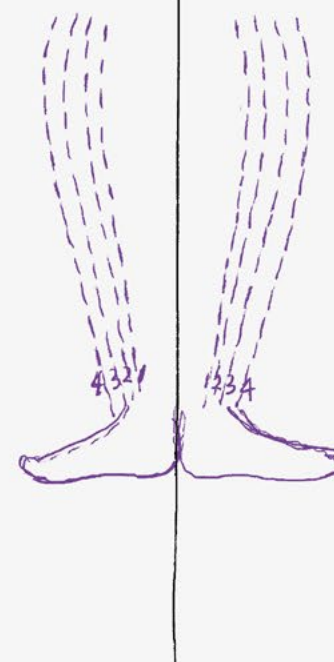
6. 臀部宽度?
6. Width of hips?

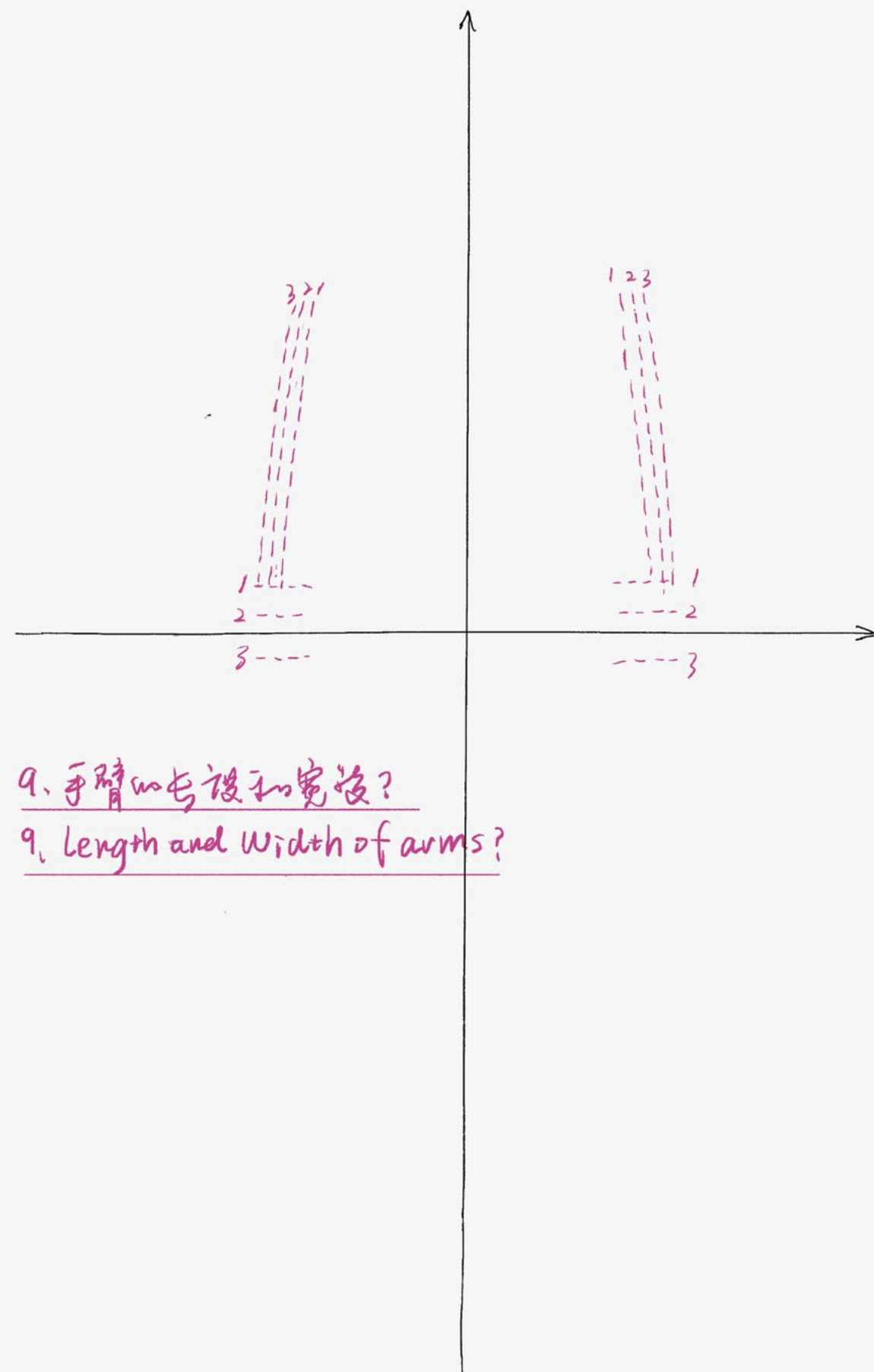


7. 大腿宽度?
7. Width of thighs?



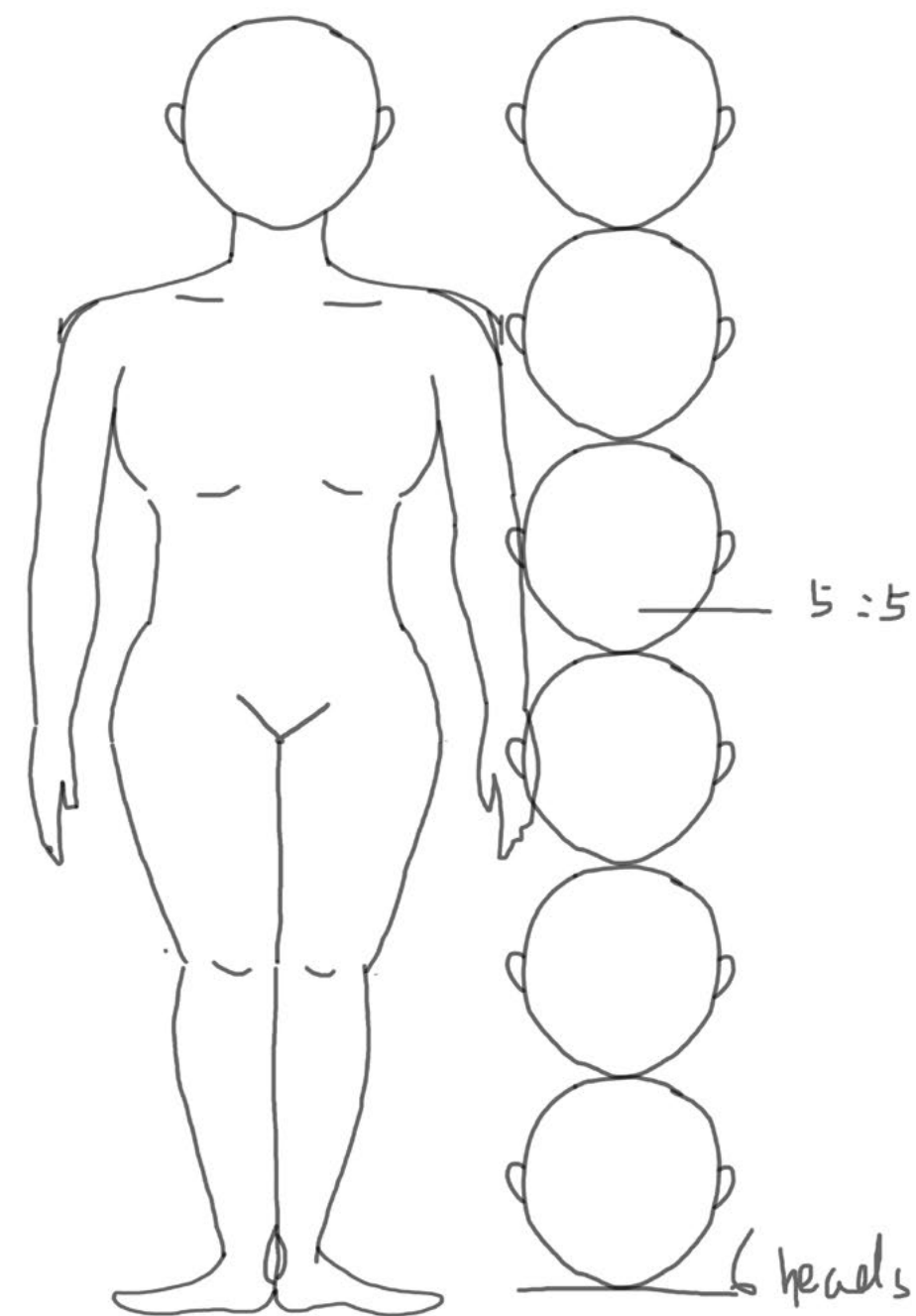
8. 小腿宽度?
8. Width of shins?





9. 手臂的长宽和宽比?
 9. Length and width of arms?

The body-image I draw for myself using this tool:



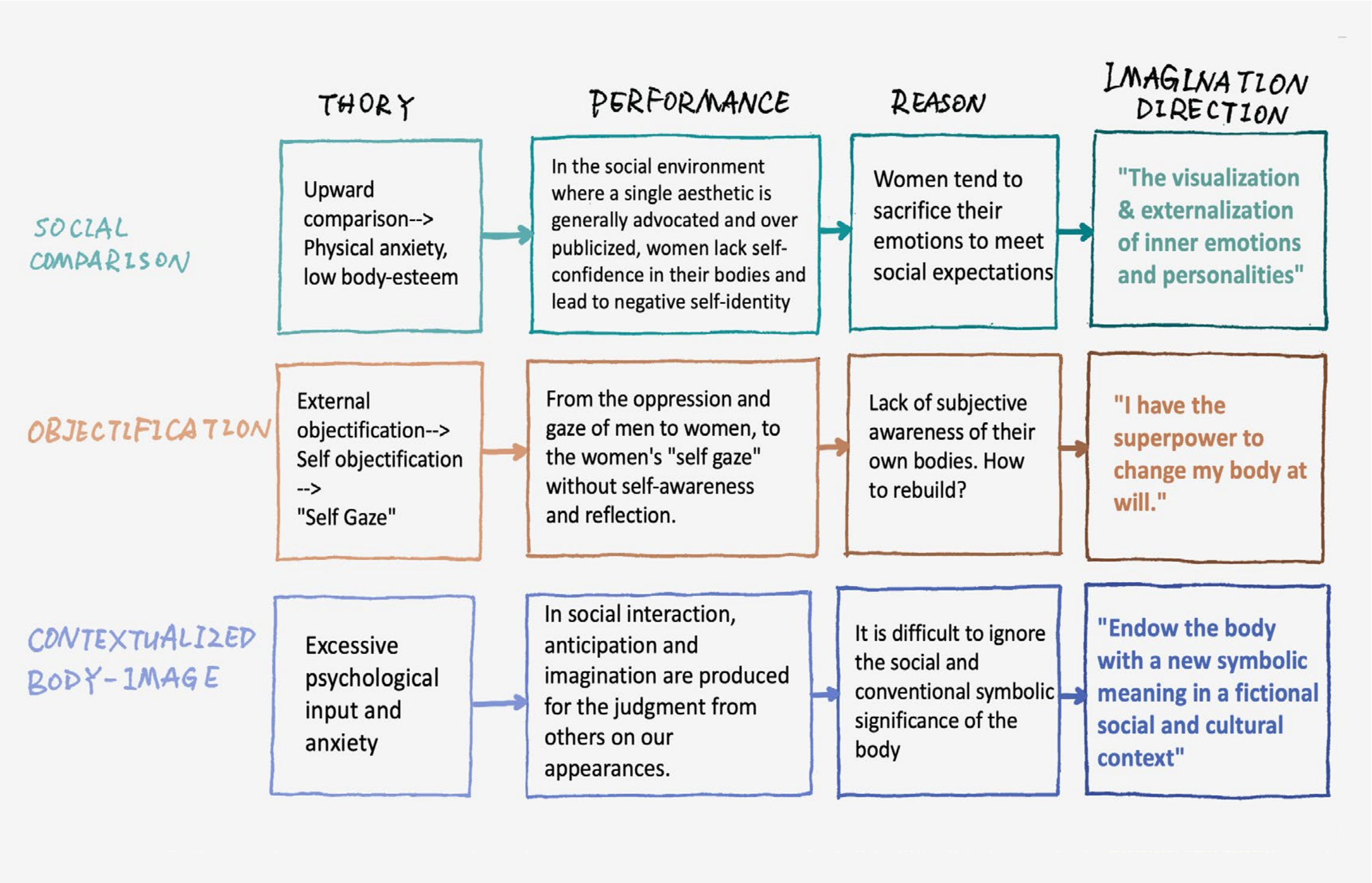
The experiment on myself proves that this set of drawing tool is effective in function. However, the way of using it should be cautious. I had a conversation with one friend on this tool as well as its concept, who has a background of North America. She holds the idea that to use numbers to quantify anyone's body in a controversial and sensitive action. From my intention as its designer, this body-image drawing tool is just a set of visual aids, and there are not any value evaluation intention in it. However, this talk made me think about why there are not anyone from a Chinese background before (in fact also after) her express similar idea to me. I have discussed this question with some of my compatriot friends, and we agree that the Chinese social environment has not get to the level of sensitivity for us to feel discomfort seeing numbers linking with our bodies. This is something worth further thinking.

7.2. Phase2: From Body-Image to Imagination

At this stage, I think about how to use imagination. Imagination is free and willful, but I also need to limit it to a certain range, as a reflection and response to the body-image problem. Therefore, based on the study of the concept of body-image, I put forward three potential thinking directions. The derivation process is shown in the table on the right:

From three facets of body-image:
1. Upward social comparison leads to negative body-image;
2. External objectification environment leads to women’s self-objectification;
3. Body-image is contextualized.

From these three points, through deduction and analysis, I put forward three potential solutions:
1. Externalizing and visualizing the inner emotions and personalities to resist the tendency of women’s self-suppressing the real feelings to meet the social expectations;
2. Imagine the ability to change the body at will to emphasize women’s “body sovereignty”;
3. Imagine new body values and social expectations to eliminate the oppression and restriction in reality.



8. Phase2: The Imaginary Body

8.1. Question Cards & Self Interview

Guided by the three thinking principles above and the knowledge I have gained from previous studies, I have designed a series of question cards as prompts, which are divided into two parts: body-image and imagination. I have used them to interview myself. Here I show these cards as well as my handwritten notes in the self-interview:

Interview

访谈： 第一部分： 身体意象

THE INTERVIEW: PART1: THE BODY IMAGE

1

Interview

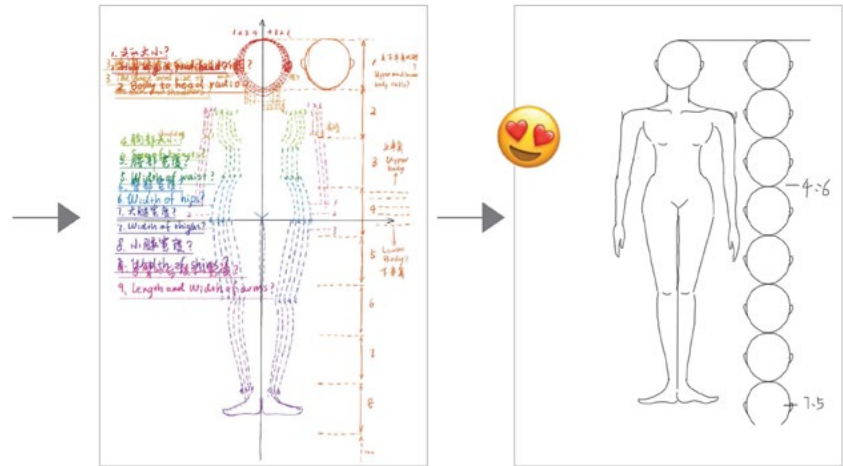
1. 使用提供的辅助工具，勾勒出你心中的自己的身体形象。

1. Use the tools provided to outline your subjective body image.

2

2. 使用提供的辅助工具，勾勒出你”理想的”身体形象

2. Use the tools provided to outline your “ideal” body image.



4. 你最喜欢你自己的脸作出什么表情? 或者你不喜欢自己的什么表情?

4. What expression do you like best on your own face? Or what expression you don't like to appear on yourself?

I like my smile but I don't like me laughing. I think the laughing expression makes me look silly. I've seen myself cry and I think even crying looks better than laughing on me.

3. 你最喜欢你外貌的什么部分 (可以多项)? 为什么? (你的某个身体部位, 你的眼睛, 鼻子, 头发, 皮肤, 甚至可以是痣, 疤痕, 胎记等), 你最不喜欢哪个部分? 为什么?

3. What do you like the most of your physical appearance (can be multiple)? Why? (Some part of your body, your eyes, nose, hair, even moles, scars, birthmarks, etc.) and what do you dislike the most?

I like my eyes most, for their shapes.

I don't like my nose and my thighs. the nose is too wide and the thighs are too thick.

5. 你是否有在做特定的活动, 或者在特定姿势的时候, 对自己的外貌感到比平常更加自信, 或者更加意识不到“我看起来怎么样”的问题 (比如跳舞, 跑步, 独处等)?

相反, 当你做什么, 或者在什么环境下, 你会觉得 (可能) 对你的外表更敏感, 更容易对自己的形象产生担心?

5. Are there any activities or in any positions that can make you feel more confident about your appearance, or less aware of “how do I look?” (Like when dancing, running, being alone, etc.)

On the contrary, when you do what, or in what circumstances, do you feel (possibly) more aware of your appearance and more likely to worry about it?

When I do some exercise that I enjoy doing I kinda feel I look better. like riding a bike, or doing exercise on a yoga mat at home.

When I squat or bend, I tend to worry about my belly bulge out. In some crowded social occasions I feel more sensitive about my appearance.

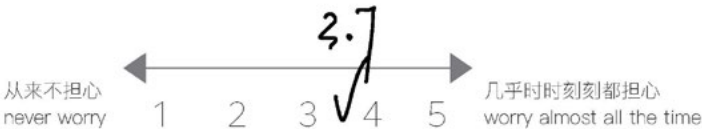
6.当你担心“我看起来怎么样”的时候，你一般最经常对哪个身体部位产生担心？相反的，你对你外表的哪个部分觉得最自信，很少担心它/它们？

6. When you are worried about “how do I look”, which body part do you usually worry about most? On the contrary, which part of your appearance do you feel most confident about and rarely worry about it / them?

I worry about my belly and my legs. I barely worry about my hair.

8. 用1到5的层级表示你在日常生活中，对自己的外貌形象的担心程度，具体表现在，你一天中会有多么频繁的担心“我看起来怎么样？”1表示：“从来不担心”，5表示，“几乎时时刻刻都在担心”。（从整体来说，不要考虑你在家睡了一天，或者要去出席一个非常重要的晚宴这些极端情况）

8. Use a scale of 1 to 5 to indicate how worried you are about your appearance image in your daily life. Specifically, how often do you worry about “how do I look?” “I never worry,” 5 says, “I worry almost all the time.”. (in general, don't think about the extreme situation like sleeping at home for the whole day or going to a very important dinner party.)



7.在日常生活中，对于自己的身体，你更经常想的是“我看起来怎么样”？还是“我感觉怎样”？当看着自己的身体的时候，你经常感受到什么情绪（可多种）？

7. In daily life, Which one do you feel more concerned about your body: “how do I look” or “how do I feel”? What emotions do you often feel when looking at your body?

In daily life I think more about “How do I look” than “How do I feel”, unless my body is sending me clear alarms, I hardly think about my body's feelings.

The emotions about my body, I always switch among “Satisfied”, “Embarrassed” and “Anxious”.

访谈： 第二部分： 想象力

THE INTERVIEW: PART2: IMAGINATION

2.如果你的身体可以延伸出更多的功能，你希望是什么？（发挥想象力，考虑基因变种，身体机械化，和其他物种如动物/植物/微生物 产生融合/嫁接，等等）

2. If your body can extend more functions, what would you like? (use imagination, consider genetic mutation, body mechanization, fusion / grafting with other species such as animals / plants / microorganisms, etc.)

- 1. Flying, the most important one.
- 2. Also I hope I can have more heads → brains, and multiple pairs of arms that can grow longer at anytime I need, so I can deal with different tasks at the same time.
- 3. I hope I can have the ability to control my weight. Cause that number always bothers me.

1. 想象你不是一个“人类”，你希望自己是什么？某种动物？某种植物？一朵花？一片云？一块泥土？（鼓励你尽可能地扩展想象力，寻找一些不常见的，具体的元素，只要你觉得跟你自己有关联。你也可以使用“某个物体的特定部分”，以及多种物体来回答这个问题。画下来，或者找一些图片展示，如果你愿意）

1. Imagine that you are not a "human being", what would you like to be? Some kind of animal? Some kind of plant? A flower? A cloud? A piece of soil? (you are encouraged to expand your imagination as much as possible, looking for unusual, specific elements, as long as you feel connected to yourself. You can also use "a specific part of an object" and a variety of objects to answer this question. Draw them, or find pictures to show, if you feel like)



(这些图片是为了启发你考虑更多的可能，不是选项)
(These pictures are meant to inspire you, not options.)

Might be a kind of a bird, like a pigeon, but with more colors on it. like a pigeon with color pots.
It can also be a insect with transparent wings.

4. 用4个或以上的形容词描述你想成为什么样的人？或者说，你希望你的外形形象给别人的感受是什么？

示例（非选项）：

可爱的，年轻的，无害的，友好的，温柔的，甜美的，独立的，坚强的，有主见的，有女人味的，性感的，中性的，酷的，性冷淡的，清新的，阳光的，外向的，好相处的，有侵略性的，领导的，包容的，整洁的，井井有条的，单纯的，简单的，敏感的，纤细的，精致的，优雅的，古典的，时尚的，独特的，柔弱的，复杂的，难以捉摸的，神秘的，暗黑的，纯洁的，华丽的，美艳的...

4. Describe what kind of person you want to be with 4 or more adjectives? Or, what do you want your appearance to make others feel?

Examples (NOT OPTIONS):

Cute, young, harmless, friendly, gentle, sweet, independent, strong, assertive, feminine, sexy, unisexual, cool, asexual, fresh, outgoing, easy to get along with, aggressive, leading, inclusive, neat, neat, simple, sensitive, delicate, elegant, classical, fashionable, unique, weak, complex, elusive, mysterious, dark, pure, gorgeous, beautiful...

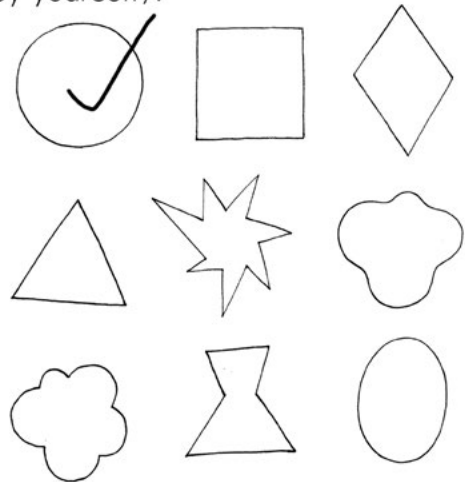
5. 用1-3个颜色表达你自己，你可以从下面的示例中选择，也可以提供别的选项，或描述。

5. Use 1-3 colors to express yourself. You can choose from the following examples or not. You can provide more options or describe your color.



6. 用一个图形来形容你自己(选择以下图形或自己画出皆可)？

6. One shape to represent yourself (Choose from below or draw by yourself)?



This interview gave me a clearer idea of how to create more powerful imaginary body illustrations. I refined the information in the interview into more abstract word clouds:



In the project of the imaginary body, I produced five illustrations so far. The first one is based on the self interview using these cards directly, the second one is more of a abstract self-expression, and the last three are inspired by my conversations with some of my friends. They are all Chinese girls who are close friends to me. And the conversations have led me to more interesting ideas, like, how come we tend not to talk about our bodies in daily life, while we long for being heard of who we are? We rarely talk about our bodies ignoring evaluation criteria raised by the outside world, for the feelings and tendencies it triggers are diffidence, evasion, weakening problems and being offended. Why is our relationship with our bodies a sensitive topic? This reflects that we are not holding a positive attitude about our bodies, and we are not really “indifferent” or neutral. However, while we talk about the imaginary superpowers, or to use abstract symbols, colors or shapes as metaphors to represent the self, the conversation is obviously more relaxed and comfortable. This part of the dialogue is illogical and relatively far from reality; they arouse some interesting fantasies or memories, which have no standard to evaluate the good or bad, right or wrong. Moreover, from the perspective of recalling and exploring their own wishes, it is a dialogue between us and our inner self. I realize that taking a conversation with ourselves provides great power. Many of us lack an environment to be heard and understood in reality. When we talk about a woman’s body, whether it’s belittling or praising, it’s always somewhat frustrating because it makes us feel that “you’re paying

attention to my body, but you’re not paying attention to me.”. Thus, when we feel the negative emotions caused by external oppression — the male gaze and sexual objectification, the way we make ourselves strong comes from the exploration and expression of our inner world. These conversations give me strong desire to express the inner voice of woman with my illustrations.

8.2. Illustration Creation

8.2.1. “Elegant Bug”

I translate the words from the self interview with visual language. I made a self portrait first in front of the mirror, and then superimposed the elements of imagination on it. In this drawing, the most prominent part is that I draw myself as an insect, with the arthropod body and multiple pairs of arms and thin and transparent wings. It comes from a strange fascination I have been having with insects. Although I fear bugs as much as most people do in reality, I can ignore the hostility between humans and insects for a while in the fantasy world. When I think about flying, the insect appears first in my mind rather than birds. I always believe that an insect is an elegant animal, small and delicate, with beautiful patterns on the body. Compared with cats or dogs with cute features domesticated by humans, their beauty is not flattering; they never need to please human beings. It gives them the qualities of independence and pride, which is in line with my expectations for myself.

Moreover, based on this insect body, I added some of the second preferred flying animal bird features, including gorgeous compound eyes and feathers. In the aspect of super-power, I add many interconnected brains to myself. Together with multiple pairs of arms, they symbolized the power of the intelligent world and the physical world respectively. This is a pursuit of absolute independence, which means that I do not need to rely on any other person to support and prove myself in the existence of both spirit and entities. I also added a childhood pet cat of mine to this drawing, an evocative element of gentle emotions and good memories. Ultimately, I gave myself the ability to change my weight number, and I write 0.00kg, which means a complete relief from weight anxiety.





如果不是一个“人类”,我愿意做一只鸽子

拥有羽毛的感觉会很轻盈吧,但我要颜色更鲜艳,有彩色的斑点

也可以是一种昆虫,如果我可以选择身体的功能,我想要能够飞翔。

有精致的透明翅膀,我也希望能任意控制我的体重,这个数字带来了太多的烦恼。

我还希望可以拥有多个脑袋以及很多对手臂,这样就可以同时处理很多事情。

跟物体建立情感很困难,但我喜欢的书,难读好看。

骑车的时候我从来不必担心自己好不好看。它让我觉得自由。

我最喜欢自己的部位是眼睛。它们有很好的形状。

最喜欢的动物是猫

小时候,曾有一只鼻子上有个小点的小猫陪伴过我很短。我还在想念它。

运动能让我暂时忘却对外表的忧虑。

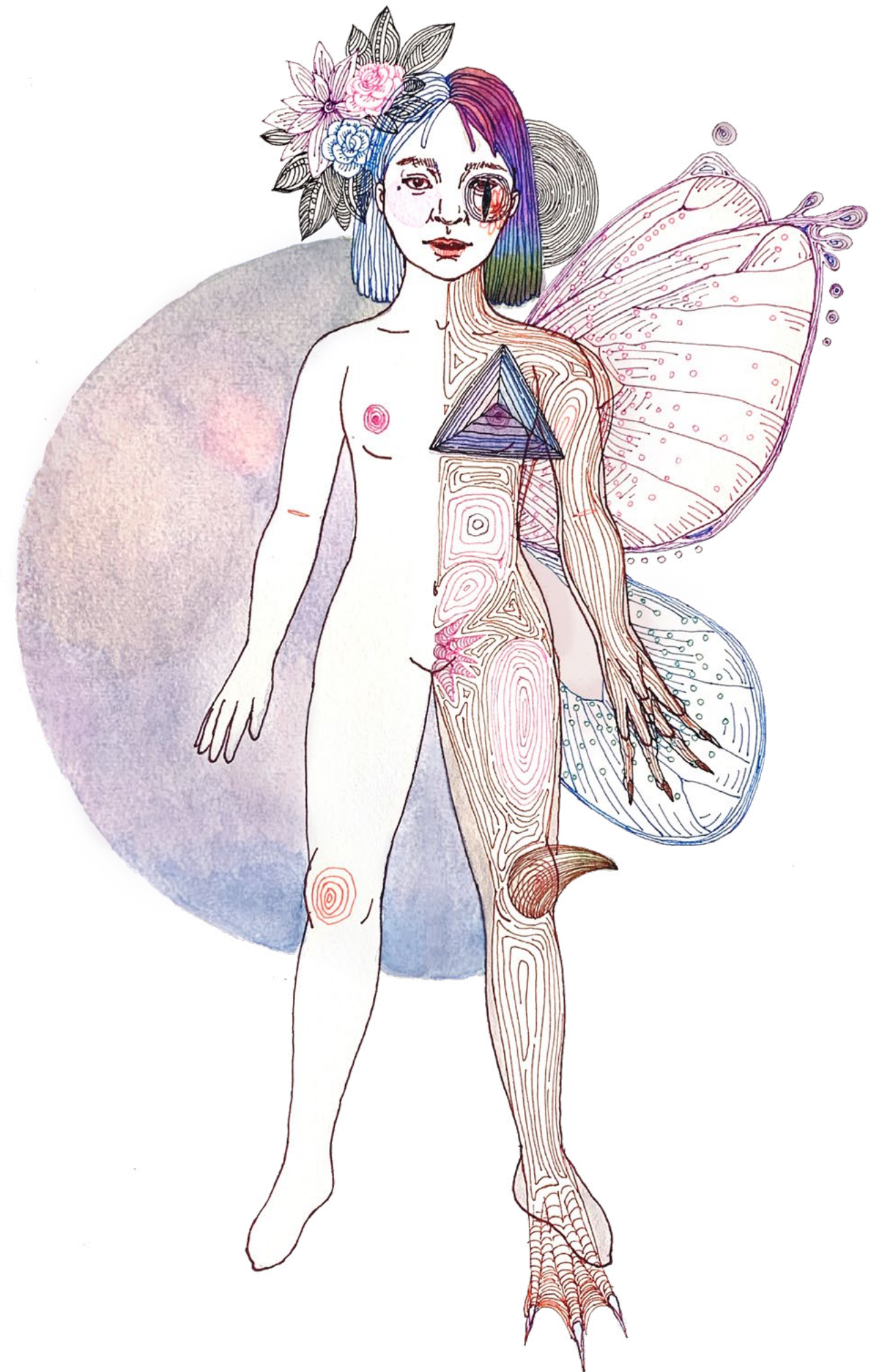
8.2.1. “Left & Right Half ”

The second illustration in this series is a concept map, which is not attached to someone’s specific and private thinking about their own bodies, but comes from my abstract expression of the concept of “imaginary body”. In this image, I want to create a sharp contrast between the left and right parts of the body, highlighting the right side of the strangeness, and how this strangeness gives it great power.

I add animal body features to a human body. She has the wings of a butterfly, which enables her to fly. There is fine dust on the wings, which in my imagination has the function of confusing and conquering people. She has a breast in the shape of a triangular cone instead of a soft and seductive circle. Also, her pudendum, which looks like a flower made of spines, is beautiful and dangerous, full of aggression. Her right hand and feet are sharp claws, and there is a hard horn on her knee. These are the physical strength I gave her. The eye is a cat’s eye. In ancient Chinese legends, cat’s eyes can communicate with Yin and Yang, and they can discern human souls. Her skin is covered with totem like patterns, as if the tendons and vessels are flowing slowly, holy and mysterious. When drawing this half body, it occurred to me that no matter in eastern or Western mythology, we all have a certain kind image of God, which is a combination of human body and animal body. It is a symbol of great power, and also shows that the spirit of nature is a mixture of justice and evil, wisdom and ignorance. Compared with the right half of the body, the left half of the ordinary human body

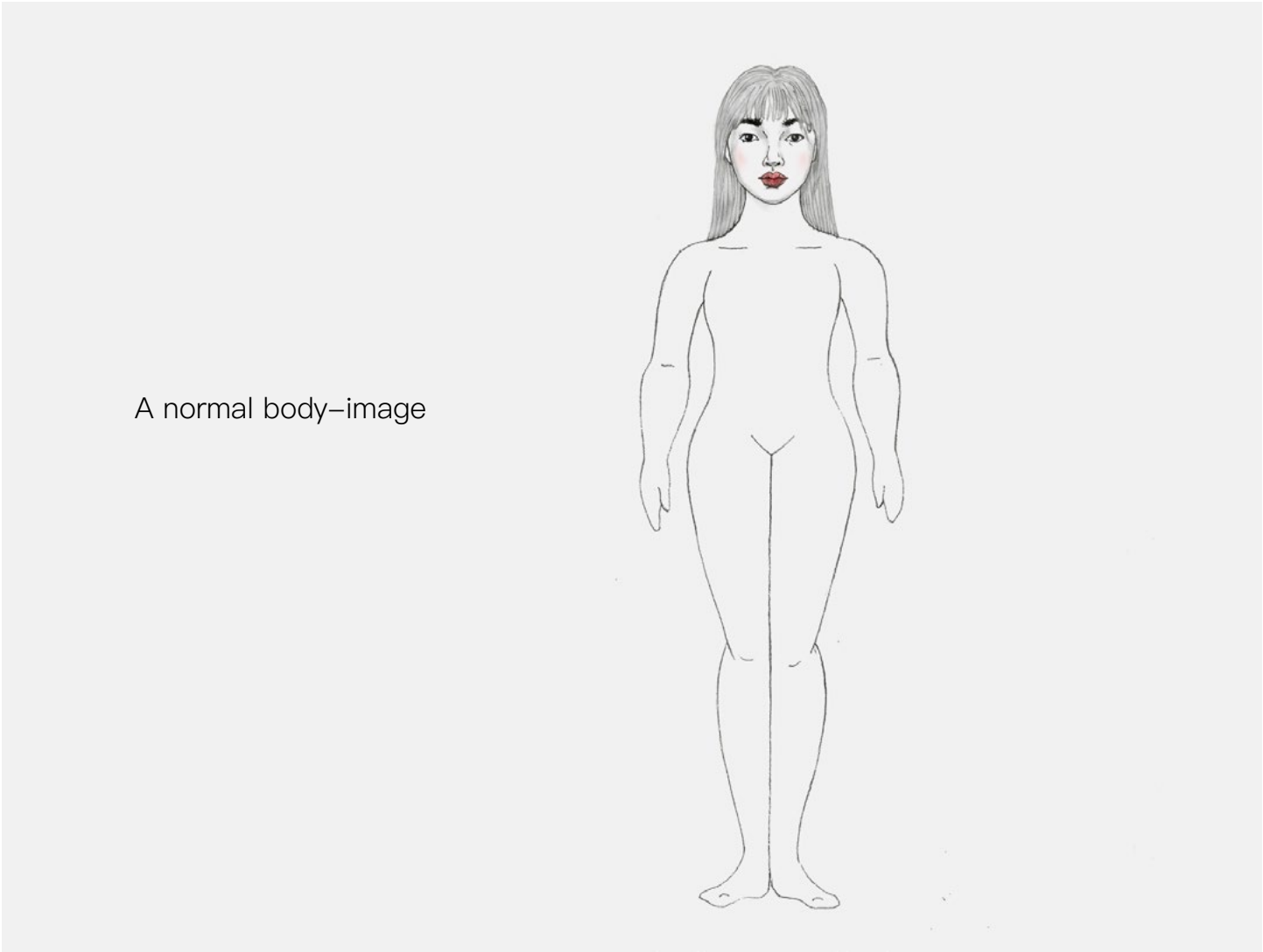
appears pure and fragile. There are flowers on her hair, what I want to say through them is that in reality, human beings may love nature, but it is difficult for us to trace and rediscover our deep relationship with nature. We are imprisoned by social relations. So we love flowers, but we can only put it on our hair as a decoration, but we can’t really turn flowers into a part of our body.

This illustration is a concentrated expression of the concept of imaginary body. It is full of metaphors and it even looks evil in some extent that is what give her image power and inviolability. But anyway, like the first one, it comes from my own previous knowledge. I urgently need new nutrition to nurture more such “monsters”. So, in the next stage, I began to get new inspiration from other people’s thinking.

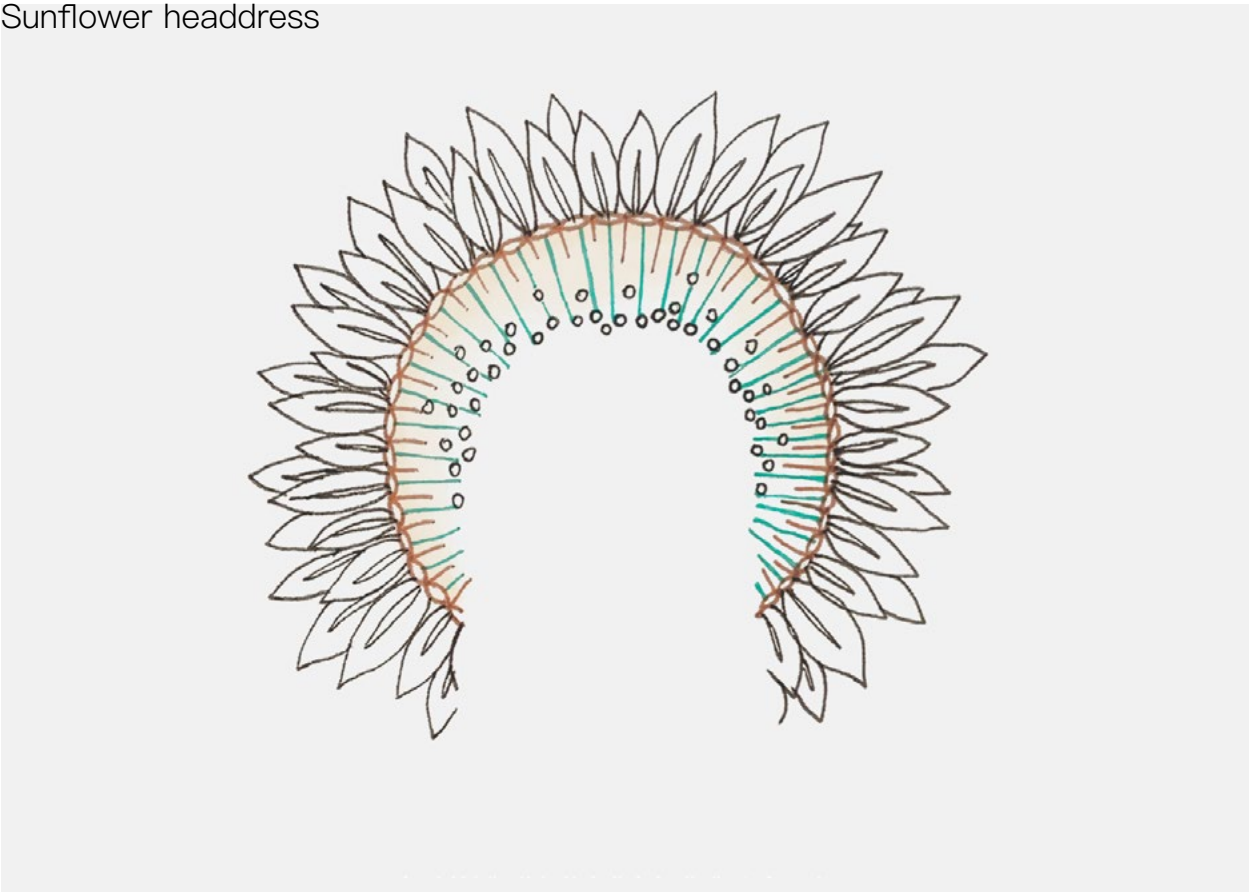


8.2.2. “Contradictory Mixture”

From this illustration, I digest and transform my conversations with others and show them in the form of drawing. I try a new method in creating the second illustration, which is the superposition of layers. I draw each element on each piece of paper independently and then stack them together, which allows me to modify and adjust flexibly in my painting. However, it is very time-consuming as I need to edit every layer individually. So it is not adopted in other illustrations.



Sunflower headdress



Snow Mountain



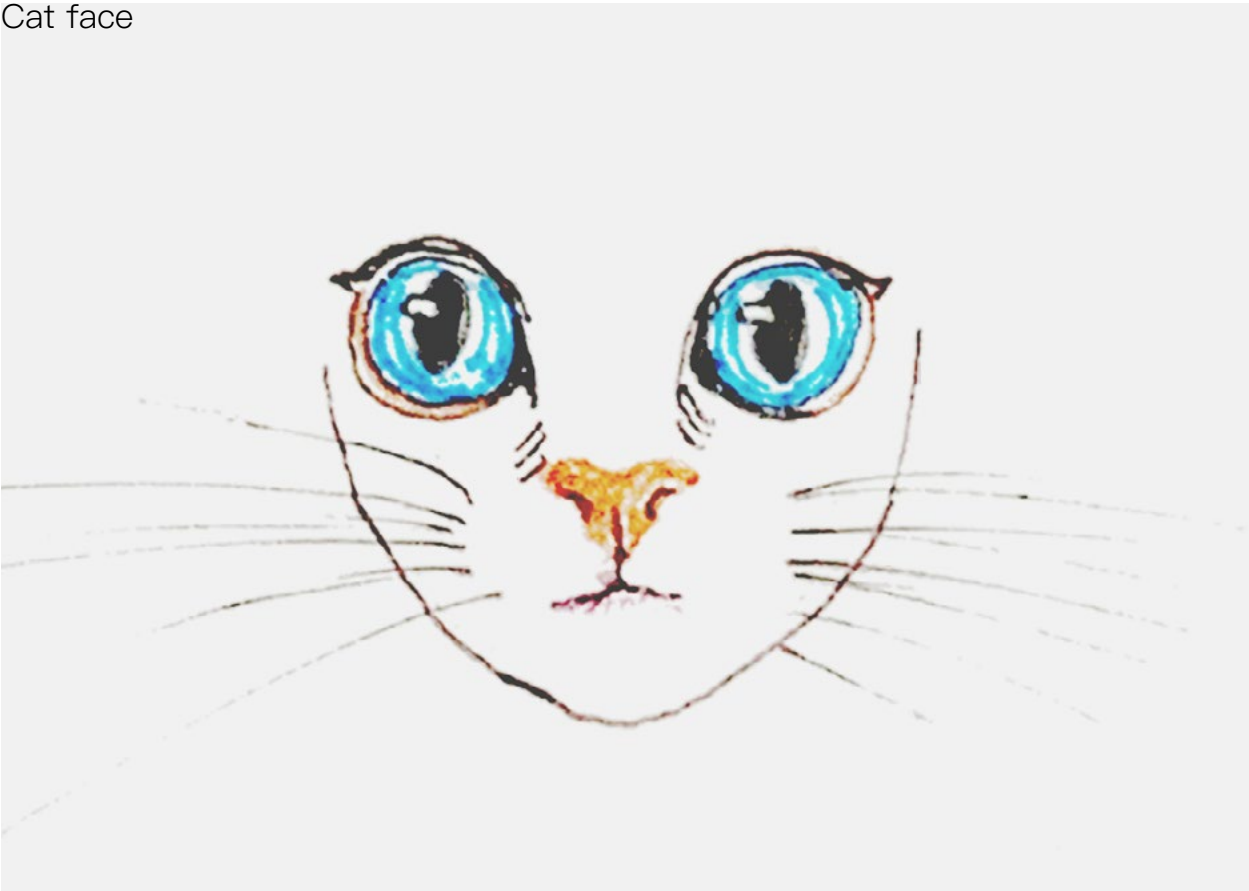
The rich hair



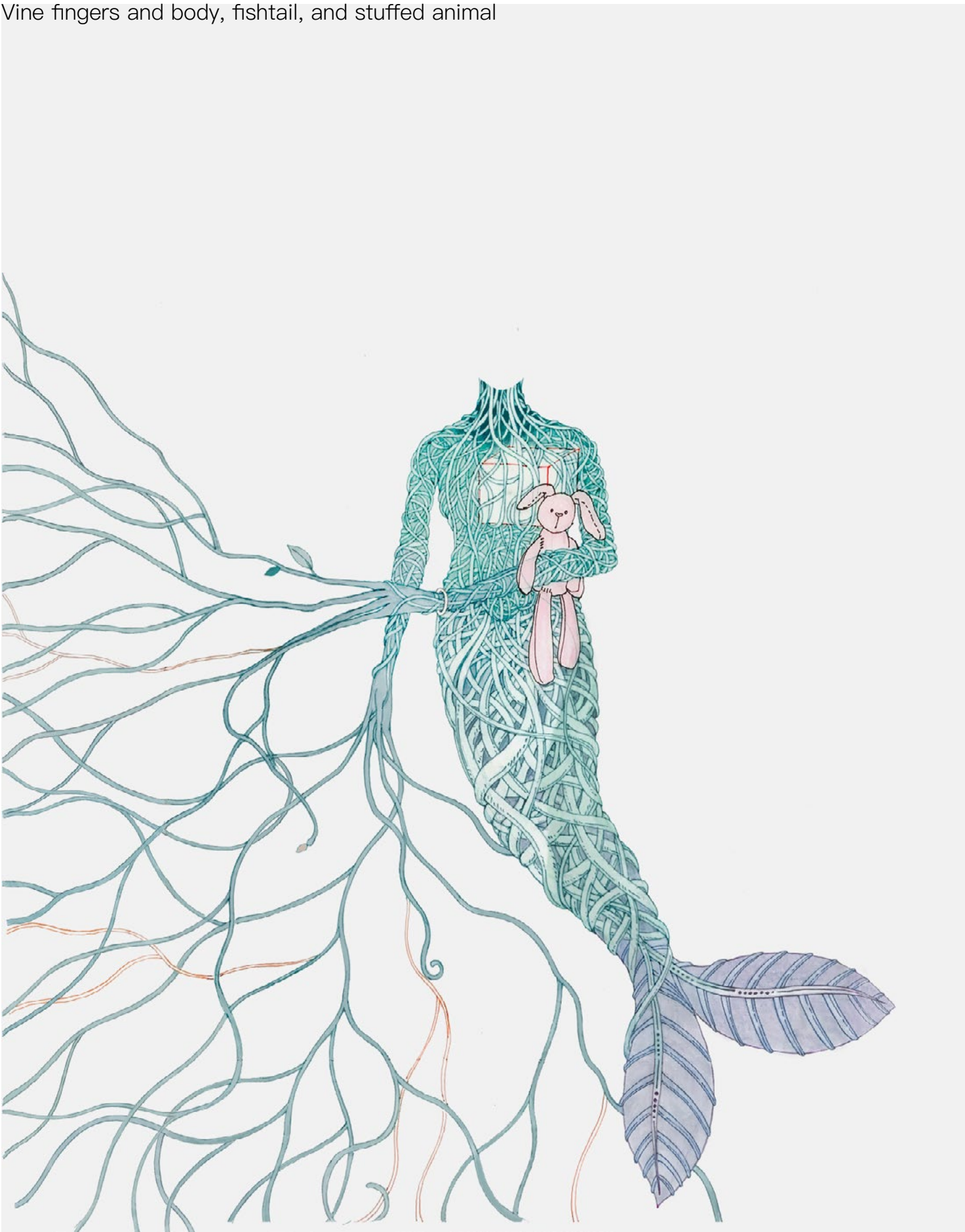
Heart: cat in a box



Cat face



Vine fingers and body, fishtail, and stuffed animal

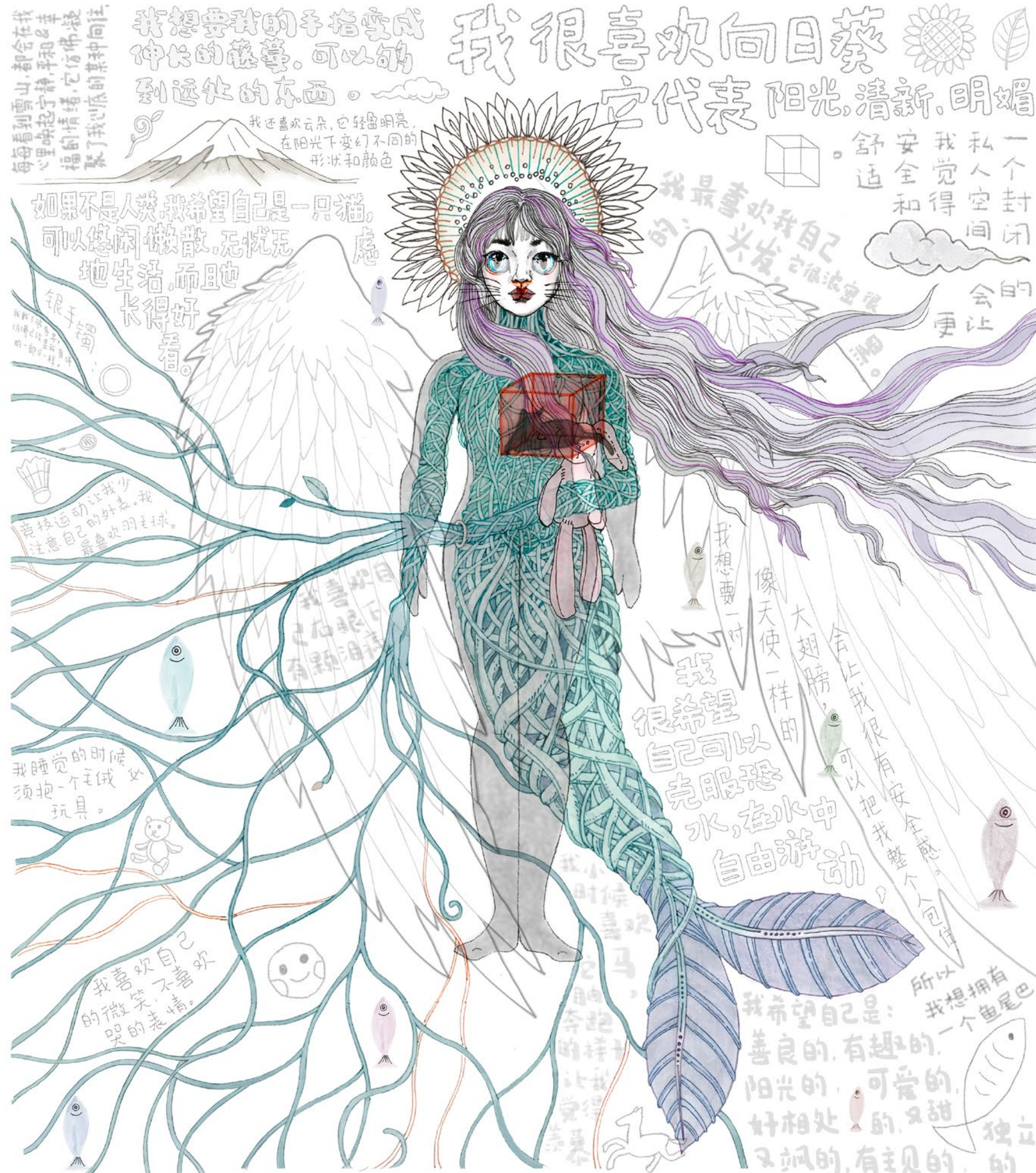


Big angle wings



In this piece of illustration, the body is a contradictory mixture of freedom and confinement, strength and fragility. She yearns for security and has a fear of the unknown, but she also hopes to overcome her fear and make herself stronger. Her heart is a cat in a box, which is her demand for a sense of security and stability. She has a huge fishtail, which allows her to swim freely in the water. That is what she (the person I had the conversation with) can't and fear to do in reality. Her fingers become vines, which can extend far away, breaking through the limits of space and distance; At the same time, these vines also tightly tie her own body: she is imprisoned by this freedom and power. She has huge, angelic wings. They enable her to fly and fight. But when she feels lonely and cold, the wings also become the providers of warmth and security, enveloping her whole body. Her hair is thick, with a sunflower wreath on it, representing brightness, warmth and enthusiasm. Her face is a cat face, beautiful and mysterious. Snow mountain represents tranquility and strength, while cloud is freedom. The combination of these elements makes the imaginary body look like a goddess of nature. But don't ignore, her arm is still holding a stuffed rabbit toy, which reveals her inner vulnerability.

The human personality is a complex mixture. It is universal and natural for contradictory characters, thoughts and love to appear in a single person. We all reconcile, and grow in the struggle with our expectations and disappointments. This is the charm of human nature, which is much more attractive than a so-called "perfect body".



8.2.4. “A Whole New World”

This illustration focuses more on the questions of “what would the world be like if humans could change their bodies at will? What change will happen in human society? What will that kind of life experience be like”? This imaginary body shows intense curiosity. There is a circle of flowers on her head, and it is actually the life trip of one single flower. The flower is born in the morning, bloom in the noon, decay and wither in the evening. This is a curiosity for the inhuman short life experience, and also a philosophical thinking about the life process. Is it possible for us to experience the ephemeral life with human body? The lower part of her body has become the hoof of herbivores, which means the worship and homage to the Faun in Greek mythology. It also symbolizes the possibility of establishing a new connection and mutual integration between human and nature. Her hands became cat’s paws. They were fluffy with pink pads, but they could also stick out sharp nails when attacking. It’s also a sign of returning to the wild, which can be both gentle and cruel. And, what if humans had tails? Would it share some of the functions of hands? And what would the social economy and cultural industry change with the existence of the tail? After the illustration was finished, I also discussed with my friend about whether human beings still need clothes in this imaginary world. Perhaps there, clothes no longer bear physical and moral functions, but merely a remnant of the old human society.





我和我身体的关系是：我很少关注，
也不喜欢审视我的身体，
我尽量回避去评价它，
可能我潜意识里认为这样可以
避免更多消极的情绪体验。

我希望我的形象给人的感觉：
简单的，清楚的，包容的，独特的。

如果不是人类，我
首先想成为一只
猫咪，因为它们
可以活得闲适自在。

我想做一朵花，
一朵长在路边纤
细脆弱的小花。

在一天内从出
生到盛开，
再衰老，
死亡一定是很奇妙的
生命体验。

我也想过
上长出蹄子，让腿
像希腊神话里
的牧神。

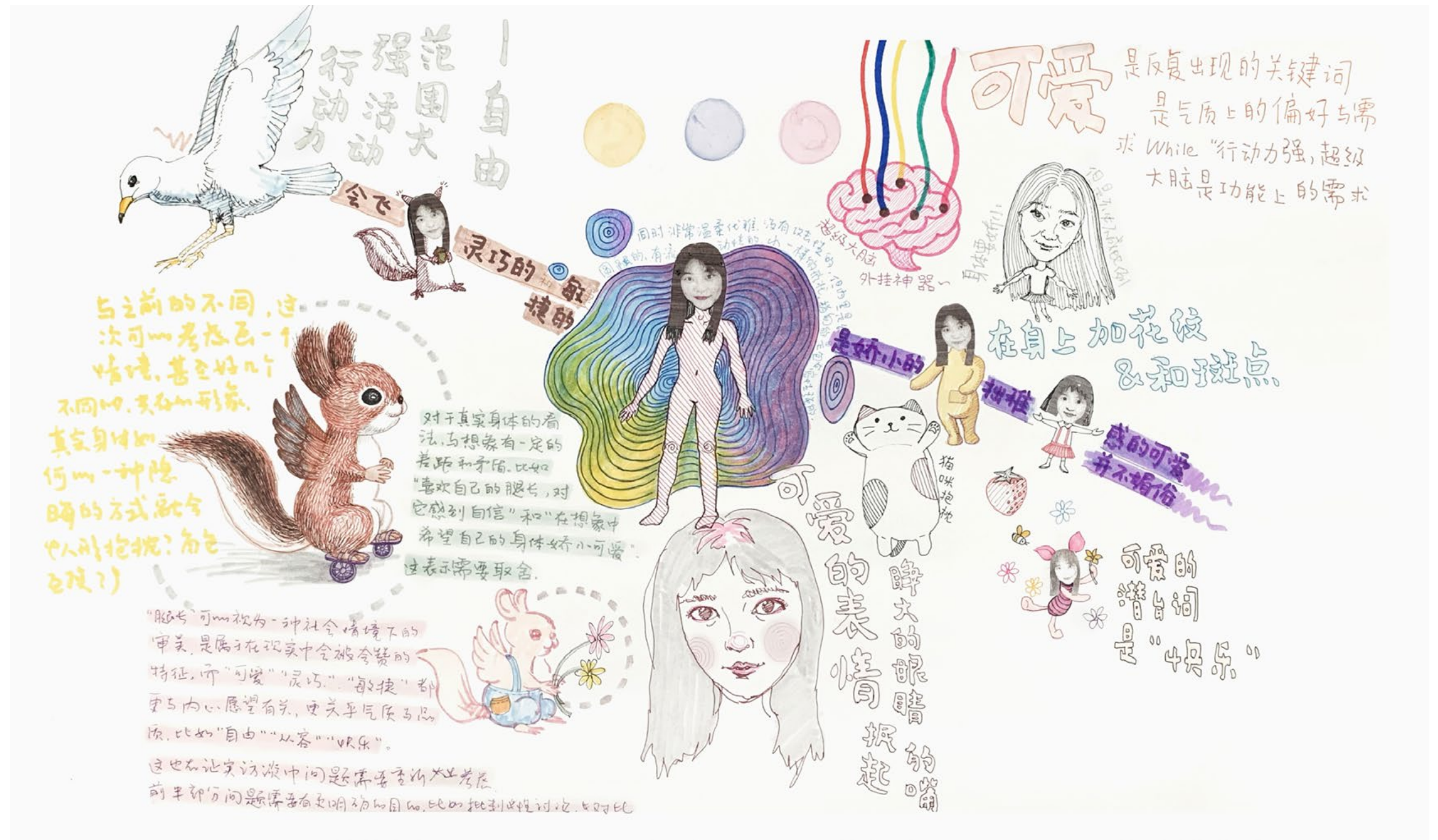
如果用一个形
状来描述自己，
我觉得是：高腰的裤子
容易让我觉得舒服和自信。

我想要一条
长而细的
尾巴，可以
卷住东西。
我会想象人
类的经济和文化产业会变
得多么不同，
如果人类有尾巴。



8.2.5. “The Meaning of Cute”

The key word for this illustration is “cute”. My friend imagine that her body would become small and cute. As a feminist, I am very sensitive to this word, because it often implies the preference for women’s youth, weakness and flattery in the general East Asian context, and weakens the power of women. But from my conversation with my friend and what I know about her, it’s clear that this word doesn’t share the same meaning here. So before drawing this illustration, I have drew a mind map to help me clarify the meaning of “cute”.



Strong action and wide range of activities—freedom



FLYING



BEING DEFT



A round, flowing, water like shape. It symbolizes the personal quality is inclusive, gentle, not aggressive, but strong inside.



SUPER BRAIN

SMALL BODY



CUTE

BUT NOT CLAPTRAP



PATTERNS & DOTS ON THE BODY

Consider drawing a scene in this illustration. Is it possible for several different bodies to appear at the same time? How to integrate her real body-image into the picture? Consider the form of toys or decorative paintings, so that the imaginary body is called the real entity in the picture, and the human body becomes the object of appreciation.



Her view of her real body is in contradiction with her imagination. She enjoys having long legs, which makes her more confident. But at the same time, in her imagination, she wants to have a small body. How to understand and choose?

Long legs can be regarded as a kind of aesthetic in social situations, which is a physical feature that will be praised in life. While cuteness and dexterity are more related to her inner desire, her expectation in temperament and quality, such as freedom



CUTE EXPRESSION AND SMILE ON THE FACE



"Happiness" is the subtitle of "cuteness"



I have draw some of her favorite cartoon characters in the visual map, such as Tele-tubbies (1997 BBC children’s program, aiming at children aged 1–4), Chibi Maruko-chan (Japanese animation series, depicting the daily life of a nine-year-old girl), Piglet from Winnie the Pooh, etc. I feel the temperament of these cartoon characters. They help me understand that when we remove the gender label and stereotype to see the trait of “cute”, it is actually a kind of temperament of friendliness to the world, and it represents childlike happiness, purity and innocence. Itself is a beautiful trait, but the gender position shaped by the social environment often makes the word stigmatized. Before I pay attention to the temperament of it belonging to whether a man or a woman, I forget that it is an individual’s human temperament first. Therefore, creating this illustration brings me thinking, and it is also a break and reconciliation between me and my gender position. It teaches me to see independent individuals before I see gender.

In this illustration, she has a fluffy squirrel body. Squirrel is a kind of cute little animal, but it is agile and alert, which makes its cuteness not stupid. She wants to have stronger mobility, such as the ability to move quickly and fly. So the little squirrel also has wings and it is wearing roller skates. She is attracted by the beauty of the world, and holds universal kindness to the world. These things she loves appear on her body in the form of patterns: flower, fruit, bird. But as mentioned above, this kind of kindness is not foolish, so she also has an super-intelligent brain, which

can draw knowledge directly from books. Her temperament can be summarized into an abstract shape, which is like a mass of water, or a constantly changing bubble. This shape is mellow without any angles, which represents goodwill and inclusiveness.



8.3. The Second Round Conversations & Project Review

I show each illustration to my interlocutor wondering her reactions and opinions. People have complex and subtle feelings for these illustrations. They can feel the relevance of these illustrations to their inner worlds, and our conversations are called back. At the same time, they also feel some embarrassment and discomfort, even offended a little. Indeed, most of us are more accustomed to containing our fantasy in our minds rather than making it an entity and a part of our body. It is undeniable that the combination of the human body with animals, plants or machinery, and the vivid visual works display is an offence to the deep-rooted social ethics in our minds, especially women.

We always have a contradictory attitude towards showing and expressing our true selves. On the one hand, we expect to express our inner self through appearances and stand out from others with our uniqueness. On the other hand, we are afraid of being too unique to be incompatible with mainstream social values and unacceptable by the collective. It is natural but also sad to suppress self-feelings to get social recognition. This is what every girl who pursues the “beauty” of “Internet hot face” and “being white, thin and young” feels. The social identity we seek brings us troubles and pain, but we can’t abandon it to face our real self – as what is the real self? The illustrations of “the imaginary body” are trying to answer this question. While drawing these, I always think about some people who dress strangely that we occasionally see in reality or in the news. Like people who have their faces covered

with the tattoo, the ones who have colourful hair, and the people who insist on wearing ancient clothes in public places. They are real life versions of the “monster body,” expressing their own existence and the idea of “I don’t need society to identify with me.” Not everyone understands or agrees with these behaviours, but we can’t deny the significance of their existence, that is, a questioning attitude: why does a person’s expressing their inner self become an offence to the collective? Is it the person who expresses it or the social environment itself that is problematic? This is also the question I’m asking through the imaginary body, that is, why does this image that reflects your own inner thoughts and expectation offend you in turn? What it offends is not our emotions, but some of the public orders, good customs and social ethics that we hold inside. And it is these ethical norms that try to educate us and require us to form a mediocre member of the social collective in a way that we are ignorant. They oppress us not only from the outside, but also from the inside, leading us to be ashamed of legitimate self-expression.

These illustrations are a mixture of the imagination of the people I have talked with, and my own organization, understanding, and recreation of the content. From dialogues to visual images, this is a multi-level and multi-stage process. It is the exchange and reflection of the ideas between me and them. At first, imagination is a vague idea that exists in our minds. I invite people to put it in words through the conversations, concretize it with various metaphors, and think about its

meaning to each of us in the process. This is the first translation. Then, I do the second translation through drawing. Finally I show the finished illustration works to my interlocutors. So far, the action of a double-reflection has been created. The illustration and the person’s mind are like two face-to-face mirrors. They reflect on each other and refer to each other. This is an interactive flow. Language communication and translation are often distorted to a certain extent for our inner ideas are broad and complex. What the creator can do is try to capture a fleeting moment to convey the vague turnover of ideas in the interaction between subject and object, environment and the heart. We use our visual works to convey these ideas. They are static, but the process of creation, as well as the moment when the work and the viewer look at each other face to face, have occurred the exchange of ideas and mutual inspiration, which is dynamic. For me, I get inspirations from my conversations with my friends. I capture the complex and wonderful ideas in that moment and generate knowledge, creating hybrid and strange illustrations. They the reflection and variation of the resistance to body ethics that once flashed in people’s minds. And new, fuzzy and messy, potential communication with the viewers happen when the works are in display.

9. Conclusion

My thesis project comes from my deep concern about the issue of Chinese women's body aesthetics and self-identity. I see and personally feel that the rigid aesthetic standards popular in modern Chinese society, which take the white, thin and young as the beauty, are destroying Chinese women's comprehension of self-worth and strength. I try to discuss whether we can change the way we look at our bodies from the perspective of women's inner feelings. In the research, the study of reflective self and sexual objectification theory enables me to see more insightfully how women internalize these aesthetic standards and form self oppression; transfeminism theories enables me to understand that one way for women to empower themselves is to emphasize the legitimacy of individuals being unique, rather than to reform themselves to cater to the dogma of the outside world; through the study in body-image, I see that our cognition of our body at the crosspoint of internal and external interaction. The negative relationship between us and our bodies is long-term structured and multi-level. The different aspects provide space for imagination to intervene. Through these researches, I develop this practical method of interview-illustration-reflection. I use literal and visual language to interact with participants, so that this interactive process provides an opportunity for contemplation. I observe and collect reactions and reflections from participants and myself at each stage. I'm not afraid that some parts of the process can be disturbing. I think the most important value appears in the discussion and reflection of discomfort.

Illustration is an artistic way of practice and expression. Through drawing I actively explore complex problems and promote the emergence of potential discussion direction with intuition and sensibility. And the final image also causes visual and emotional impact shock with its intuitiveness and hybridity. The metaphorical, elusive and powerful inclusiveness of drawing echos with the complex concept of self as expression of emotion and narration. As an illustrator, drawing as a medium of thinking and communication is effective for me.

Up till now the practice path I am experienced in is using dialogue and drawing to create the exchange of imagination and images, which takes place between me, my images and my interlocutors. What I will be more concerned about in the next stage is the more far-reaching impact that can happen after the completion of the image creation. My illustration is a tool for me to inspire and explore myself. When I use the dialogue with others as my inspiration and present these illustrations to others for feedbacks, I need to further think about what it means to me, to my interlocutor and more potential external audiences. Are the works meaningful only to me and the people I talk to? Does the thinking around it necessarily need the assistance of linguistic dialogue? Is it possible to spread and apply this artistic method more widely? These illustration images of human body's misappropriation and transformation can become avatars, which can arouse more thinking and resonance with its critical and rebellious attitude, and that would be the direction my further exploration goes and efforts being taken.

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11. Appendix

More Works of Mine in Grad Study

11.1. Video: Collage of Face–Oct. 2019

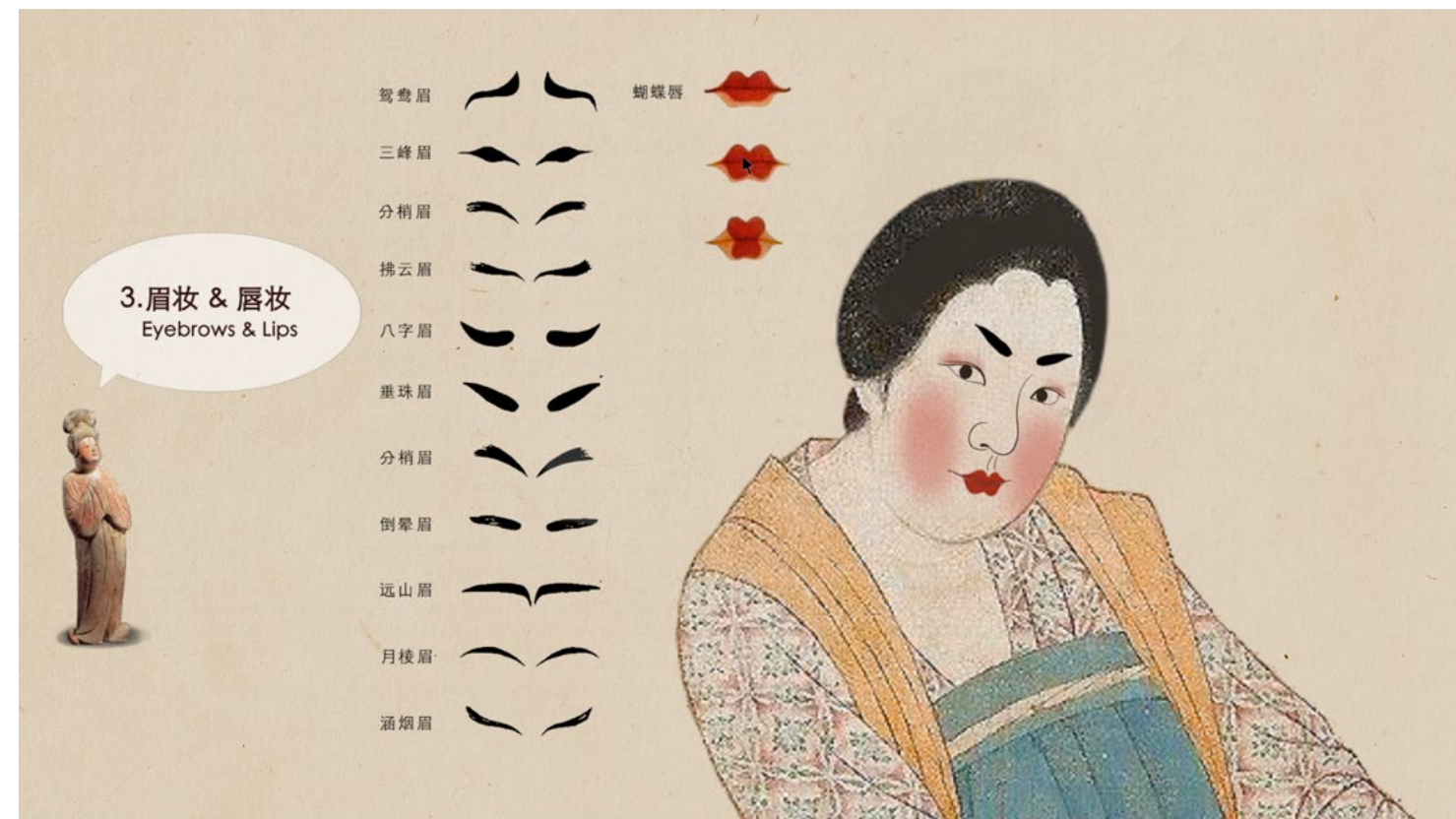




11.2. Application: Diversified Women
Aesthetics in Ancient China–Mar.2020



Through this project, I discuss the diversity and variability of aesthetics from the perspective of ancient China. This application takes the Tang Dynasty as an example. Users could input their own photos, choose and match the makeup and clothing of the Tang Dynasty, and finally get a digital Chinese painting in Tang style of their own.





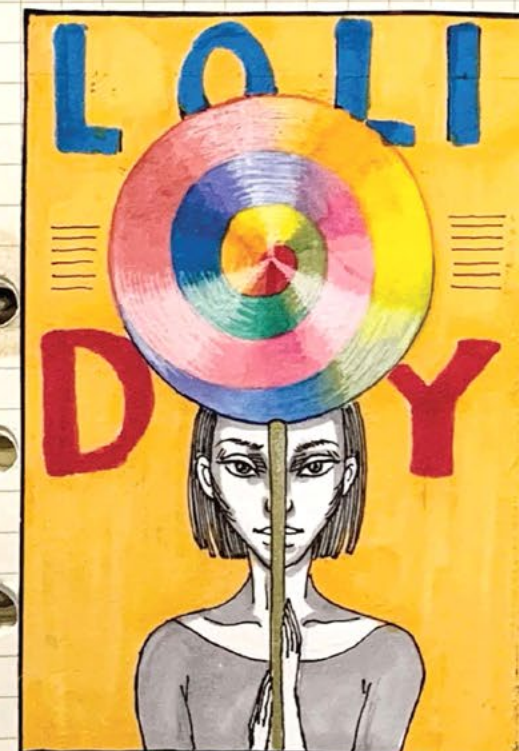
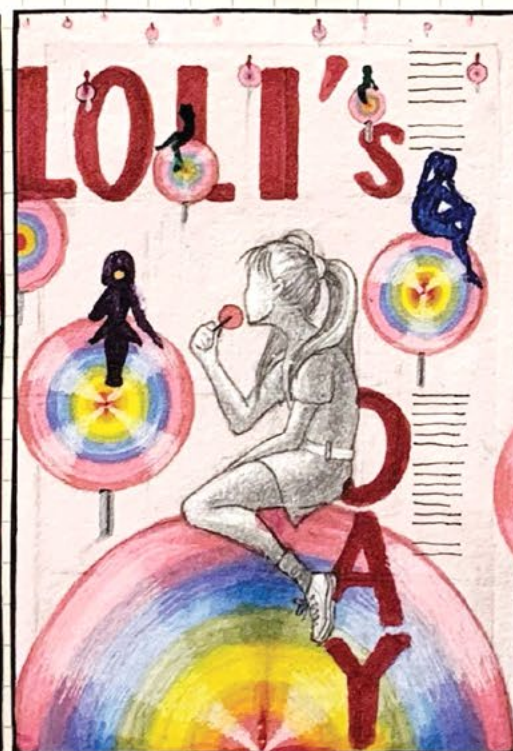
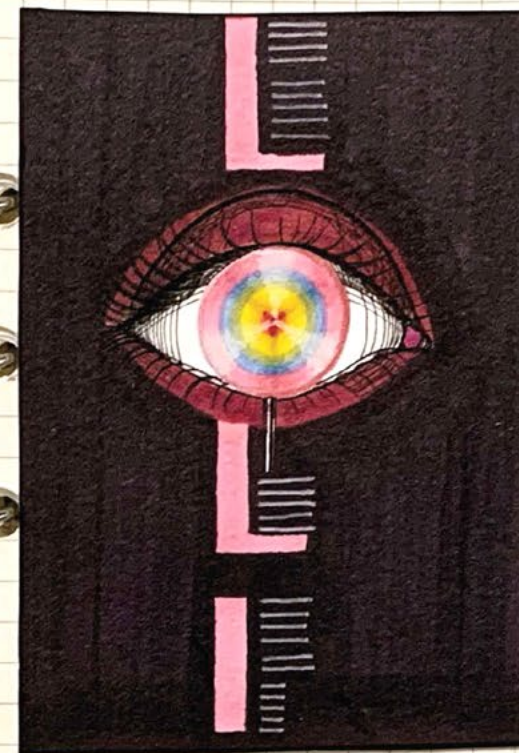
11.3. Communication Design Project: Loli's Festival–June–Aug. 2020

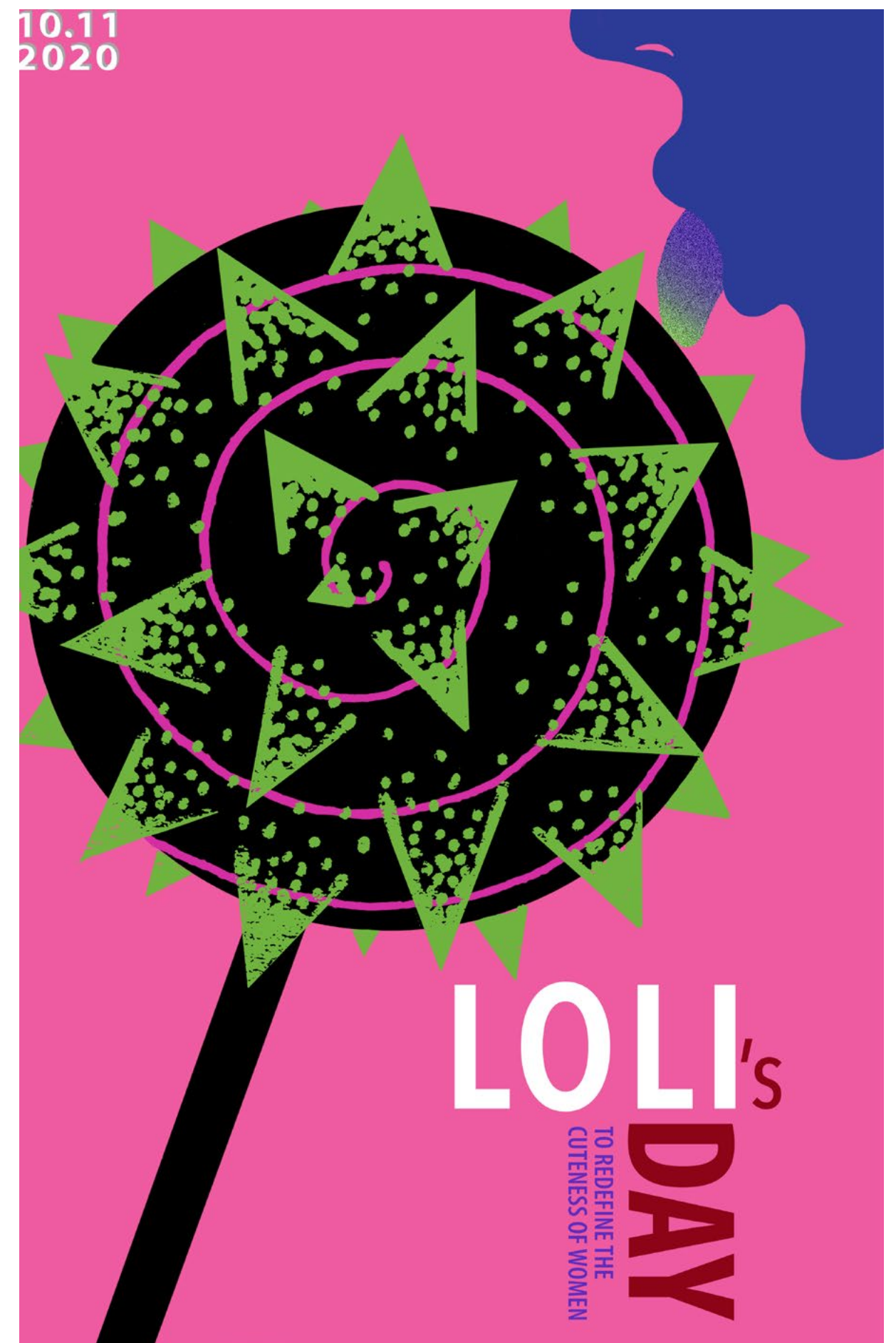
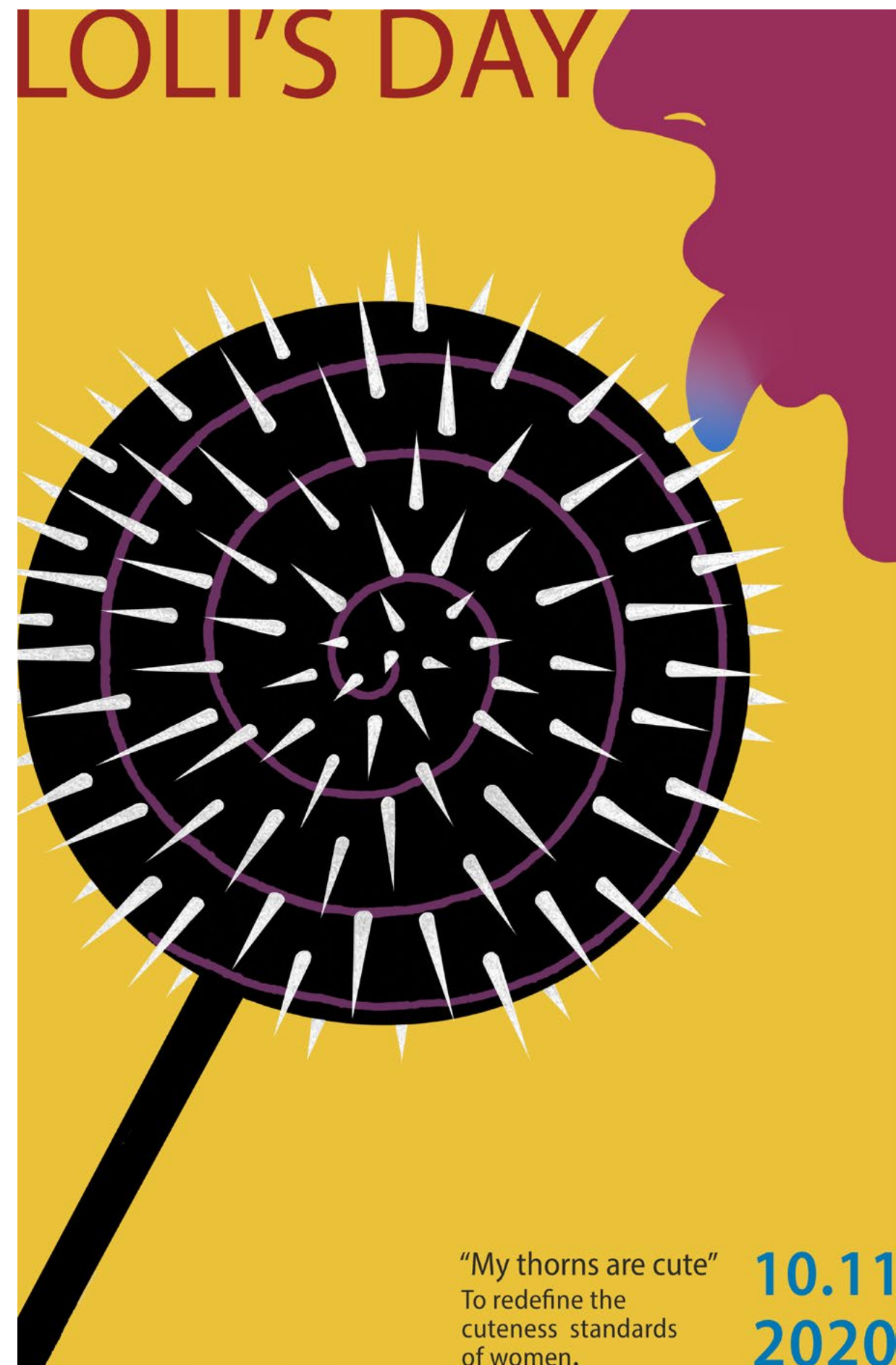
“Loli” is a variant of “Lolita”, which is from the novel Lolita published by Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov in 1955.

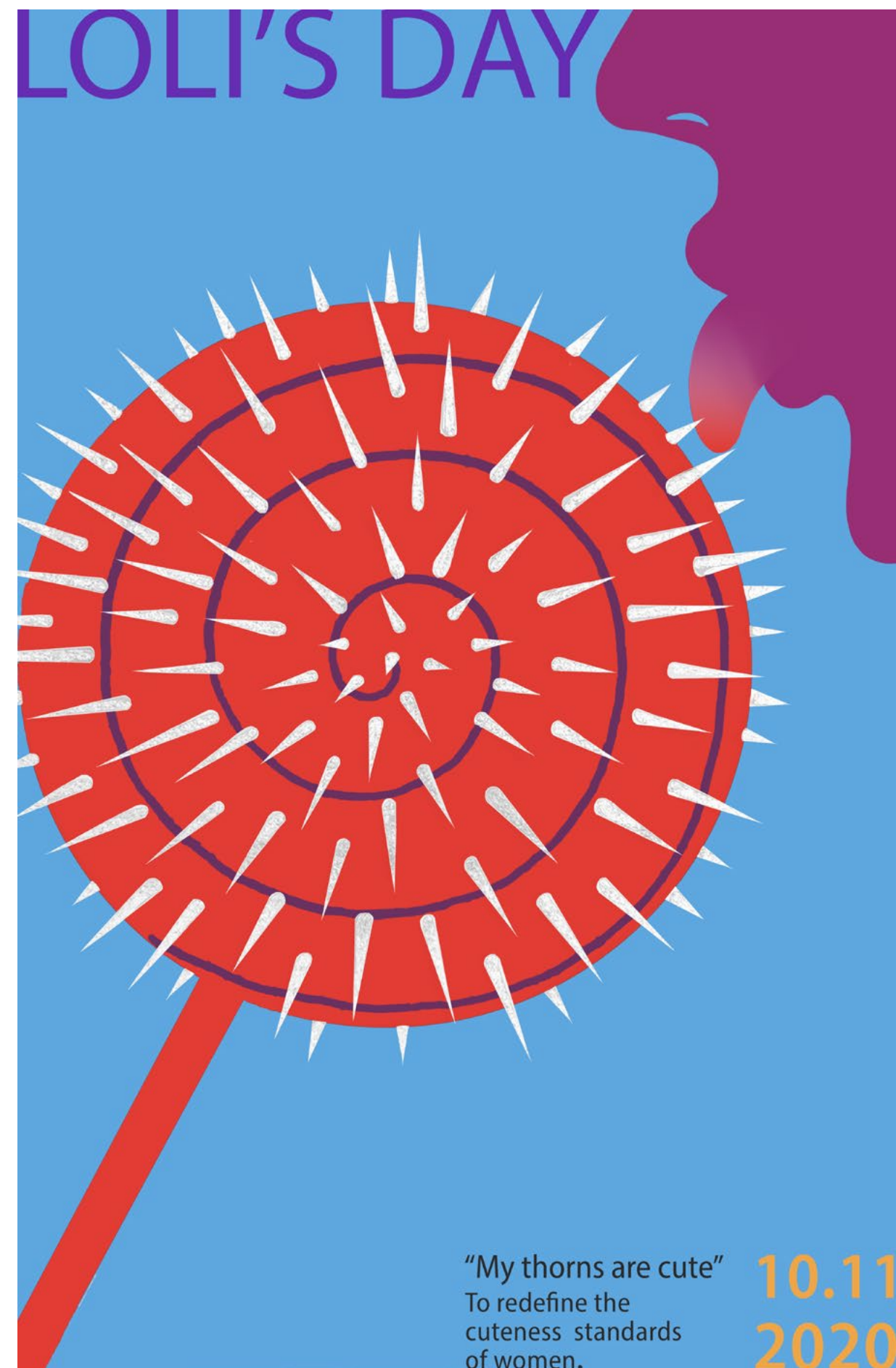
The Loli Festival date is October 11st., because “1011” looks like “LOLI”. This festival is a very small-grouped and informal “Loli” subculture product in China, expressing an aesthetic preference for “cute girl”, and this cuteness mainly comes from the innocent and pure feeling of the child-likeness. In its development, this concept is male-gazed and women-disempowering.

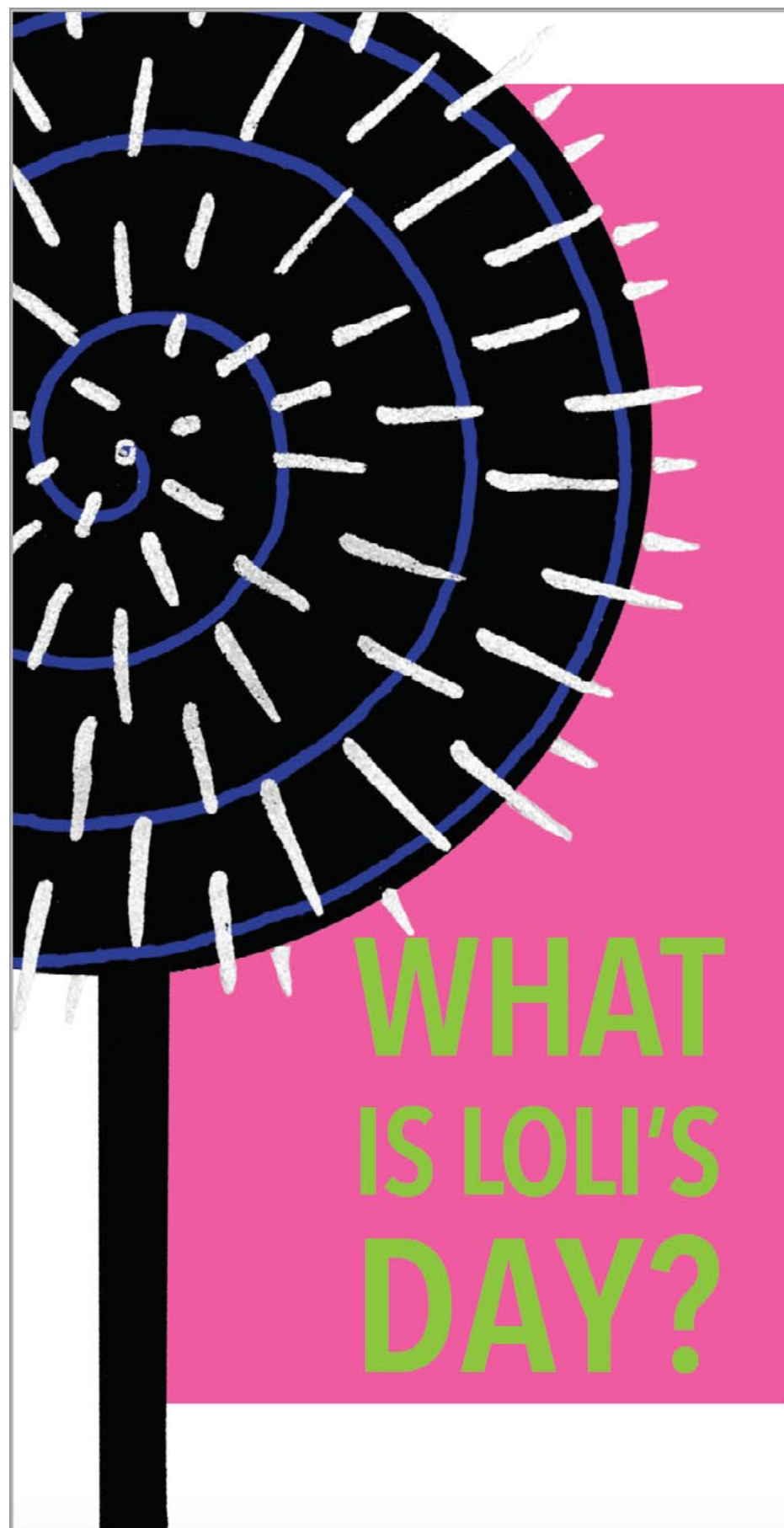
In this project, I take communication design to question the aesthetics and values behind Loli culture, and through the development of a set of graphics I redefine the standard of cuteness of women. I choose the image of “licking lollipop”, which often appears in Loli subculture. I add aggressivity in this scene to get rid of its erotic meaning, and make it a symbol of female power. The early hand-drawing drafts, posters, and brochure designs are displayed.











The "Loli's Day" date is October 11, because "1011" looks like "LOLI.". Originated in the Chinese Internet environment, this festival is a very small-grouped and informal "Loli" subculture product, expressing an aesthetic preference for young girls' pure, innocent and cute appearances.



HOW TO BECOME A "LOLI"?



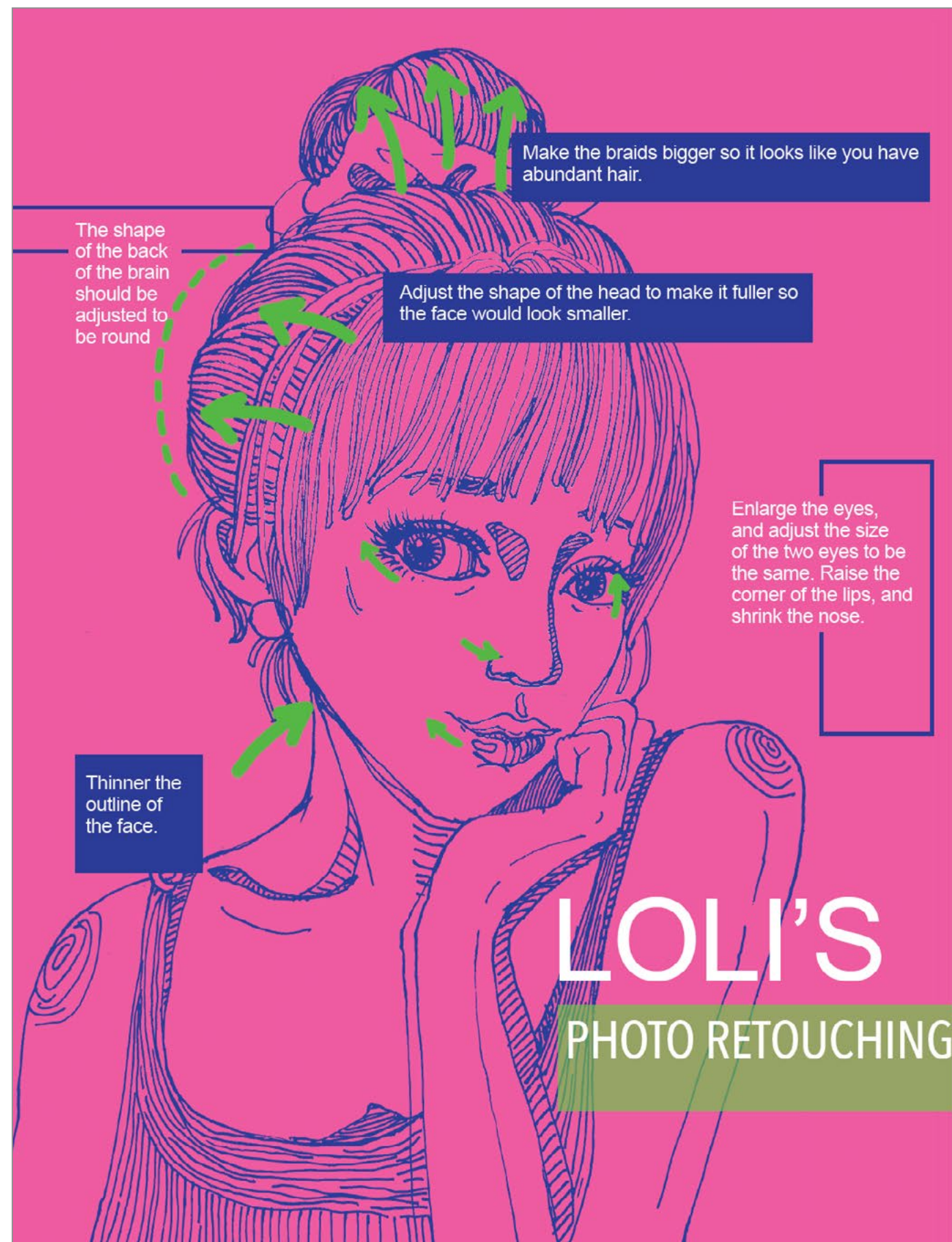
Dressing Style: put on the gorgeous Victorian style dress, with the corresponding make-up, and practice lifting the skirt with both hands and circling;

Standing Exercises: stand and walk with toes close and heels away. This kind of action looks like a child learning to walk, looks naive and lovely.

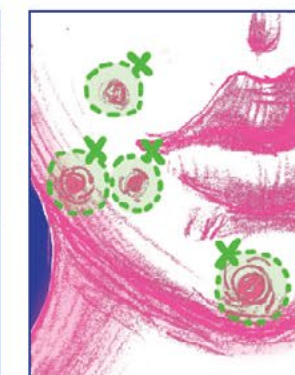
Sitting Posture Practice: the sitting posture chooses to hold the leg as far as possible, can highlight the lovely temperament.

Social Behavior: practice looking up 45 degrees at other people, which would enlarges your eyes, contracts your chin, and makes you look younger.





Shrink the abdomen.



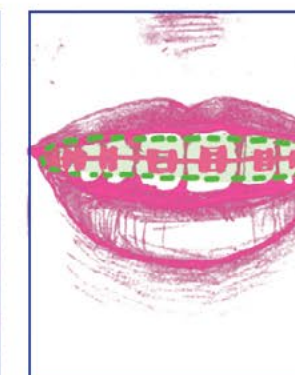
Remove pimples.



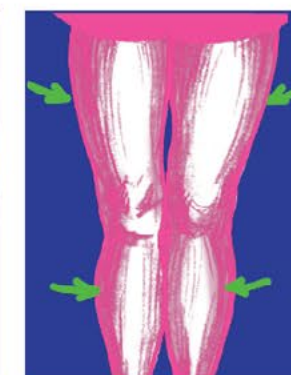
Remove the stretch marks.



Remove the scar.



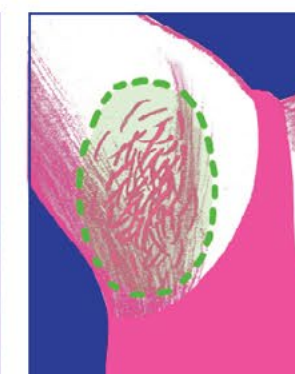
Invisible orthodontic appliance.



Make the legs thinner.



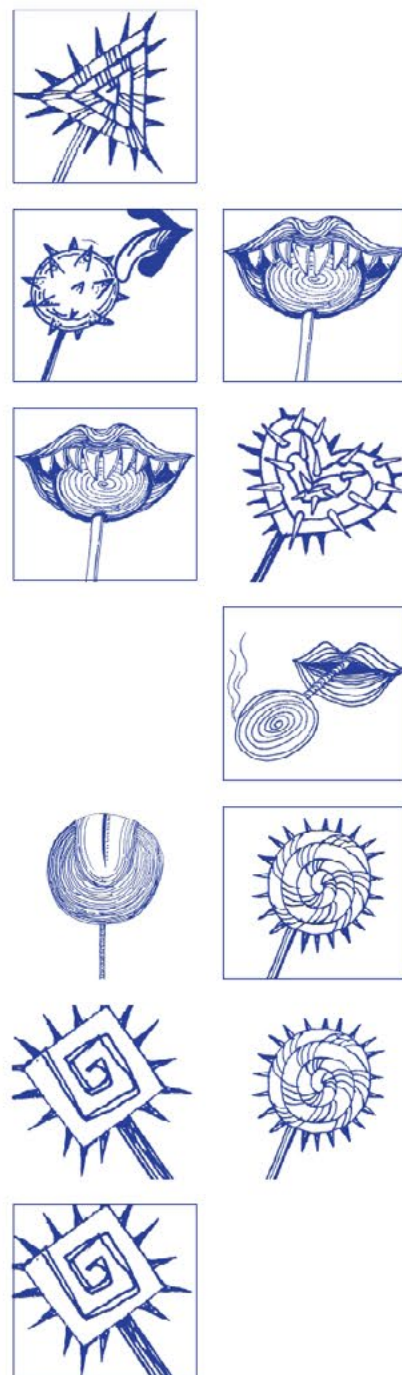
Remove the birthmark.



Remove the armpit hair.



Remove the crow's feet.



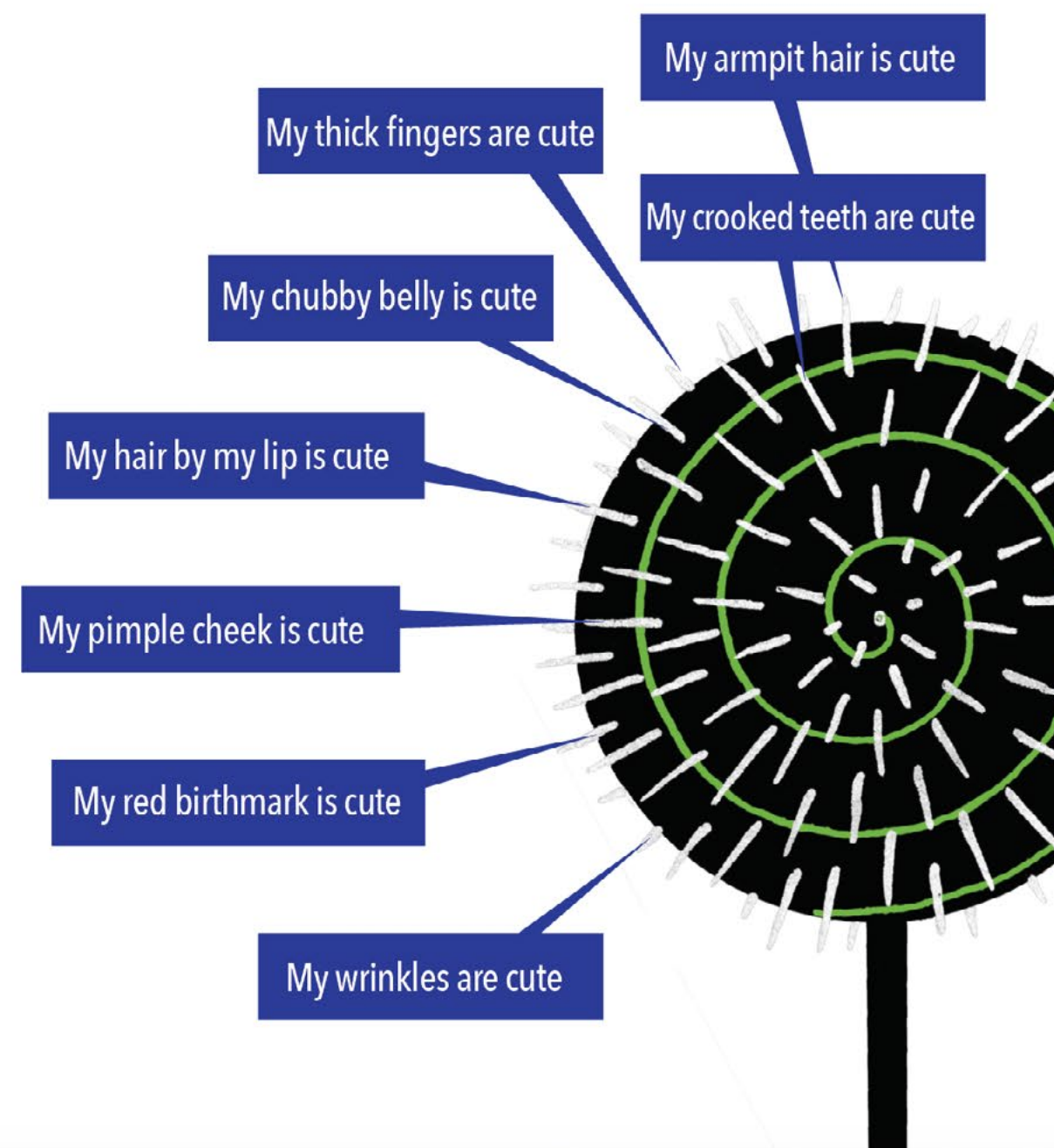
Participate in Our Photo Collection Activity!

1. Buy the badge of "Lollipop with thorns" on our website, or you can make your own lollipop;
2. Examine your own body and reflect: what are you dissatisfied with about your body (such as what makes you feel "ugly" or a sign of aging)? Why aren't you satisfied? Does it make you feel bad because of your own feelings, or because of the external evaluation?
3. Find one part of your body that you decided to change your attitude to and accept, take pictures and print it out, or draw it (pay attention to the specifications match your badge). Observe how you feel in the process.
4. Put your painting or photo in your badge and fill the blank on the stick "my ____ is/are cute".
5. Your badge is finished! You've turned the characteristics you once hated into your own pride. Put it on and take a picture and send it to us!

BADGE CAMPAIGN

MY THORNS ARE CUTE

Lollipops don't have to be cute, and women don't have to be cute. Or, we don't have to follow the traditional standard of "cuteness". A lollipop can have thorns, like every imperfect features in our body.



THE IMAGINARY BODY
THE IMAGINARY BODY
THE IMAGINARY BODY
THE IMAGINARY BODY
THE IMAGINARY BODY
THE IMAGINARY BODY
THE IMAGINARY BODY

