

# DRAWING THE LINES

By DANI OSORIO

We've all witnessed the current trend that's thrust adult coloring books into a surprising spotlight. Danish gender sociologist Cecilie Nørgaard has put an unusual spin on the craze, though. She pulled together drawings by 30 artists and illustrators from around the world to inspire open reflection on gender and diversity. Each artist created an image that challenges gender stereotypes and perceptions.



Cecilie Nørgaard says her mission is to “increase gender equality for everybody.” But why a coloring book? She felt that discussions around gender equality needed new ways to raise awareness, and the book certainly takes a creative and meditative approach to the topic.

“Art has the opportunity to ask questions without words,” Nørgaard says. “Art can touch you in other dimensions and open you for new reflections.” She realized that gender

research is often complex and very academic, so she wanted to create something more accessible as a tool for reflection for people outside the world of research.

As a child, Nørgaard was a bit of a tomboy as an act of rebellion. She started thinking about gender when she was seven, when all her friends asked her the same question: Why don't you want to play with dolls? “I thought it was some kind of conspiracy theory,” she explains.

“Why did they independently from each other ask the same question? One day I found out that it was because I was a girl. And that there were certain expectations associated with being a girl.”

She had been unaware of these expectations and never felt compelled to follow the norms, but when her friends made her aware, it had a surprising effect. “What happened was that I became angry, didn’t want to fit in, and started my process towards creating knowledge on how these structural dynamics work,” Nørgaard says. “Later on this became the object for my professional life too.”

Conversations on gender diversity are typically centered around two main approaches. There’s the feminist movement with a focus on equal rights, equal pay, diversity in the workplace, overturning gender norms, etc. On the flip side, gender diversity in the LGBT movement is related to the notion of a binary identity in which an individual doesn’t identify with the gender they were born into.

Nørgaard’s coloring book casts a wide net across gender diversity, as artists seek to cover multiple interpretations of the concept.

She says, “For me, gender diversity is about the variations of gender practices no matter which gender you identify with. And potentially it has nothing to do with sexual orientation.”

She adds, “I am longing for, and working towards, a world where everybody has the possibility of doing gender in any which way they want without being looked at as misfits.” Nørgaard realizes that her approach is moving away from the mainstream: “The more traditional interpretation of LGBT diversity is more binary and built on a wish of being tolerated as a minority. For me, the focus is on breaking down these power relations and changing the norms that create deviations and minorities so no one has the power to tolerate others or others the powerlessness to be tolerated.”

Nørgaard believes the biggest inspiration in modern feminist thinking is still the American

poststructuralist, sociologist, and queer theoretician Judith Butler.

Scholars like Butler believe that gender is predominantly a social construct—in other words, we are not just born as a girl or a boy, but rather, we are born into discourses that construct and control. Butler argues that gender is both dynamic and fluid, so it potentially can develop in diverse ways.

Diversity and gender equality are inherently related. In his book *The Gendered Society*, American sociologist Michael Kimmel argues that “gender difference is the product of gender inequality and not the other way around. In fact, gender difference is the chief outcome of gender inequality because it is through the idea of difference that inequality is legitimated.”

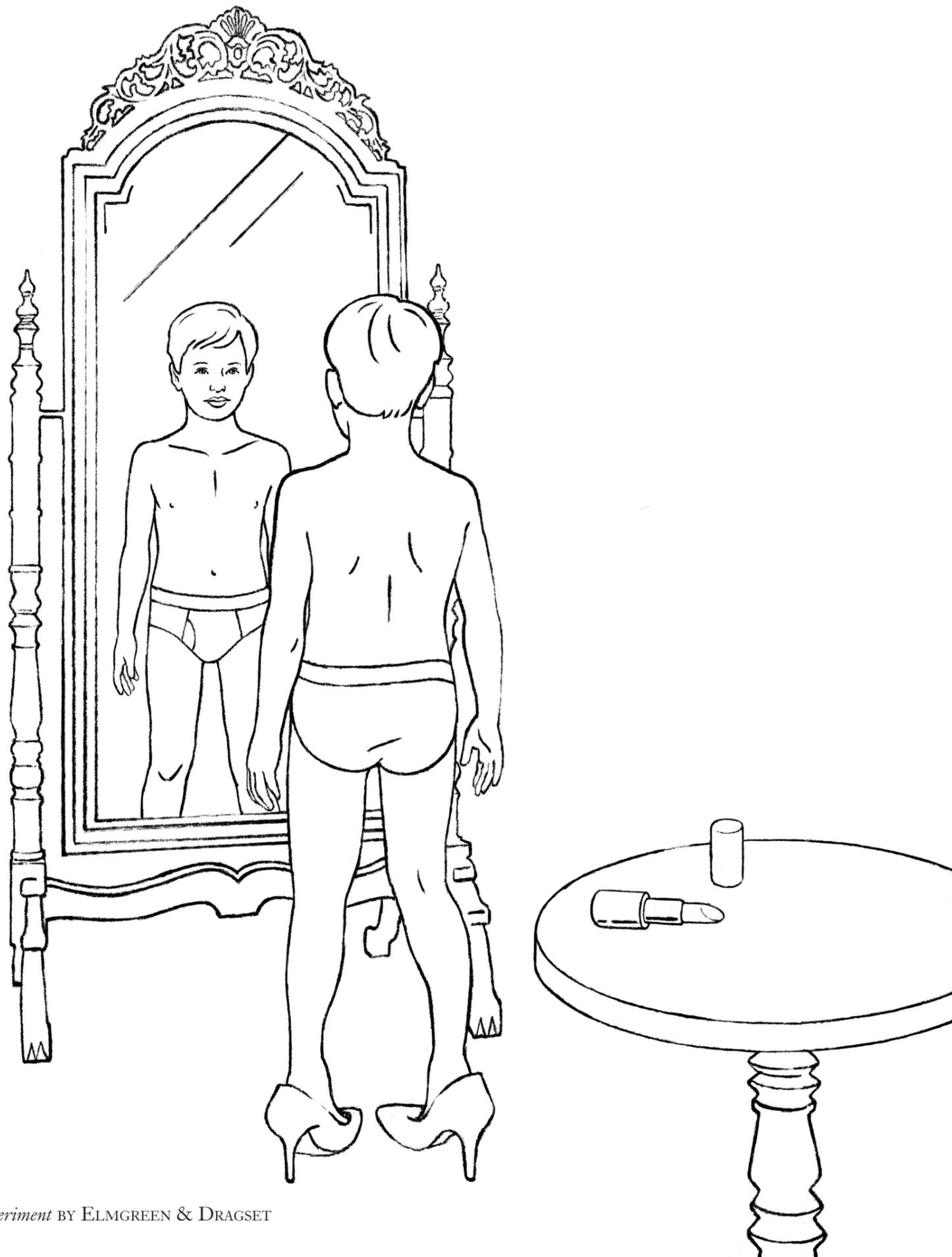
So what does that mean in practice? Nørgaard believes that this is particularly important because if, for example, we as a society think that boys are born with more potential for leadership, then they of course will have more access to these roles, even if only “through

their own internalized gender perceptions and gendered self-esteem in this context.”

On the other hand, if we constantly reinforce the idea that men are born with less potential for parenthood, they will naturally have less access to resources and lower self-esteem to embark on this challenge.

All is not lost, however. Nørgaard is confident that if we believe in gender as a much more diverse category, we can start to break down these stereotypical walls of power relations in our professional, domestic, and personal lives. Her rallying call: “My best advice to all feminists, regardless of gender, is to stand up for what you believe in. Live it, say it loud, speak up. It’s the small actions that make the greatest changes—at least in your life. And that’s where it all begins.”

*Mission magazine has selected six of the drawings for you to download and print. You can find Cecilie Nørgaard’s coloring book, Facing Gender Diversity, online, at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art and at Colette in Paris, France.*

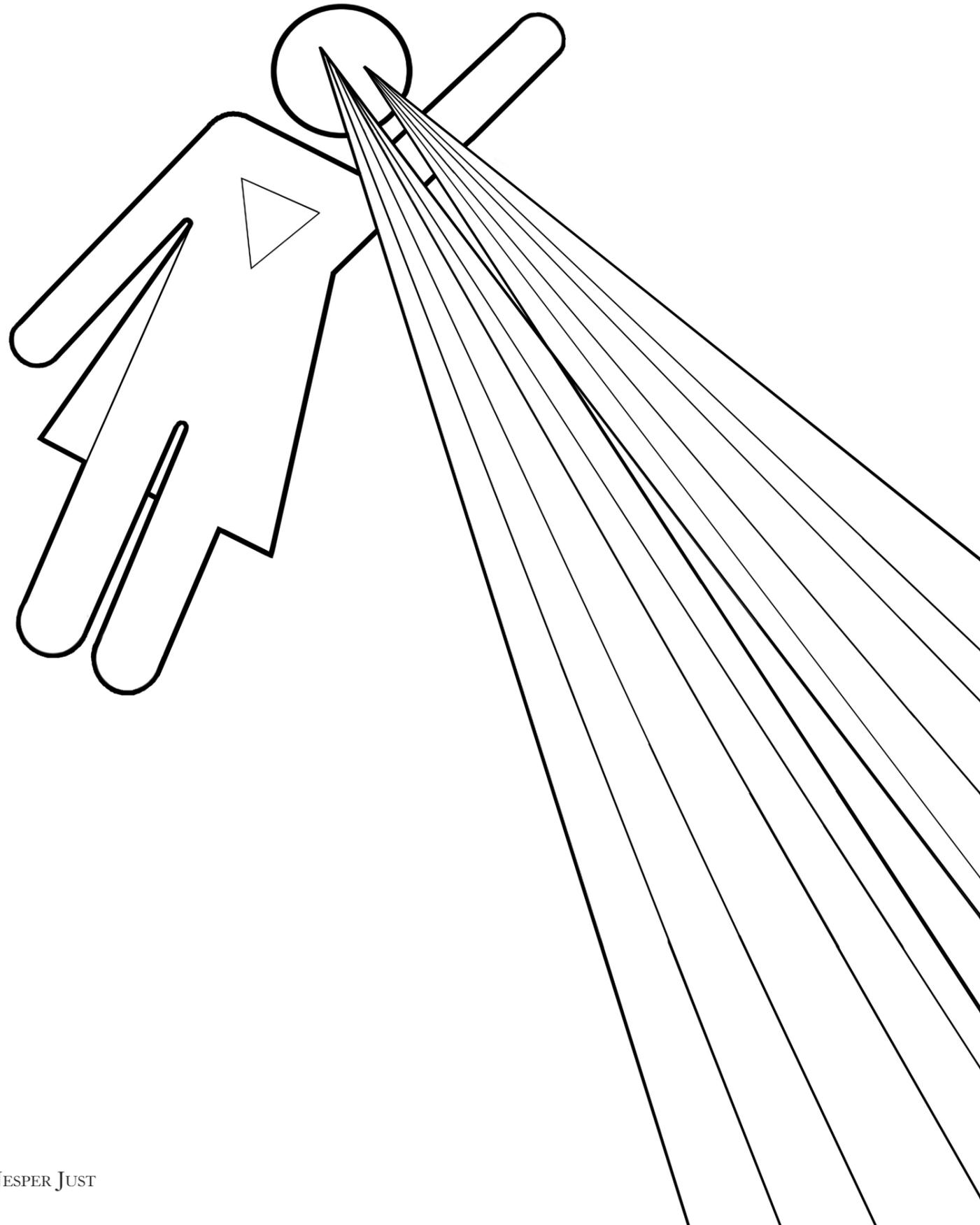


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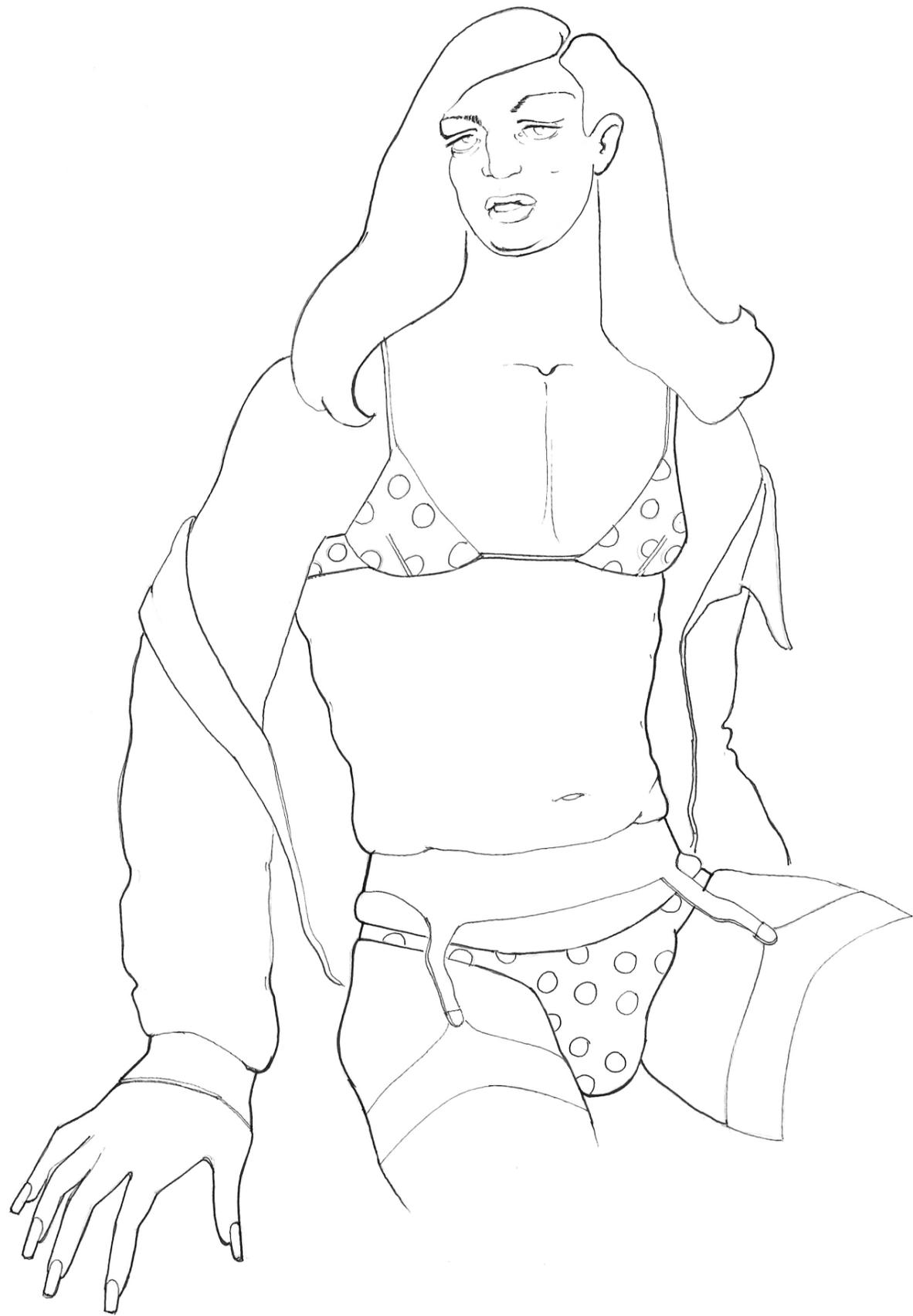


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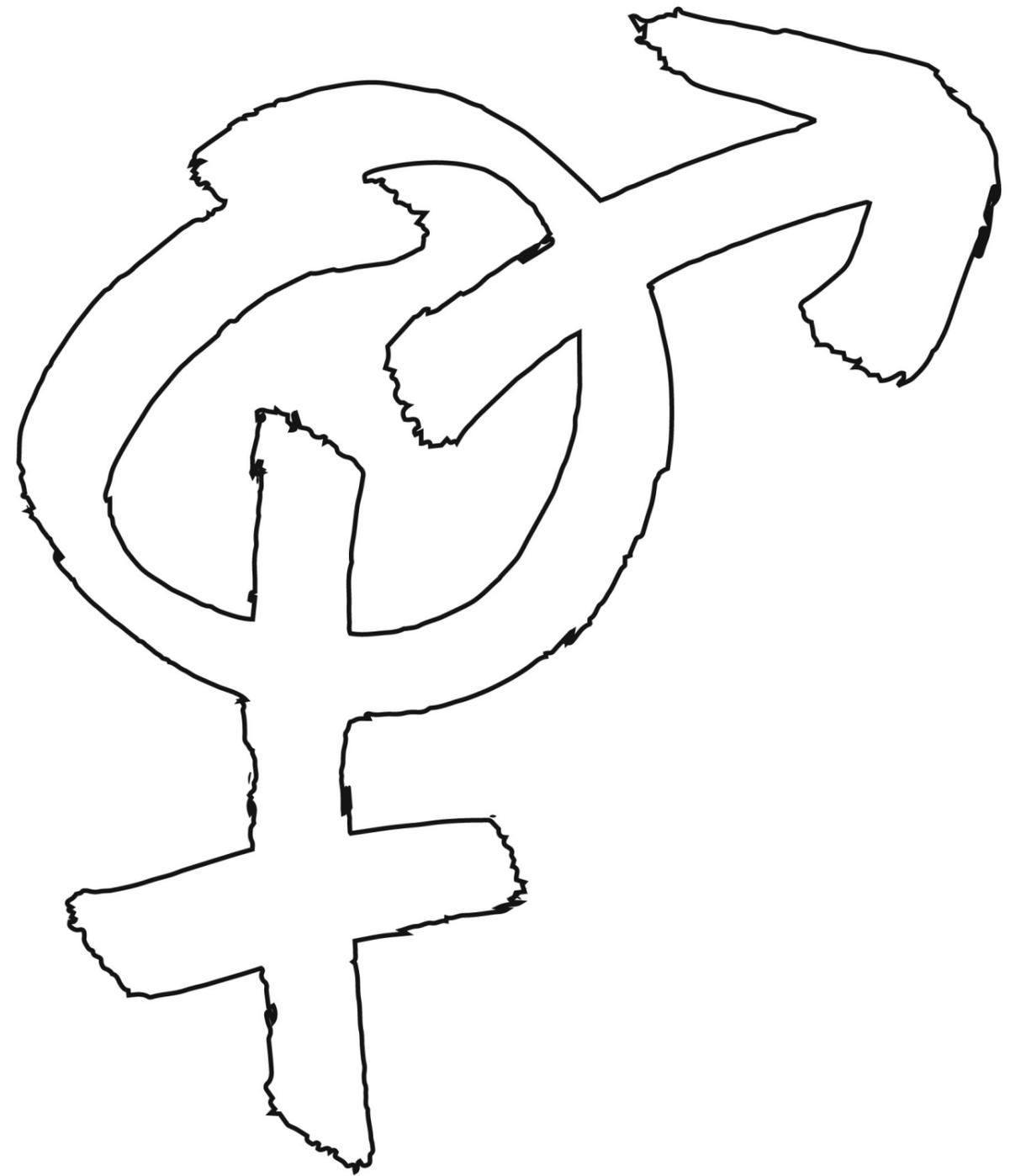


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of them all

Untitled by KASPAR BONNÉN



Untitled by LOUISE TRAMPEDACH



Untitled by REBECCA LANGEBAEK