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History of Illustration

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### Blue Jeans amongst the Sea

Perhaps one of the most influential figures of the contemporary art scene belongs to Taiwanese-American Illustrator and fine artist, James Jean. Born in Taiwan and raised in Parsippany-Troy Hills, New Jersey, Jean graduated in 2001 from the School of Visual Arts in New York City<sup>1</sup>. After graduating, Jean became a cover artist for DC and worked his way to earn a plethora of achievements that included seven Eisner awards, two gold medals awarded by the Society of Illustrators of Los Angeles, and a gold medal from the Society of Illustrators of New York<sup>2</sup>. In addition to contributing to several publications such as Rolling Stone, ESPN, Time Magazine, and Prada<sup>3</sup>, Jean produced an extraordinary work for Guillermo del Toro's film, "The Shape of Water".

Figures entwined with one another are delicately focalized within the composition as encompassing sea foliage directs the viewer even further to the heart of the character's embrace. Thoughtfully, Jean fabricated each form with subtle calligraphic line-work to transcribe a deeply sensuous, evocative and unassailable bond.

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<sup>1</sup> WOW X WOW. "James Jean - Artist Profile." WOW X WOW. September 16, 2016. Accessed April 12, 2019. <https://wowxwow.com/artist-profile/james-jean-ap>

<sup>2</sup> WOW X WOW Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> WOW X WOW Ibid.

Jean's formal communication of dynamic verticals penetrating upwards through the figures and their descent, consequentially creates a new form of vocabulary for the definition of intimacy. Body to body, the pair refuses any room for space; entering each other not only physically, but spiritually. Accented specs of sublime light reinforces this notion, while jointly providing crucial pictorial harmonization and fluidity.



A GUILLERMO DEL TORO FILM THE SHAPE OF WATER IN THEATERS DECEMBER 8TH

James Jean, final teaser poster for *The Shape of Water*

Once more, our attention shifts back to these orbiting plant life as identifiable forms of expression for femininity and masculinity coming together as one phenomena. Virile stems juxtaposed with a looseness affirmed by feminal leaves, echo the female's suspended hair and the fins tracing along the aquatic creature's back. Such expressive and lively methods of approaching form, emphasizes the content's erotic fever in softly weighted detail. When Guillermo del Toro was interviewed about the film's poster, he stated that it was the delicate nature and beautiful line work that is both realistic yet elevated to a uniquely individual style, that assured the Mexican filmmaker for James Jean to be the proper artist to illustrate the concept<sup>4</sup>.

Equally as tender in his approach as the image's content, Jean began the piece with a traditional charcoal drawing, finalizing the work digitally with an overlay of blue and white shimmer. Pulling inspiration from Gustav Klimt's, *The Kiss*, he curated the figure's embrace through suggestions of yin and yang, having the woman illuminated against the darker contrast of the male's skin<sup>5</sup>. When comparing Jean's work to Klimt's painting, the similarity between the two is outstanding. When approaching the application of the male sea creature, Jean expressed in an interview, "It just seemed natural for me to hide the face because the form and silhouette of his body are so striking to begin with," he said. "I wanted the creature to stay more mysterious and have the viewer project their own idea of what he would look like."<sup>6</sup>

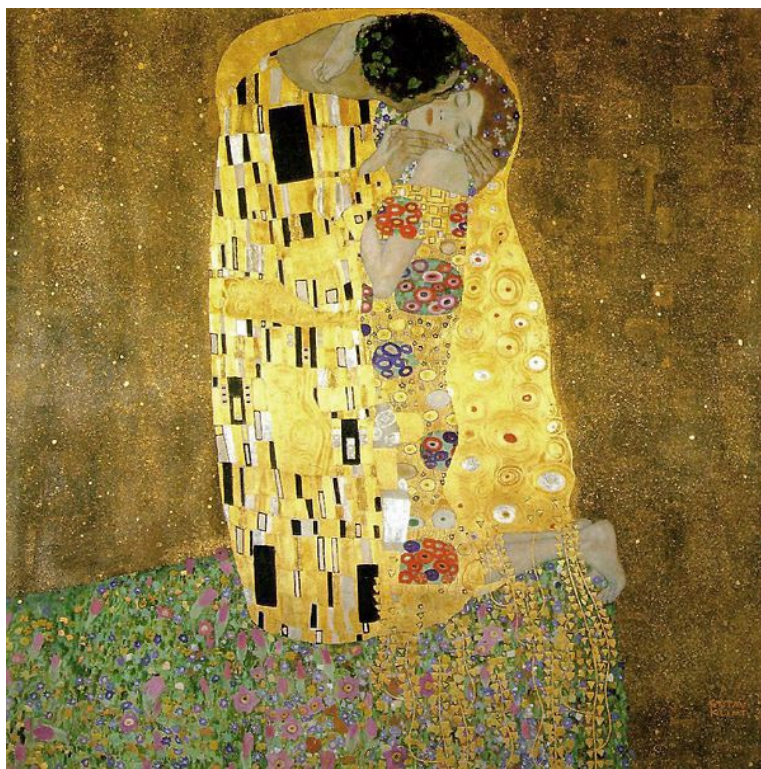
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<sup>4</sup> Murphy, Mekado. "The Hand-Drawn Journey of the 'Shape of Water' Poster." The New York Times

<sup>5</sup> The New York Times, Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> The New York Times, Ibid

As explored in Jean's work, Klimt also obscures the face of the male figure. The familiar sense of mystery and passion was executed expertly in Jean's rendition. In both works, the figures are suspended- albeit in different whimsical settings, yet nonetheless equally transcribes an utterly raw and internal sensation.



*Der Kuss*, 1908, Gustav Klimt

*“ The universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine.”*

- James Jean

## Works Cited

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