

The Barefoot

Wendy Wang
Professor Swati Piparsania
Design for Protest
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The Barefoot

Acknowledgement

This is my last project at Pratt. I would like to move from problem-solving to a more conceptual and storytelling ideology. As an industrial designer who is going to join the real world, I always believe that designing is a work of beauty and freedom. Designers are the people who can go back to the past and create the future. Moreover, as Wang Xiaobo said, 'Real freedom is the freedom to think'. In the last semester at Pratt,

I aim to pour all my admiration and pursuit of critical thinking into my project. I would like to thank Swati immediately. He showed me another way of designing, which is enthusiasm and sensibility. Also, I want to appreciate my colleagues and director from FILA; they allowed me to complete real projects independently when I was a college student. They allowed me 'Do whatever I want', free to think and create. They let me have a deeper understanding and love for the design of sneakers.

The most important is my family. My family never forced me to have any stereotyped standard lifestyle. Instead, they encouraged me that 'life is not only about counting dollars, but also about counting stars.'. Last but not least, I want to thank the great artists and musicians, viz. John Lennon, Zhi Li. With their actions, they showed me that artists should also bear the responsibility of education and the courage to push society forward. Everyone deserves a better world.



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Protest for Ourselves

01

There is an old saying, "The barefooted are not afraid of people wearing shoes" in China. The meaning behind it is that when those who have power over the public put too much pressure on people, people will begin to fight against them because they have already lost everything.

Protest is usually understood as a tricky, radical, and sometimes dangerous. Peaceful protest movements have been achieved also with the harm to the participants during the process. People protest for human rights. No matter what kind of topics are brought by them, human rights are always the center of everything. Fighting for human rights has been practiced throughout history, especially during the war time. Today, protesting for human rights is more practiced through scientific movement, and artistic expression.

The ways of people taking part in protesting movements can vary depending on the topic and the initiators. Nowadays, art is one of the most understandable ways for people to accept, and to popularize. Protest arts grasp the audience, and then leave the space of imagination for people to involve deeply in the event. Artists use their popularity to create a space for their followers to speak up. Among the audience who share the same thought, the sense of belonging is created, and then grows to a higher level.

"Between a high, solid wall and an egg that breaks against it, I will always stand on the side of the egg."

---Haruki Murakami

Haruki expressed his determination of always standing on the side of "the egg". "The egg" here can be explained as the vulnerable group in the world, or simply as the people. As a novelist, Haruki's way of protesting against the dictatorship is to speak through his works of writing and speech. Novelism is considered a method of artistic works. Then, design, also being considered as an expression of arts, how can it contribute to protesting for the rights of "the egg"?

Protest as Designers

As an industrial designer, I dedicate to the critical thinking of the design process. The story of the products as well as the process of development is more valuable than the products themselves. A successful story makes the product stand out more than just the function. I also believe that the background of a product can help users solve the problems in an emotional way. Providing a new function is still superficial. Changing the way of thinking can actually help people from their hearts.

Designing for protest is a unique topic with the sense of making artistic pieces. It highlights the background story instead of the functions of products. It is also relevant to political activities so that many designers with political correctness would avoid telling such a controversial story. For me, I would love to run toward fields that people usually consider avoiding. Political activities are too sensitive to be touched. Therefore, as an industrial designer, an artist, and a social activist, it becomes my job to find the balance between politics and the users we love.



TRACE GREEN



Musicians Activists



03

From the first expression, the design for protest can be easily viewed as graphic design. Graphic design plays an essential role in dictating and reacting to the major political events throughout times. A good message can change the face of the campaign for a long time. Designing the content then becomes the most understandable method for the protestors to express what they claim for.

However, more than using speech, there are lots of artists also using language to protest. The only difference is that they speak in a language with musical rhythm.

The group of artists are musicians.

At the same time, they are also known as social activists. Protest in general is achieved through language, such as using signs at marching, posing online, and speech. For musicians, they speak in music. Their words are written as lyrics in the songs to be sung, and popularized in live music or music albums. Songs represent their thoughts and claims. Different musicians have their own claims and way of protesting. Here are some examples of a couple of famous musician activists in the world:

PEACE GREEN



-John Lennon & Ono Yoko:

John moved to NYC after he left The Beatles. He and his wife, Yoko, worked together for world peace and the anti-war movement. They used their honeymoon to accomplish a bed-in peace activity. During his years in NYC, he published several musical albums with the works of claiming anti-war and full human rights for every single individual. After being denied by the US immigration office, the Lennons introduced the conceptual country called Nutopia, saying that the country has nothing but people.

-Bob Dylan:

Bob Dylan's lyrics have been acknowledged as poems and literature. He has also been granted the Nobel Literature Prize. Bob Dylan's early works talk about the injustice in law and political movement by the US government, which became extremely influential to the public in the 20th Century.

-U2:

A musical band from Ireland. Ever since the 1980s, the members of U2 have been collaborating with other celebrities and organizations to address the ongoing issues in poverty, injustice, and environmental pollution.

Musician Activists in The World



For me, I am from China, a country with a unique way of governing billions of people in the world. Protesting is always a sensitive and prohibited movement in order to maintain social stability. Hence, the musician activists in China are experiencing more restriction in their social activities and publication of their works. They need to figure out a more humble and silent way to protest and to speak for the people.
?

For example, Li Zhi, a musician from Nanjing, China, published several radical songs during early years of his career. Most of the songs are either ordered to be modified or banned. In 2017, Li Zhi followed the Chinese novelist, Wang Xiaobo's claim that the real freedom is the freedom of thinking. He started a live music tour called "334", aiming to travel to 334 towns in China to popularize live music. He wants to be an educator to people who don't have access to certain forms of arts. However, after performing in 59 cities, he was fully banned in 2019.

From Li Zhi's experience, I raise a question: how can musicians and social activists keep their protest under restrictive circumstances? And how can I help them as an industrial designer?

Musician Activists under Special Condition

“Don’t Talk, Just Repeat.”

04

In the beginning of my last semester in college, I started with a warm-up project called “Don’t Talk, Just Repeat”. It is a conceptual sneaker design with satirical background. The reason I chose the sneaker design is that sneakers are usually given with a background story. The story then becomes the reason why the design is popular among customers.



I used the position of sneakers on a body to represent the resistance of the user. The lyrics "Don't Talk, Just Repeat" are modeled on the sidewall of the sole in Chinese characters. The user is stepping on top of the characters to represent that they are against the repeating life. On the bottom of the shoe, the sentence "People Do Not Need Freedom" is printed so that when people walk around, the words can be left on the ground.



For the upper, the underlay is a simple piece of knitting for comfort. The overlay is a double-layered TPU firm with a mesh in between. It can be taken off the whole shoes as a sign for the protestor. TPU firms can be written on content with markers. The overlay is hooked on the sidewall of the shoe. On the lateral side, the pins are hidden in the characters.



On the medial side, it leaves a blank space for the protestors to design by themselves. They can use screws and push pins as hooks. This design means that the true personality is always hidden with something unified by the society.



Around the ankle, the protestor can wrap with jewelry or decoration they like in between the overlay and the underlay with an end being shown on the back. This means that protestors can keep their identity inside with some parts showing to the public. The whole shoe is made in a white color. I was inspired by the concept of Nutopia by John Lennon that the flag of Nutopic is pure white. It is because that peace can only be achieved through surrender and compromise.



The reason I did sneaker design is not only that I have work experience on footwear design, but also sneakers can represent a significant proportion of personal characteristics. It is a typical product that is made to tell stories. The story behind a pair of sneakers are usually more valuable than the product itself. The function of a sneaker is minimal when it is made based on a celebrity or a historical event. Also, sneakers are small objects. They can move around with the users. The message can then be viewed by the audience in a short period of time.

“The Barefoot”



05

光脚的不怕穿鞋的

To be continued, I started The Barefoot Series for this semester. “The Bare-Foots” represent “people”, who own nothing substantially compared to people who have political power and wealth. Here, “The Shoe-Wearers” here represents the decision-makers. The protesters are not afraid of the government. A similar meaning I find from the book the American Journal of Politics that “A beggar will never be bankrupted”. My goal is to design a pair, or series or sneakers that can be used as instruments. While playing, the musicians are bare-foot to show that they stand the people to fight for their freedom.

The selection of instruments can be a collection of traditional Chinese instruments that reflect the history of low-income class, or the modified version of existing instruments. The sneakers should combine materials, structures, and forms that have deep meaning in people's lives. The design is a new language for musicians to play their music in a satirical way against the government. It is designed for protesting, but if necessary, it can also be introduced as instrument and footwear design in order to avoid conflicts.

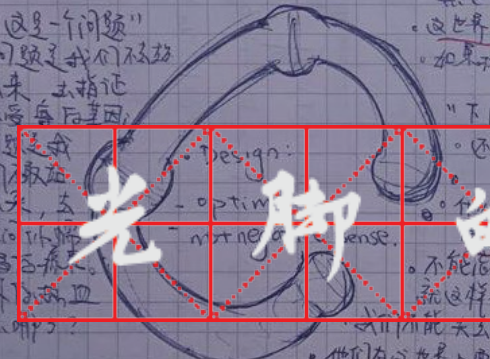
Lyrics: 人民不需要自由
 有人沉溺着观望,有人怀疑过生活,听见他们在歌唱
 "广场"
 如今广场是我的坟墓,这个歌声将是你的挽歌,你会被教育成一个好人,
 (死)死叔叔吃路拉撒的幼物。请让不要相信他的良心,他的手枪正瞄准你的胸膛。
 "他们"
 他们指向我,带着恨和故事;他微笑着对我说,人民不需要自由。人民不需要自由,这是最好的年代。
 "对郑州的记忆"
 这是成非或是世界最长,有情有义又有航欢,感时间双变很多世什么都没有。
 "这个世界会好吗?"
 忘记一些隐秘的真相,在回头观望的时候迷失了自己。
 我在夏天开放吗?这种失落会持久吗?这个世界会好吗?却又回自一切

被遗忘的...
 Arthur Schopenhauer
 一生不幸
 独立的思想
 "人生就是痛苦和错误"
 "不好明天"
 "意味"
 "灰色信笺"
 "方式"
 "对威威支持有希望"
 "自由"



"广场"
 如今广场是我的坟墓,这个歌声将是你的挽歌,你会被教育成一个好人,
 (死)死叔叔吃路拉撒的幼物。请让不要相信他的良心,他的手枪正瞄准你的胸膛。
 "他们"
 他们指向我,带着恨和故事;他微笑着对我说,人民不需要自由。人民不需要自由,这是最好的年代。
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 我在夏天开放吗?这种失落会持久吗?这个世界会好吗?却又回自一切

这是一个问题
 问题是我们的不好
 来去指定
 最后后更
 "下雨"
 "我们在这个世界上不停地奔跑,一不小心就改变了我们。我们在世界上不停地奔跑,一不小心就改变了生活。我们不能,不能天天信印"
 "我们在这个世界上不停地奔跑,一不小心就改变了我们。我们在世界上不停地奔跑,一不小心就改变了生活。我们不能,不能天天信印"



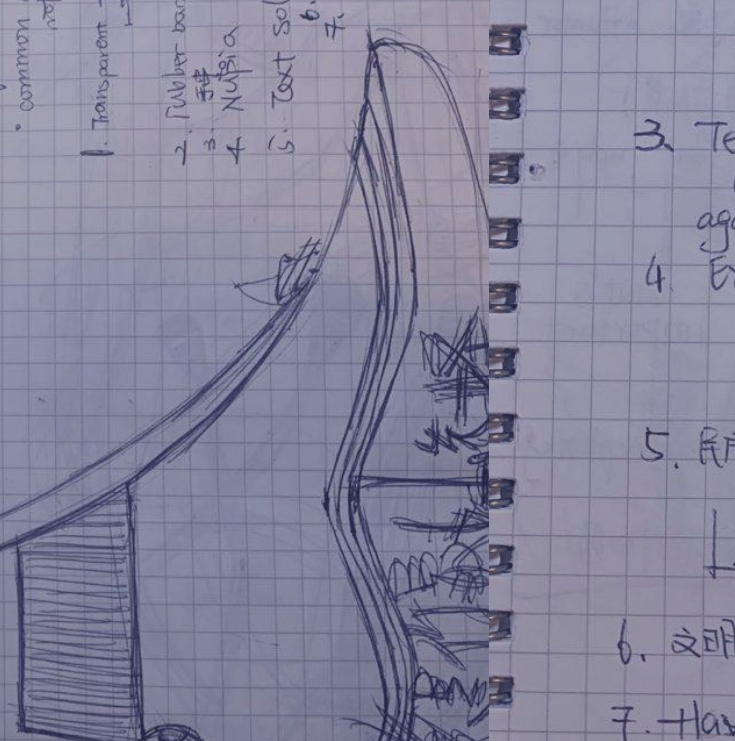
光脚的不怕穿鞋的

提醒 people
 提醒 people

我们来到哪里
 the upper can be removed to sign
 Function: signature
 world language?
 334
 a. Appeal
 b. NUTopia
 c. signature.
 justice ducking.com
 早稻田
 Keio

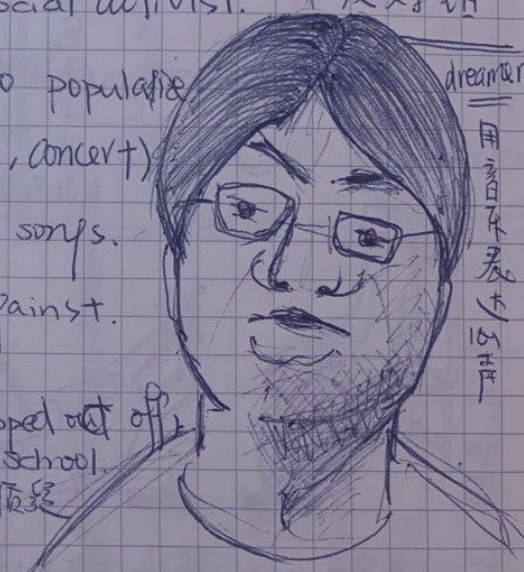
我生活和我所想,从相隔万里。
 我生活和我所想,从相隔万里。

Trans
 common on not
 Transparent +
 Rubber band
 NUTopia
 Text
 334



Collective Identity.

- Representative personae: Li Zhi & his band.
- ↳ Ola Art Space 欧拉艺术空间
- important features
- 1. Musician (mostly balladeer)
- 2. Niche singers, & social activist.
- ↳ not committed to popularise his work (album, concert)
- 3. Tell the truth in the songs. (tell story) 精神 against what they are against.
- 4. Experienced (lots of them dropped out off) 反对反抗 + School 质疑
- 5. 民族精神 Ethos (National Spirit) ↳ the Chinese nationality, not the government
- 6. 文明是美好的, 人应该追求美好 → pursue the good future.
- 7. Have their own determination. → 理想主义者 愚钝, 坚持, belief. 救ingeme (诗和诗)
- 8. ↳ sth for the society in world, NA, people

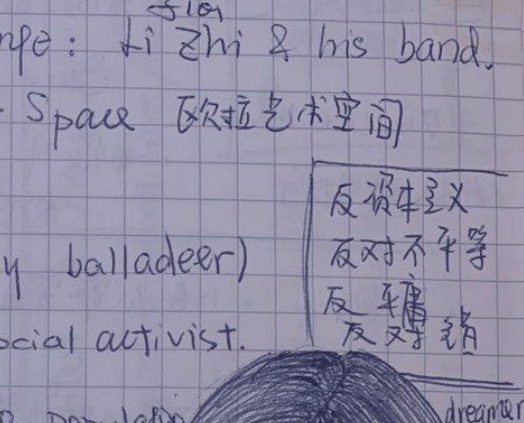


反资本主义
 反对不平等
 反特权
 反对剥削

Against!

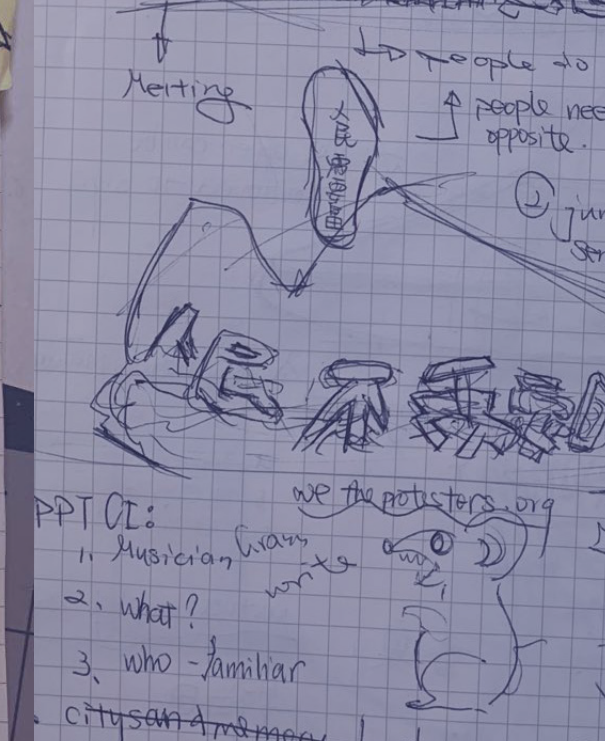
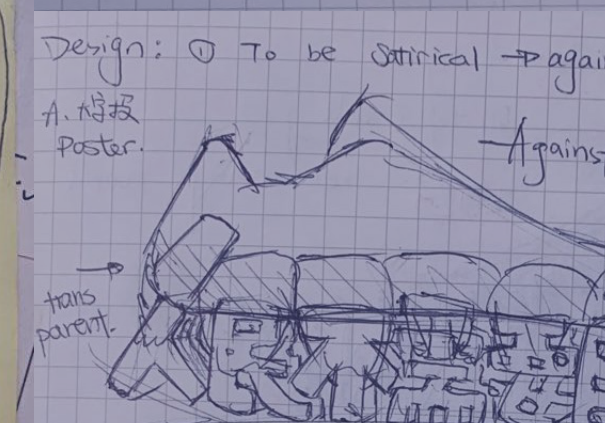
Design: ① To be satirical → against "step on"
 A. 海报 Poster.
 反对!

Meeting
 people do need free
 people need it → opposite.
 ② joint sentence.
 我们不需要自由
 PPT 01:
 1. Musician
 2. what?
 3. who - familiar
 city sand memory
 city sand memory.com
 non union workers protest
 we the protesters.org
 March for a
 Disobedient
 1/1



Design: ① To be satirical → against "step on"
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After the decision of "The Barefoot", I firstly chose on making a pair of transformable sneakers along with an overalls. These two products can be transformed to an acoustic guitar so that the musician can use it to play it anywhere they go. Another direction I picked was to make a pair of shoes that can be taken apart to play as a percussion instrument. At the same time, I went out to record the sound I found from the natural or artificial environments that can represent the sound of protesting.

However, the quarantine started in March. The plan of making new instruments was suspended. Because a project of instrument design requests model-making and testing of the sound, a studio environment was necessary. I had to switch from instrument design to the conceptual design of a combination of footwear and instruments. My goal was to create conceptual designs of "The Barefoot" series that can be later tested and improved.

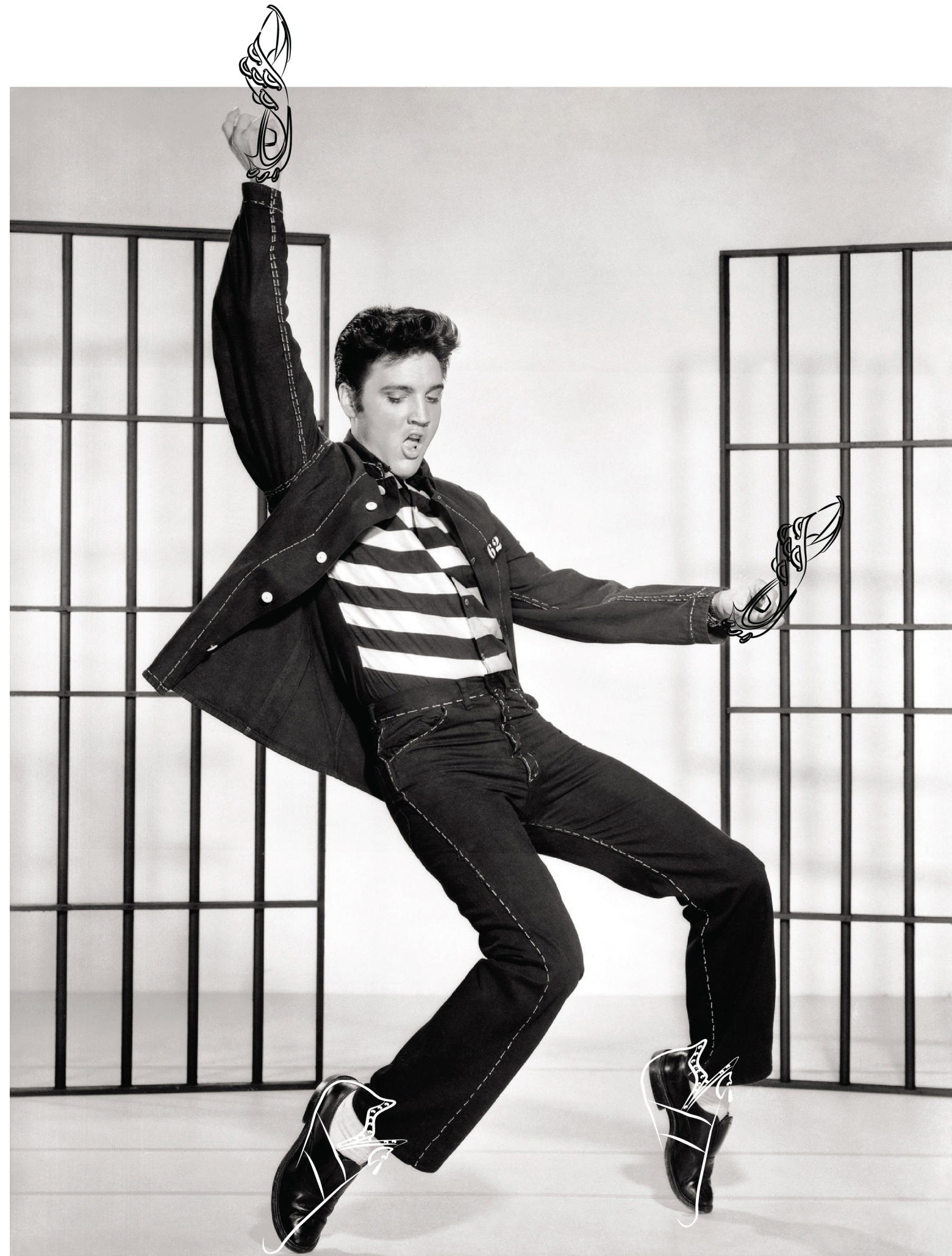


Tambourine

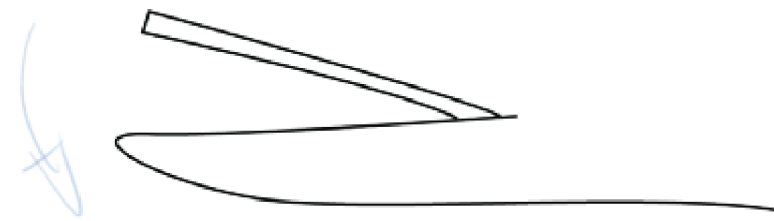
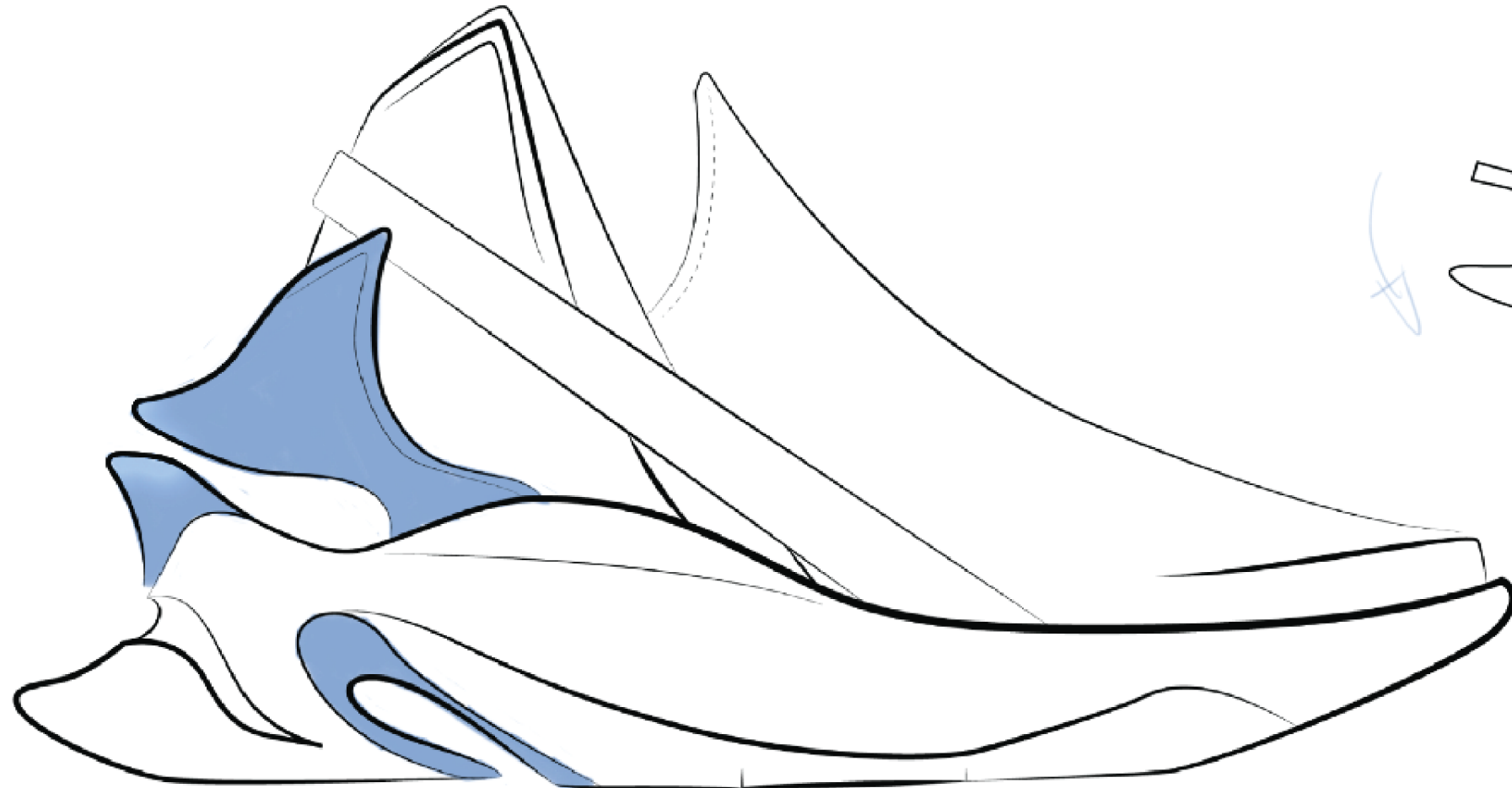
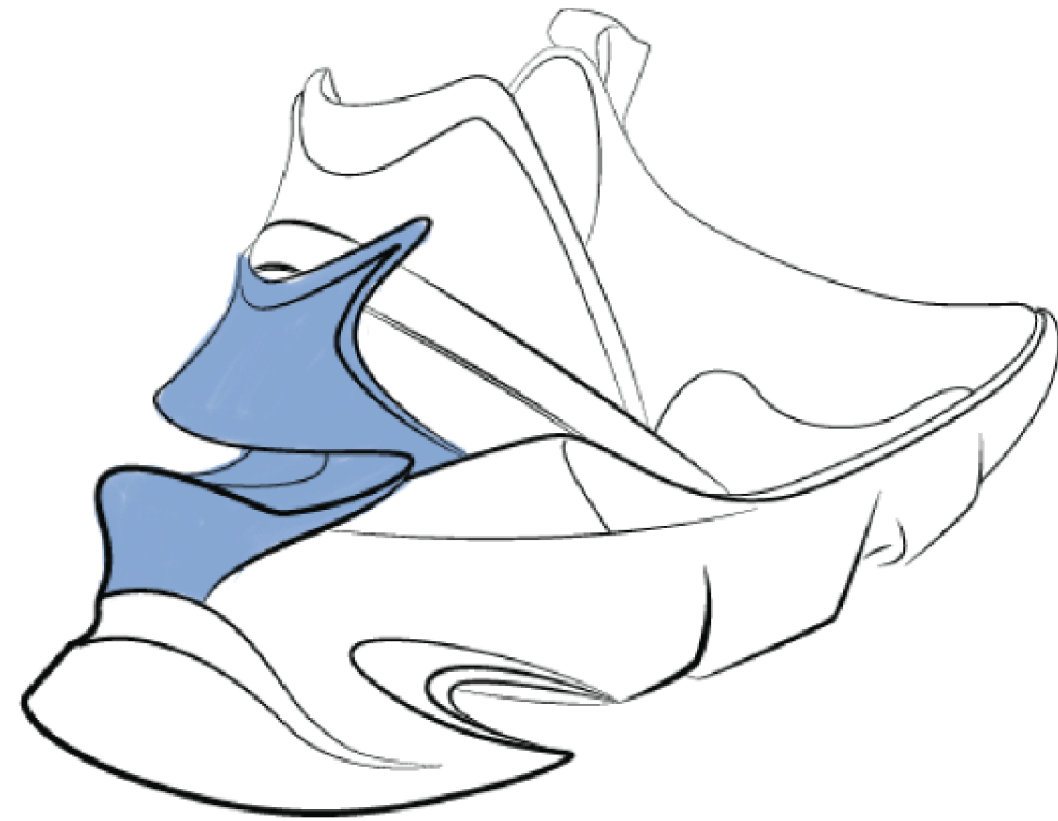
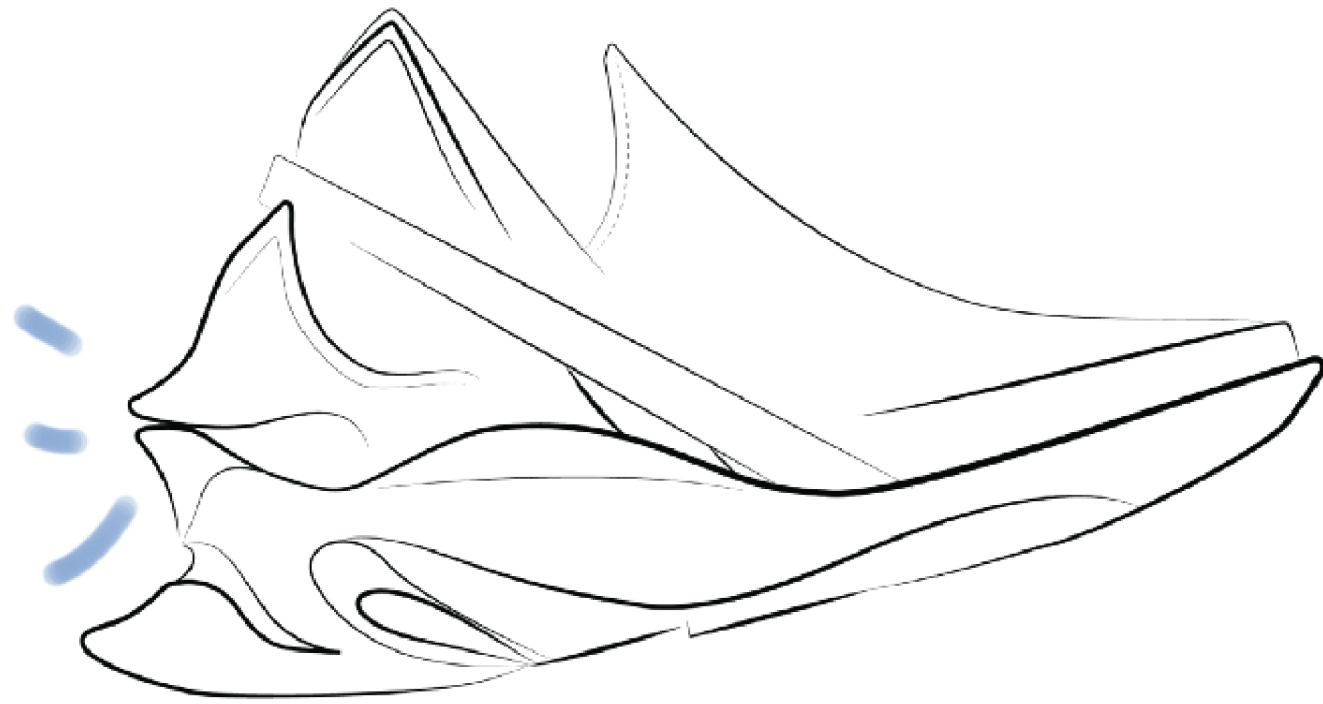


The first design is a footwear design based on the percussion instrument---tambourine. Tambourine is used in various forms of music: Turkish folk music, Greek folk music, Italian folk music, classical music, Persian music, samba, gospel music, pop music, country music, and rock music. The reason I choose on tambourine is that it is used very often in live concerts and marching. The sound of the tambourine is solely composed of the sense of attacking and the sharp noise as a background. These two kinds of sound can be interpreted as the sound of protesting since a protest can be noisy and radical. The percussion players usually play the tambourine at an exciting moment or the turning point from slow melody to quick melody.

The shoe is designed to have the upper and the bottom parts detachable. The bottom of the shoe is a one-piece form going from the heel to the toe. The form wraps about the whole foot with the metal discs inserted on the heel and the quarter. When the musician needs to play it, they can simply take the bottom off and leave the upper on. The supporting part under the heel can be used as a handle to grab the tambourine while playing. The upper is decorated with drum skin and pins to indicate the inspirational instrument.

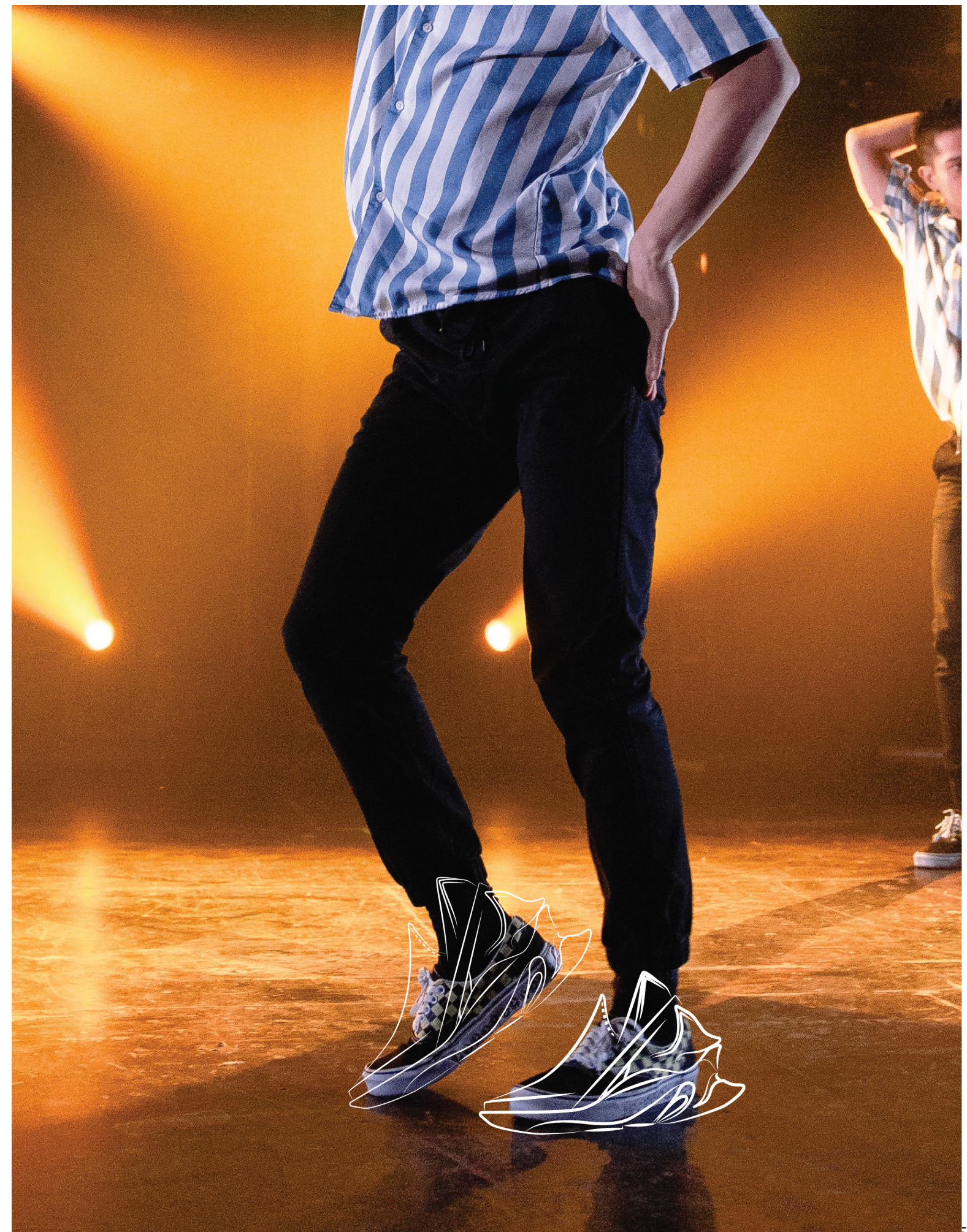


The Castanets

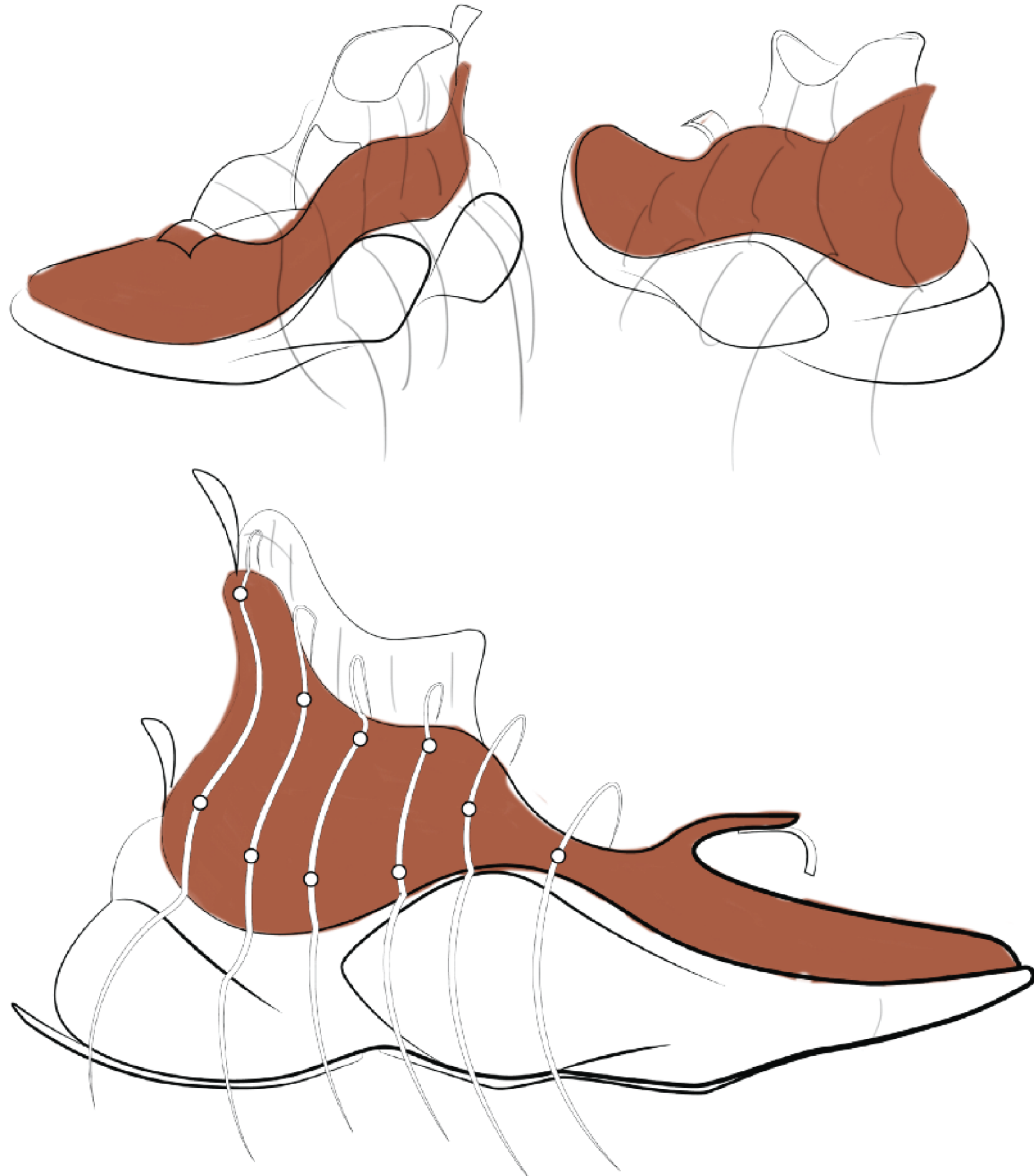


The second design is based on another percussion instrument --- castanets. Castanets are a small percussion instrument in scale, usually used in Spanish, Kalo, Moorish, Ottoman, Italian, Sephardic, Swiss, and Portuguese music. I choose on castanets because it makes a simple sound that can become a collective sound during protesting. Castanets are held in the hand. Musicians use them to produce clicks for rhythmic accents or a rapid series of clicks. When people gather together to play collective sound, the clicks can then turn loud and anxious. The footwear is designed to have one castanet on the heel, in between the upper and the bottom. Another castanet is made in the bottom part with the opening facing the ground.

These two locations of castanets can make clicks while the musician walks around. The footwear is a separate-toe design. The big toe is separated from the rest of the toes as well as the bottom. It becomes another castanets on the shoe. The musician can tap their big toes along the music to make a sound. The castanets can be powerful when a group of people walking together along with the rhythm. Also, they can also create a sense of chaos when people dance together without following the rhythm of music. Both discipline and chaos are necessary for protesting.



The Guitar



The third design is based on the guitar. The guitar is one of the most important instruments in the world, and is regarded as the main instrument in pop music, rock music, blues, folk songs, flamenco. The guitar is good for being a background music for storytelling. My design is to have footwear inserted with six strings from heel to the quarter. The strings are made from one side to the other. The pitch changes based on the length of a string. The strings are not necessarily to stay on the shoe.

Every string is longer and dragging on the ground. There is also a circle cut-through on the back of the shoe. It is inspired by the hollowness of a guitar. To play it, the musician has to put one or both feet on a surface in order to reach the string. The reason to do that is to create a satirical way of asking for freedom. When you try to speak up, you have to give up on some of your options. Also, the guitar is an instrument you need to sit down or to set up with extra equipment. Making the musician stop moving is a sign for the audience to join the group with peace and seriousness, meaning that we have to stop to listen to people's hearts with all our hearts.



Believe in The Future

06

The goal of "the Barefoot" is more than the object itself. It makes a community. For this semester, the products end up becoming footwear with components of existing instruments so that people can easily understand the function. Then they can pick it up to play right the way. The series is aimed to be a new mechanism for musician activists to deliver their thoughts. Also, as musician activists are experiencing prohibition in some places, they need a space to spread their voice. "The Barefoot" is a new language for people sharing the same thought. The objects can create a sense of belongings for the public.

Other than considering what the musician activists are facing right now, "the Barefoot" series are designed with the concern of potential conflicts they might run into when they still want to speak up for people. Using footwear and instruments as soft weapons helps them avoid unnecessary political conflicts.

While introducing the series as simply products, they become common and harmless in people's lives. However, when we regard them as the carriers of the background story, they become powerful and alive. Hence, I set up the protection for the music activists during the protest.

Moreover, the power of music and personal items cannot be underestimated. These daily items have the potential to make controversial protests right for the public. Individual stories are put together as a collective sound. With the power of music, protest can be sung as a song for those who wait to listen. Protest is taken as a personal belonging to everywhere it goes. Protest is done when we use everything we own to speak up. Even though there is nothing on your feet, your heart is filled with peace and hope.

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