

INFORMATION SHEET -

The Body Library: a resource of diverse figure references



I am a part time lecturer in design on the Performance course at London College of Fashion. I am one of the few members of staff lucky enough to teach across both BA courses – Costume for Performance and Hair, Make-up and Prosthetics for Performance. I mainly work with the first year, so I am there right at the beginning of their university journey, part of establishing the first principles of their learning. I feel a privilege and responsibility in welcoming them. I want them to feel included, empowered and excited to learn.

It is vital that our industry and its future character creators understand how potent their work could be in shaping society. We all have a responsibility to own what power we must represent diverse voices and uphold anti-racist and inclusive practices that create a fairer more equitable society for all. Recognising our power and the ways we can make a difference can feel like a pressure but can also be exhilarating.

“Positive representation authentically portrays the real world and creates equal opportunities for actors – therefore, it’s essential the industry keeps striving to make it the norm.” Ridgeway (2024)

The focus of both courses in our department, the student’s canvas and point of collaboration, is the actor’s body. The industry is beginning to understand that these bodies must represent a joyfully broad range of humanity, so the students need to follow suit.

I have noticed a predominance of what I would call “fashion bodies”- thin, elongated and predominantly white- in students work. A visual default that speaks of a dominant visual culture for bodies that has been written about in many ways and that I would like to disrupt.

By developing an image library of beautifully diverse figures from which students and staff draw for reference or teaching material, I hope that broad representation in character drawings, costume drawings or the development of make-up looks becomes second nature for students. Drawing and visual communication is central to the design process so if the reference for those drawings is varied and diverse then hopefully the work will be to.

This will equip the students for an industry which is striving to be more representative both onstage and backstage, so in very practical terms it helps the students to think about their future collaborators and become aware of the adaptations and opportunities there are in working with all sorts of bodies.

This project creates such a resource and assess what impact it may have on student’s design thinking and drawings.