DISSECTING THE MONSTERS OF
CORPORATE MEMPHIS.

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Foreword

No art style is ever "bad," as the perception of art is purely subjective to each specific viewer and their personal understanding of the work. The following contents are strictly subjective and shouldn't be used as a reference to judge any works of art.
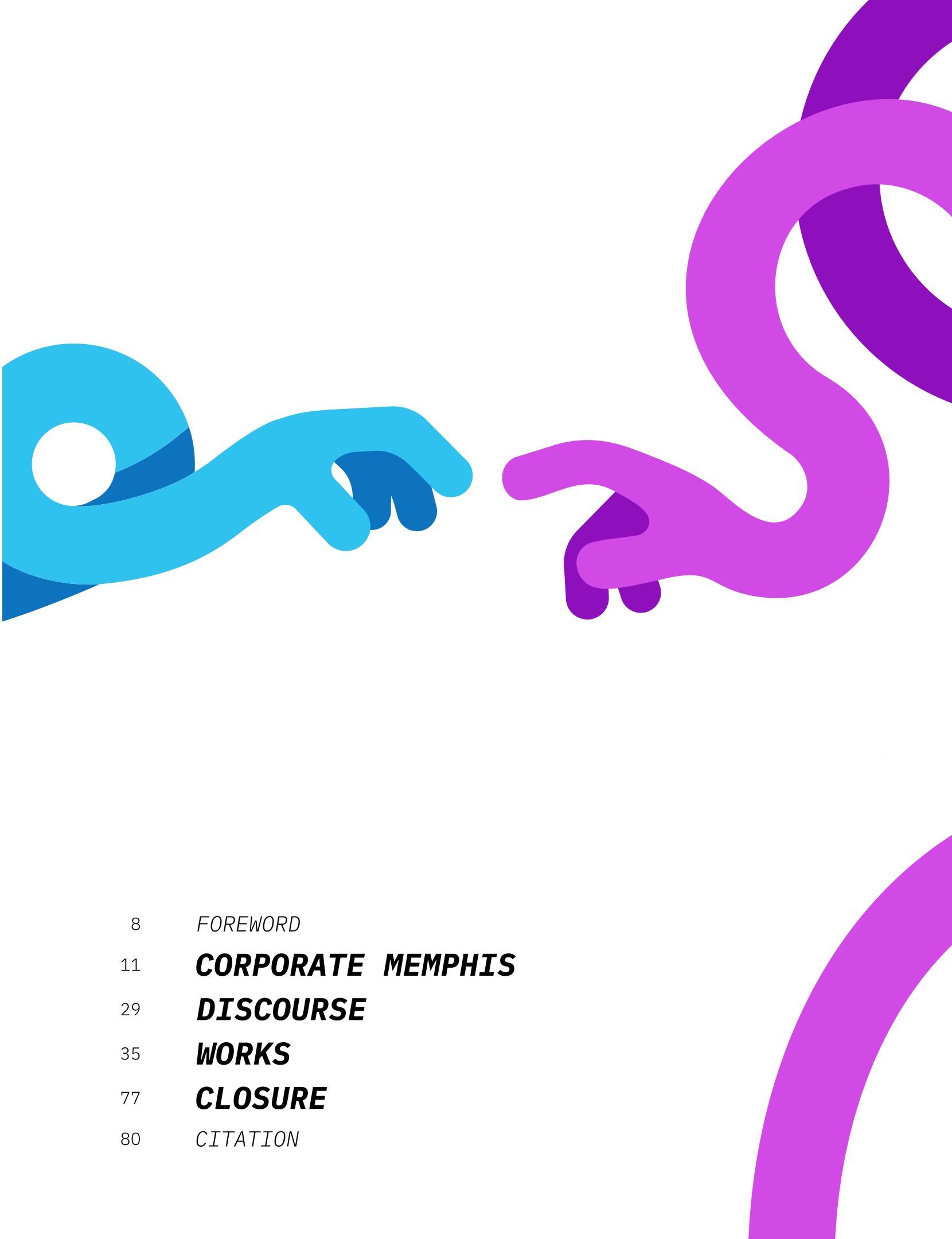
Dissecting the Monsters of Corporate Memphis contains graphic depictions of violence, assault, death, nudity, and sexual content in an informative manner. The images displayed in this book are recreated in the Alegria/Corporate Memphis style, based on a set of chosen photographs. The recomposed images are not perfect replicas of the original. In addition, the recomposed images reflect the original artistic composition of the referenced photographs without any additional personal political bias.

I would like to emphasize the significance of the original photographs and their associations with corresponding historical and cultural values when they were taken. The recomposed images are made with great respect to the original content and a comprehensive investigation of the photographs' background. By no means are the works shown meant to be disrespectful, discourteous, or insolent. I hope the viewers share these values and further research the history of the works if interested.
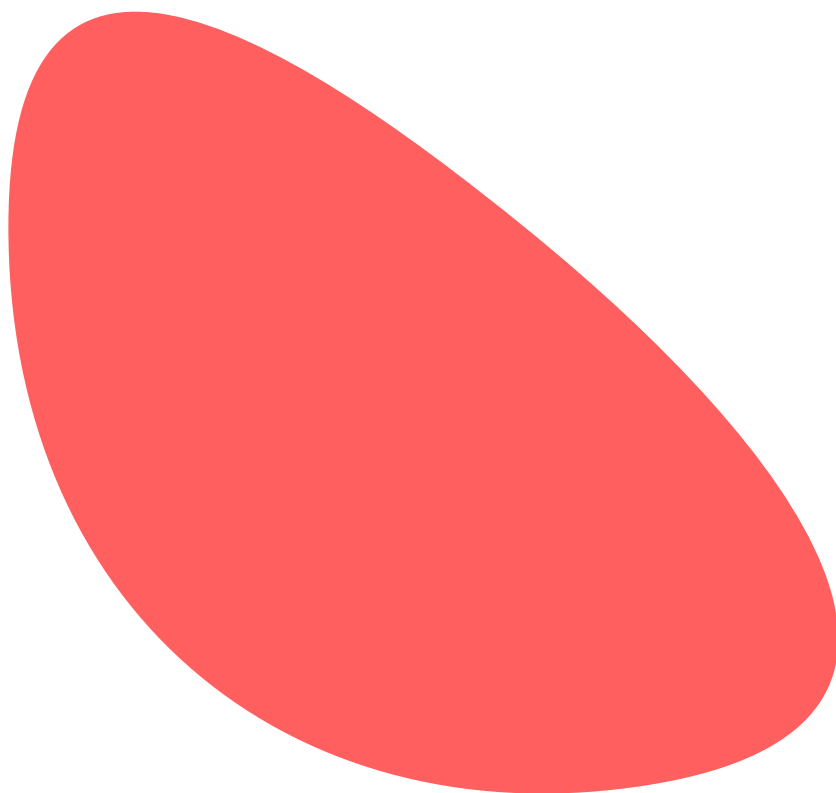
CORPORATE MEMPHIS

(noun). a term used to describe a flat, geometric
art style, widely used in Big Tech illustrations

Exposition

Corporate Memphis (CM) design has been dominating web design in recent years, used by every major tech company, magazine, advertisement, or any media source with an artistic illustration. Though the term may be unfamiliar, the presence of CM is hard to avoid for people that are online frequently, or in real life - as the CM style ads flash on billboards in nearly every subway station and Apple store.

The exact origin of the CM design is hard to determine since countless media outlets adopt its presence at an astonishing rate. The two most commonly accepted sources for CM's origin are *Alegria* by BUCK Studio and Alice Lee, an independent illustrator partnered with Slack.

Although Alice Lee is often regarded as the pioneer of this widely-adopted style, I believe her works function as an inspiration for Corporate Memphis instead of the origin. As artists and designers continued to draw on and experiment with her established illustration style in the 2010s, CM established its unique style and gained popularity through *Alegria* by BUCK Studio. Being an illustration system that is specifically developed for Facebook, *Alegria* represents the epitome of Corporate Memphis.

John Slater of BUCK studio

Google Fi Commercial, 2021

Google Fi Commercial Satire, Me 2021

Moreover, the term *Memphis* originates from the Memphis Group, a group of artists and designers known for their bright and bold furniture design. The group's focus was to subvert the practical use of daily items and furniture to be used as decoration. Their style is easily recognizable with its clashing colors and haphazard arrangements. Though the group disbanded after seven years, their impact is still seen today throughout high fashion and experimental designs such as CM. CM rises in popularity as the style consists of visually appealing colors and can easily convey a story or action. Alongside the rise in minimalism in the graphic design field, CM has established itself as the primary illustration style for many tech companies, getting the following nicknames: Big Tech art style, Corporate Art, Humans of Flat.

Lot 103, Big Sur sofa by Peter Shire

Skeuomorphism
(noun). a derivative object that retains ornamental design cues from structures that were necessary in the original

Corporate Memphis is the illustrative equivalent of universal design, switching from Skeuomorphism to Flat UI. Even if you don't know the term *skeuomorphism*, you have likely witnessed the transition of style in universal graphic representation - as long as you own any device with a screen or digital interface.

  The primary function of skeuomorphism is to help transition the understanding of iconography to its real-life counterparts. Leaving the Skeuomorphistic age was the first major shift in the user interface, as the need for its graphic style had outgrown the general audience's competence in utilizing technology. The move to a cleaner, more simplified interface was a significant step in the design evolution. Much like iconography/ logos, the average user is now able to recognize an illustration of a human being without a photo-realistic or proportionally-correct representation. The absence of these restrictions allows for a more creative and minimal depiction of human-related activity.

Rising Action

The most significant advantage that Corporate Memphis has over its competitors is its adaptability. The flatness of the style creates abundant opportunities for creative proportions and perspectives, allowing artists to adjust and change their work if necessary. Compared to traditional mediums, CM enables artists to create countless variations at a fraction of the time, synonymous with a fraction of the costs for companies. The variables of CM tie back to Alice Lee's illustrations, which have been used as a guideline for corporate designers to modify and use.

There are countless variations of CM being used in media today. Many of which are created with minimal alterations, including corporate colors, outlines, textured shadows, etc. These minor variations give the illusion of diversity and personalization towards each company.

Different Same Human by Me

A Taste of Summer by Olimpia Zagnoli

THE
ALIEN FREAK

A Taste of Colorful Humans by Me

Facebook and Hinge Advertisement

Many tech-related companies have strived to minimize brand identity, including their advertisements. The use of stock photos has become nearly obsolete in this digital shift, making illustrations its primary substitute. CM has given these companies a blank template to mass-produce simple, quick visuals for virtually every advertisement, product illustration, etc.

Climax

Not every artwork using a flat, illustrative style is Corporate Memphis. Although it is a unique style for graphic illustration, CM aligns more with the techniques adopted by corporates to create one-dimensional narratives that suit their needs. The CM artworks, primarily used as filler art at eye-catching spots on media, have become a symbol of the modern culture of corporate art and its application.

Apple Small Business Program Illustration


Small Business Illustration

In addition, CM contributes to a shift in the focus of artwork used in various media. The illustrative style doesn't gain its infamy from disproportionate limbs but rather from the homogeneity of corporate aesthetic and practices the illustration creates. Many big companies, such as Facebook, Spotify, and Google, have adopted the style as their primary direction in art despite the countless creatives within their staff. Rather than highlighting the individual artist's style for suitable projects, many are forced to mass-produce works in CM style with limited creative freedom for the projects. As a result, the focus of these artworks shifts - from the quality or aesthetics of the art itself to a straightforward yet superficial representation of the product or narrative the corporates are selling.
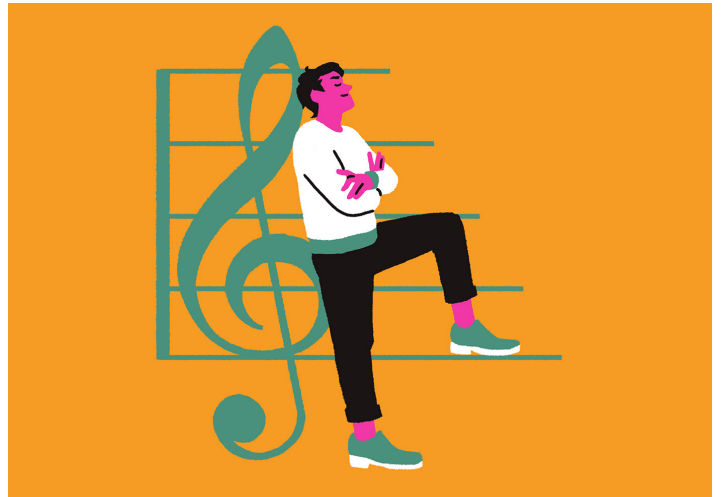
Spotify Premium Illustrations by Sua Balac
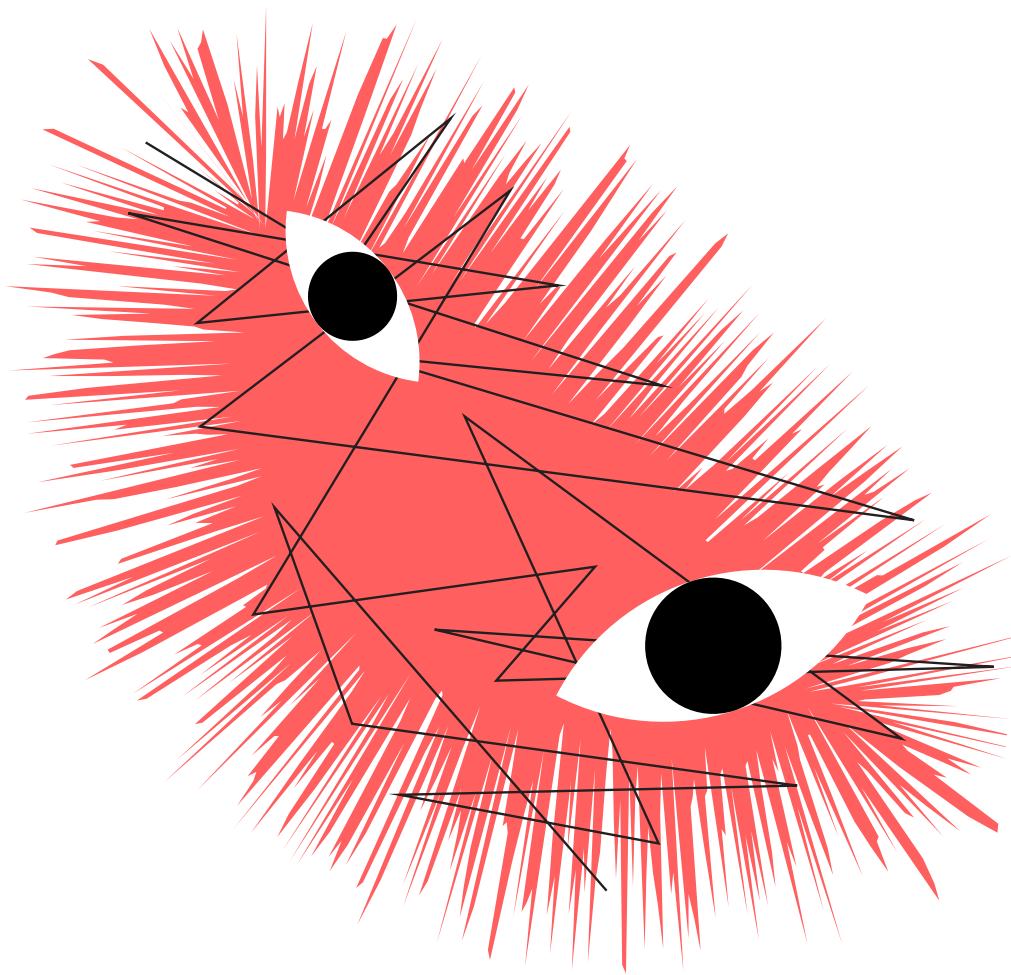
DISCOURSE

(subjective). a term used to describe the present
culture of art used by Big Tech companies as filler
art or promotional art

I Hate It

Personally, I have developed a strong despise towards the CM art style. In my opinion, CM represents a fleeting design trend that major tech companies adopted forcefully due to its widespread popularity in the industry. The across-the-board change in illustration style is similar to corporates redesigning their logos during pride month to appeal to the broader social environment, then stripping away the rainbow as the month comes to an end. Neither of these adaptations is progressive design change for the brands but rather a temporary shift to appeal to mass media trends.

Besides the superficial and temporary changes to fit in the current preference in the design industry, the visual elements of CM reinforce my disdain for the style. The grotesque proportions of limbs and unnatural skin tone render the artistic representation extremely inoffensive in an aggressive way. However, the uttermost application and exaggeration of these visual elements make the figures of CM seem unnatural and alien instead of appealing and inoffensive. Arguably, the skewed proportions have been seen throughout art history - notably in Egyptian and Medieval paintings. From my point of view, art is an expression of the people and the time period it was created in.
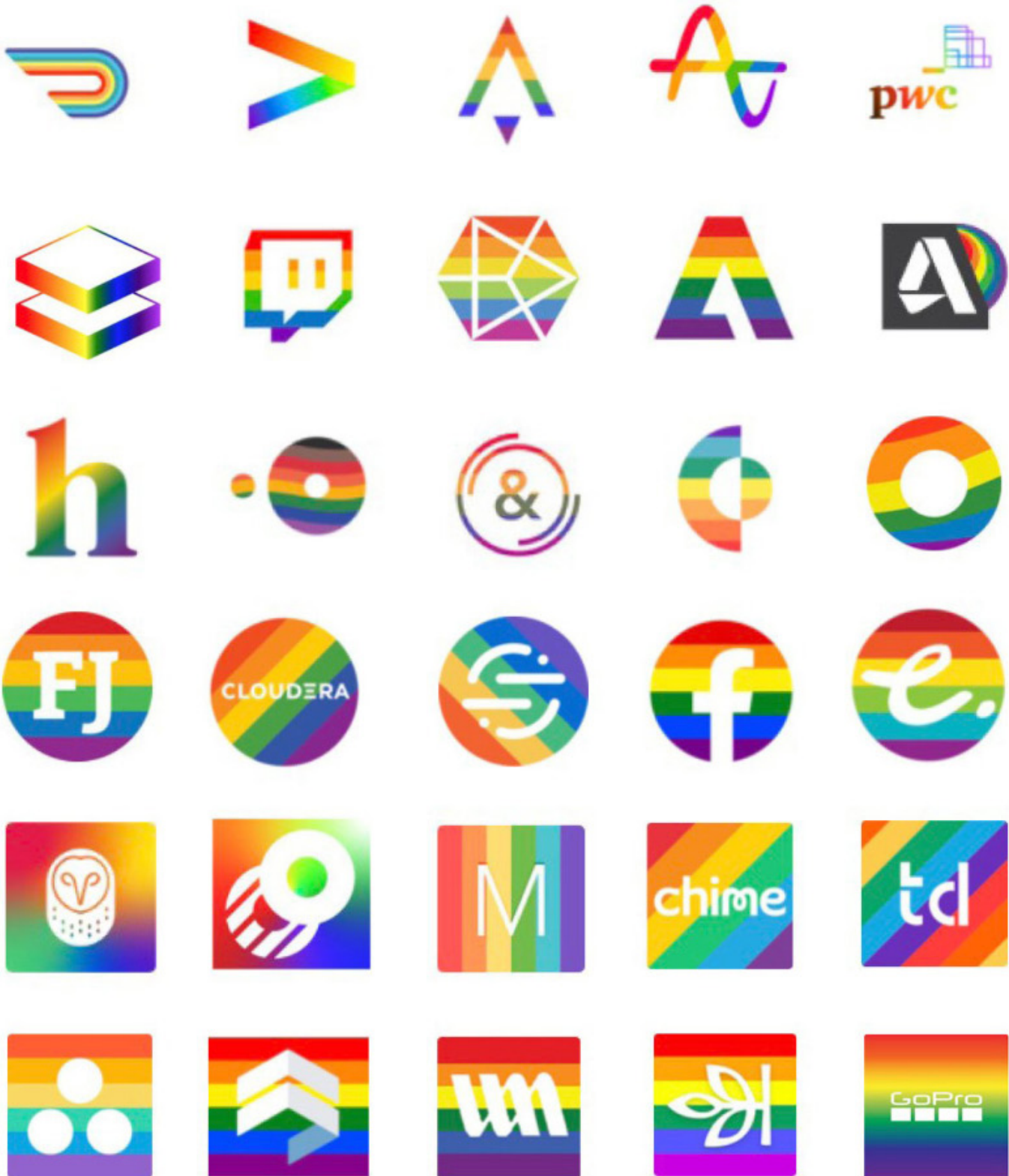
Pride Logos
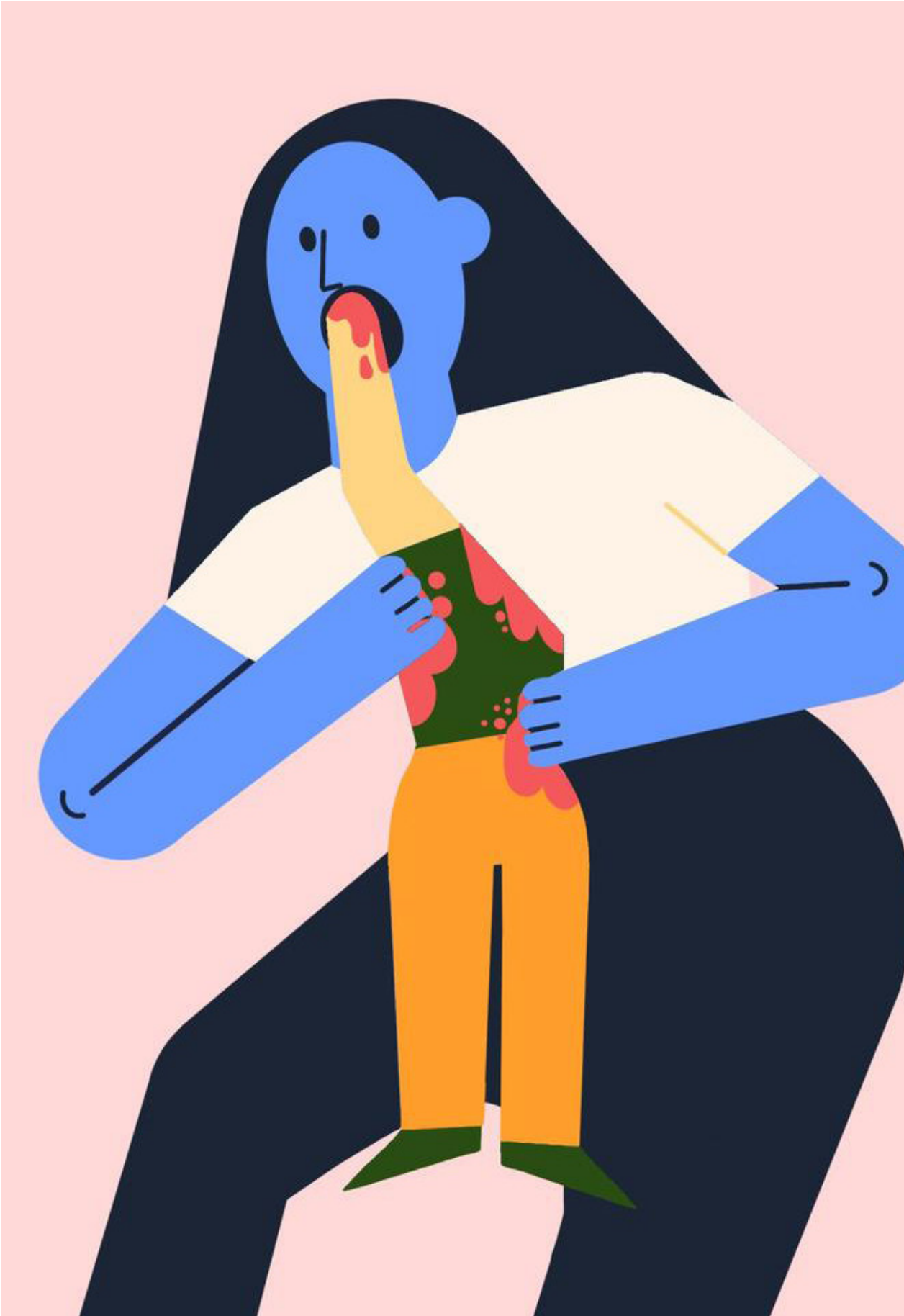
Small Business Illustration

Historically, art styles that adopt disproportion-ate figures have profound culture and reasonings behind the dramatic style. For example, figures in early Christian artworks disregard proportions as it reinforces the widespread belief that the human body was merely a sinful vessel for the soul, while Egyptian depictions of humans were made to highlight the hierarchical social structure. How-ever, one can sum up the motivations behind the chosen visual element of CM to a singular point - "it looks nice." The visual elements hold little to no cultural reasoning, and the most prominent element of the figure in CM is used to highlight a product the corporation is promoting.

Even while disregarding the passage above, the art style is appalling. Portraying hu-man skin tones in pink, teal, or green does not render the work inoffensive but eerie and weird. The unnaturally large feet and hands somehow resemble clowns, while the simplified facial features look off-putting. In addition, the sole use of bright, pastel colors lacks depth in the works. All these visual elements promote the audience to disassociate the figures of CM from humans to just organisms/aliens.
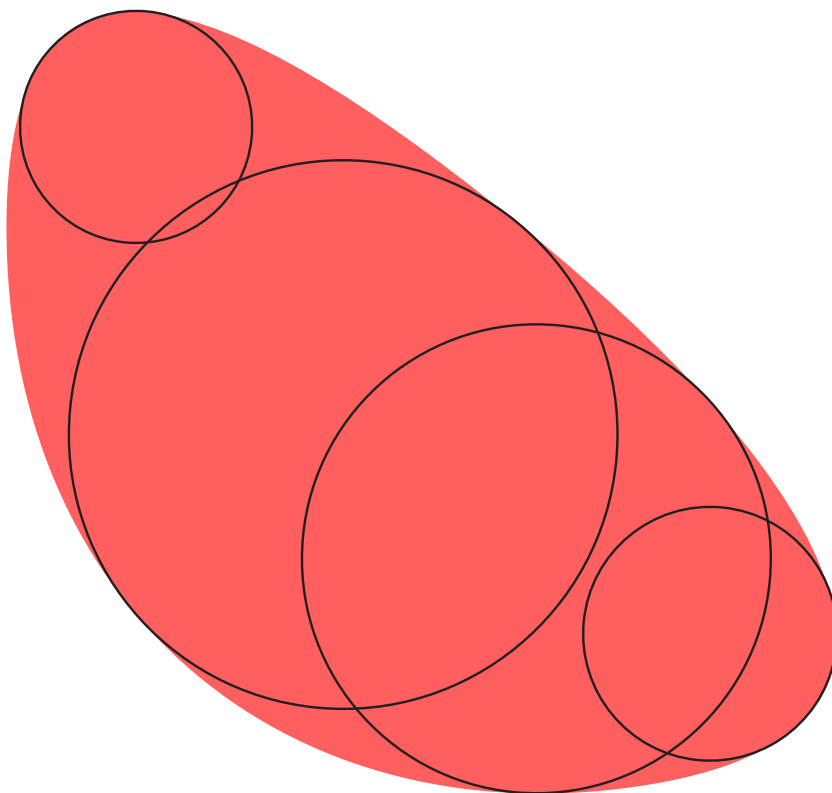
WORKS

I would like to re-emphasize the significance of the original photographs and their associations with corresponding historical and cultural values when they were taken. The recomposed works are made with great respect to the original content and a comprehensive investigation of the photographs' background. By no means are the works shown meant to be disrespectful.

The Burning Monk
Malcome Browne, 1963

Thch Quang Duc, a Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhist monk, set himself ablaze at a major intersection in Saigon in June 1963. In protest against the persecution of Buddhists by the government of President Ngo Dinh Diem, He was seeking to demonstrate that in order to tackle all types of oppression on equal terms, Buddhism, too, needs martyrs. The self-immolation was subsequently seen as a defining moment in the Buddhist crisis and a crucial turning point in the Diem regime's demise. Malcolm Browne received a Pulitzer Prize that year for his photograph of the monk's self-immolation.
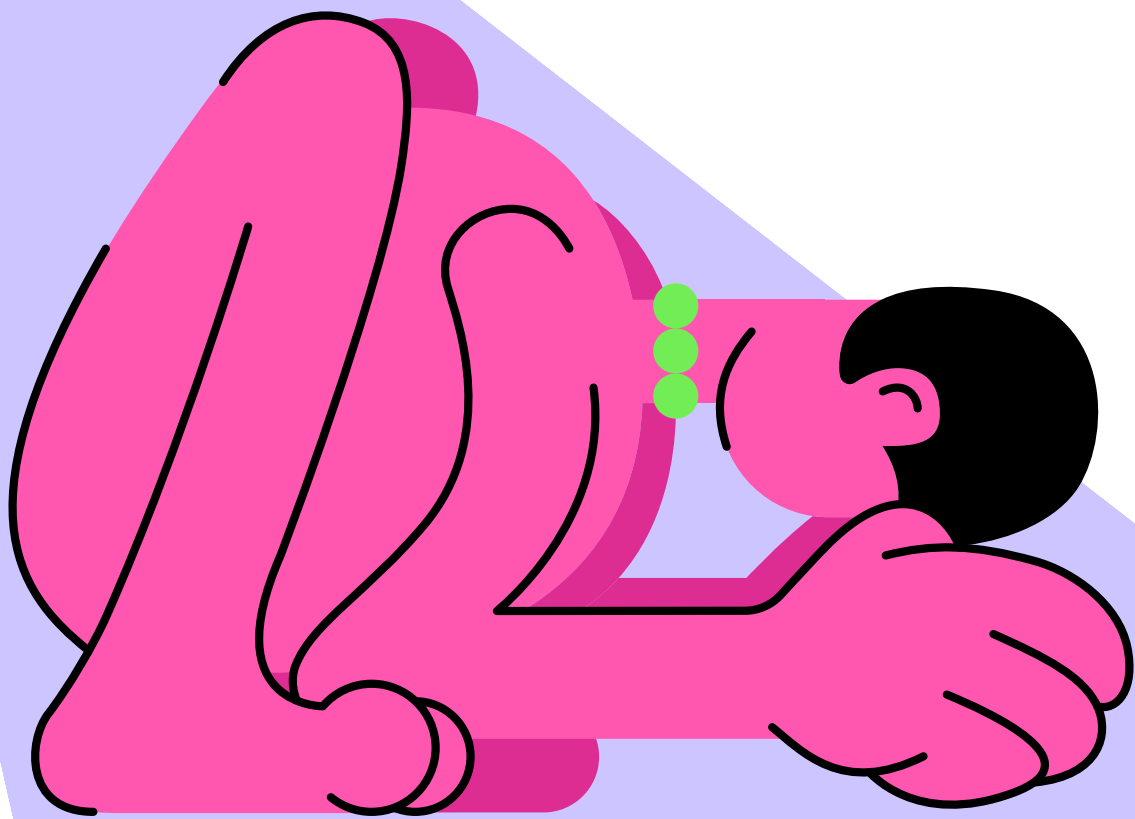
The Vulture and the Little Girl
Kevin Carter, 1993

The Struggling Girl, commonly known as *The Vulture and the Little Girl,* is a photograph by Kevin Carter published in *The New York Times* on March 26, 1993. It's a photograph of a frail famine-stricken child who had collapsed in the foreground with a hooded vulture watching him closely. The child was claimed to have survived an effort to reach a United Nations feeding center about a half-mile distant in Ayod, Sudan, in March 1993. However, the image, which was striking in its simplicity, highlighted complicated ethical concerns about the photojournalist's responsibility - to document or to intervene? Photographer Kevin Carter was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1994 for his shot of a Sudanese child being followed by a vulture. Yet Carter committed suicide in the same year.

Saigon Execution
Eddie Adams, 1968

The subjects of Eddie Adams's photo were a South Vietnamese police chief general and a captured Viet Cong prisoner. The person that is being shot in this photography is Nguyen Văn Lém,who was a member of the Viet Cong. During the Tet Offensive in the Vietnam War, when the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces launched a massive surprise attack on Saigon, Lém was brought to Nguyn Ngc Loan, a South Vietnamese brigadier general, who then summarily executed him. Lém is accused of assassinating Lt. Col. Nguyen Tuan, as well as Tuan's wife, six children, and his 80-year-old mother, before being apprehended and executed. The photographs and film were widely distributed throughout the world, igniting the anti-war movement in the United States. Adams' photograph of the incident became one of the war's most iconic and important photographs, earning him the Pulitzer Prize for Spot News Photography in 1969.

TANK MAN.

Tank Man
Jeff Widdener, 1989

Tank Man was an anonymous Chinese man who stood in front of a column of tanks leaving Tiananmen Square in Beijing on June 5, 1989, the day after the Chinese government's forceful repression of the Tiananmen Square protests. The protester altered his position repeatedly to disrupt the tank's intended path around him as the lead tank maneuvered to pass by him with multiple attempts. The incident was captured on video and shown to a global audience. It is widely regarded as one of the most iconic photographs of all time. The image, as well as the circumstances surrounding it, are censored throughout China. The world media named him "tank man," as he became a figure of defiance in the face of violent authoritarianism.
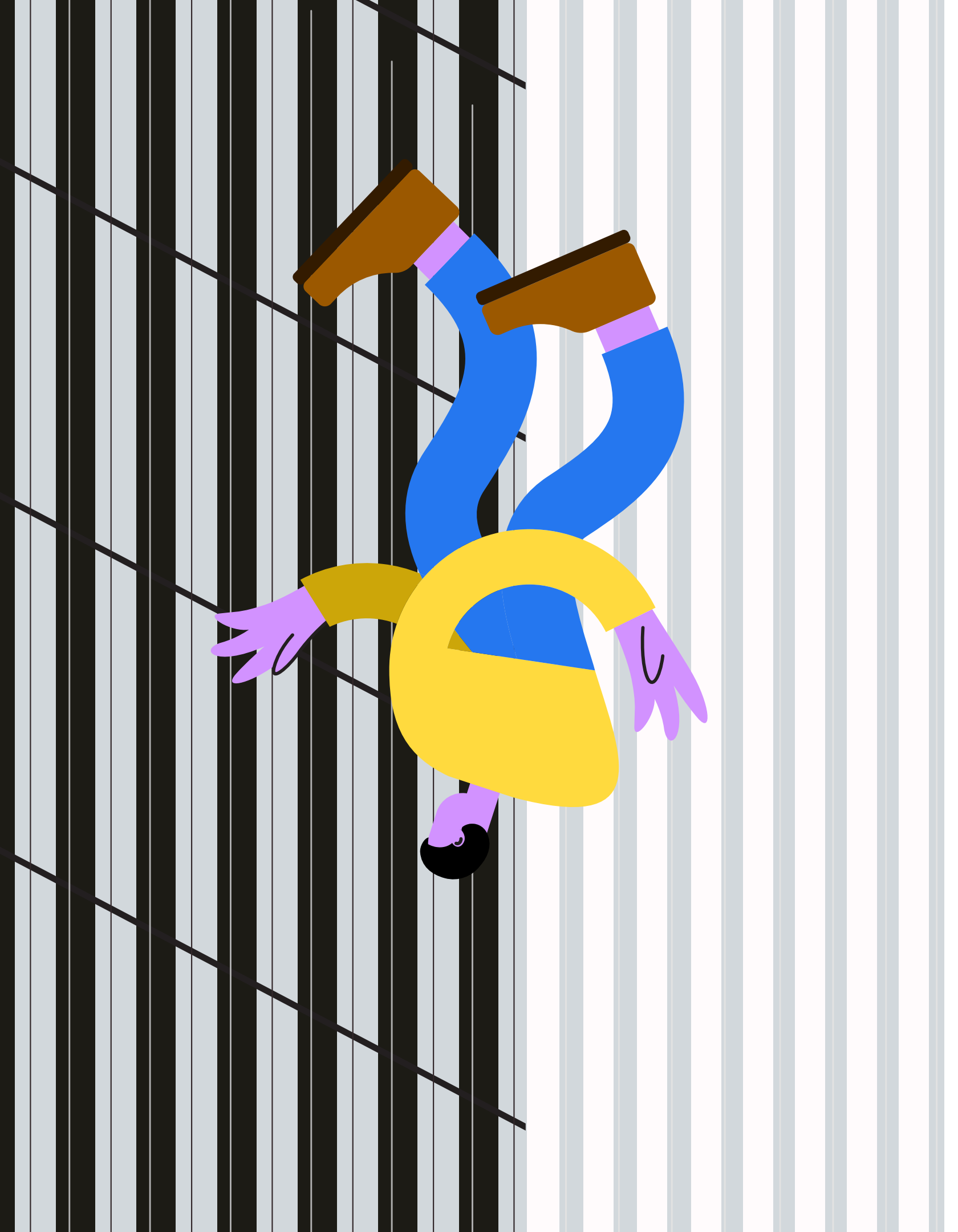
The Falling Man
Richard Drew, 2001

The photograph of a man falling from the World Trade Center taken by photographer Richard Drew during the September 11 attacks in New York City is known as *The Falling Man.* As one of the most enduring images of the 9/11 tragedy, The picture depicts a man falling to his untimely death against the backdrop of the North Tower's steel structure, appearing to be descending headfirst in a moment of relative tranquillity. The picture remains poignant 20 years later, serving as a vivid reminder of the "jumpers" of 9/11, who either fell in search of safety or leaped to escape the fire and smoke.
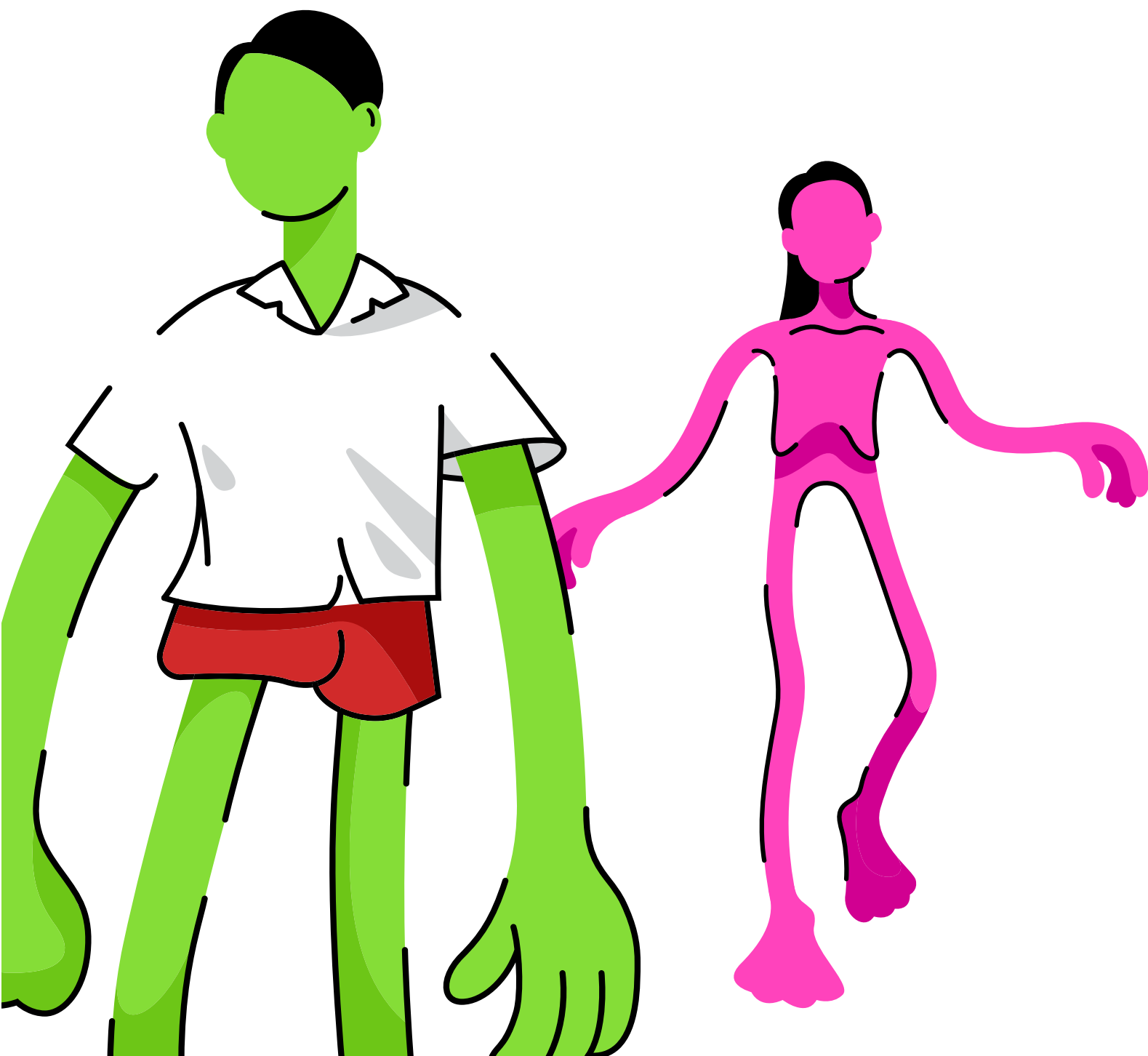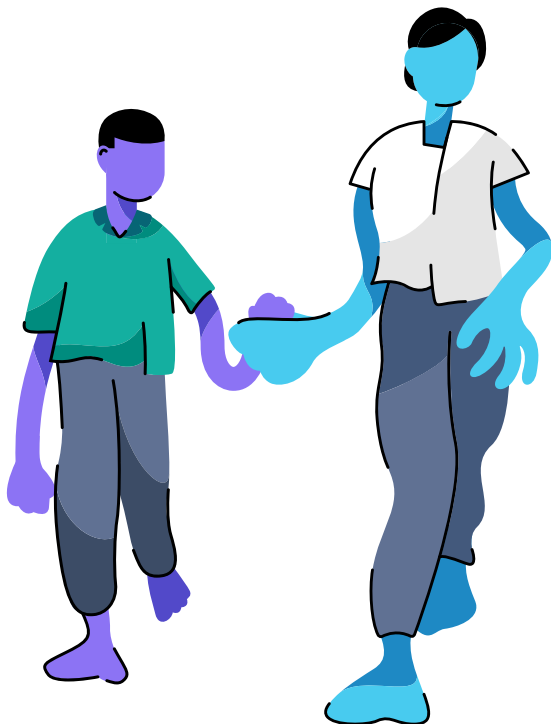
The Terror of War
Nick Ut, 1972

The Terror of War, also known as the *Napalm Girl*, was captured by Nick Ut, a Vietnamese American photographer who was working for the Associated Press at that time. The image captures the terrors of the Vietnamese War after a napalm bomb mistakenly hit Trang Bàng, a town in the Southeast region of Vietnam, and its civilians. Villagers hiding in the village temple ran out, as they thought the temple would also be targeted by the bombings. Nick saw terrified children, among them a naked 9-year-okd girl, running and crying as her skin was falling off.

The image was met with countless controversies, including that of Richard Nixon, who publicly doubted the authenticity under the context that surviving Napalm was an extremely rare occurrence. Ut later stated that, "The picture for me, and unquestionably for many others, could not have been more real. The photo was as authentic as the Vietnam war itself".

Nick Ut's image won a World Press Photo and the Pulitzer Prize for the picture in 1973. Continuing his work, Ut was inducted by the Leica Hall of Fame for his contributions to photojournalism in 2012.

Alan Kurdi
Nilüfer Demir, 2015

The photograph of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian boy, made international headlines after he drowned on September 2, 2015, in the Mediterranean Sea. During the European migration crisis, Alan and his family were one of the many Syrian refugees seeking to reach Europe from Turkey. Nilufer Demir, a Turkish journalist, photographed his body on the shore - the photography immediately went viral and caused a surge in international attention over the refugee issue. Since the Kurdi family allegedly attempted to enter Canada, his death and the broader refugee crisis became a campaign topic in Canada's 2015 federal election.

Vietnam War Annual Draft Lottery
**Thomas J. O'Halloran,** 1972

On December 1, 1969, the Selective Service System of the United States conducted two lotteries to determine the order of call to military service in the Vietnam War in the year 1970, for men born from January 1, 1944 to December 31, 1950. Men with lower numbers were notified first and reported to induction centers, where they could be ordered into active military duty and potentially deployed to Vietnam.

Three hundred sixty-six blue plastic capsules containing birth dates were placed in a large glass container and drawn by hand to assign order-of-call numbers. The capsules were drawn from the container, opened, and the dates inside were put in order and broadcasted through radio, film, and TV. The first capsule – drawn by Congressman Alexander Pirnie of the House Armed Services Committee – contained the date September 14, therefore, all men born on September 14 in any year between 1944 and 1950 were assigned lottery number 1. The drawing continued until all days of the year had been paired with sequence numbers. Fifty years later, the Vietnam draft lotteries have become the drosophila of the social sciences, serving as a model organism for scholars attempting to understand how a life-altering intervention affects those who experienced it versus those who avoided it by chance.

Fire Escape Collapse
Stanley Forman, 1975

Fire Escape Collapse, commonly known as *Fire on Marlborough Street*, is a black-and-white photograph by Stanley Forman which received the Pulitzer Prize for Spot News Photography in 1976. On July 22, 1975, 19-year-old Diana Bryant and her two-year-old goddaughter Tiare Jones were photographed falling from the collapsed fire escape of a burning apartment building on Marlborough Street in Boston. As a turntable ladder on a fire truck was being extended to pick up Diana and Tiare at a height of around 50 feet, the fire escape on the fifth level collapsed.
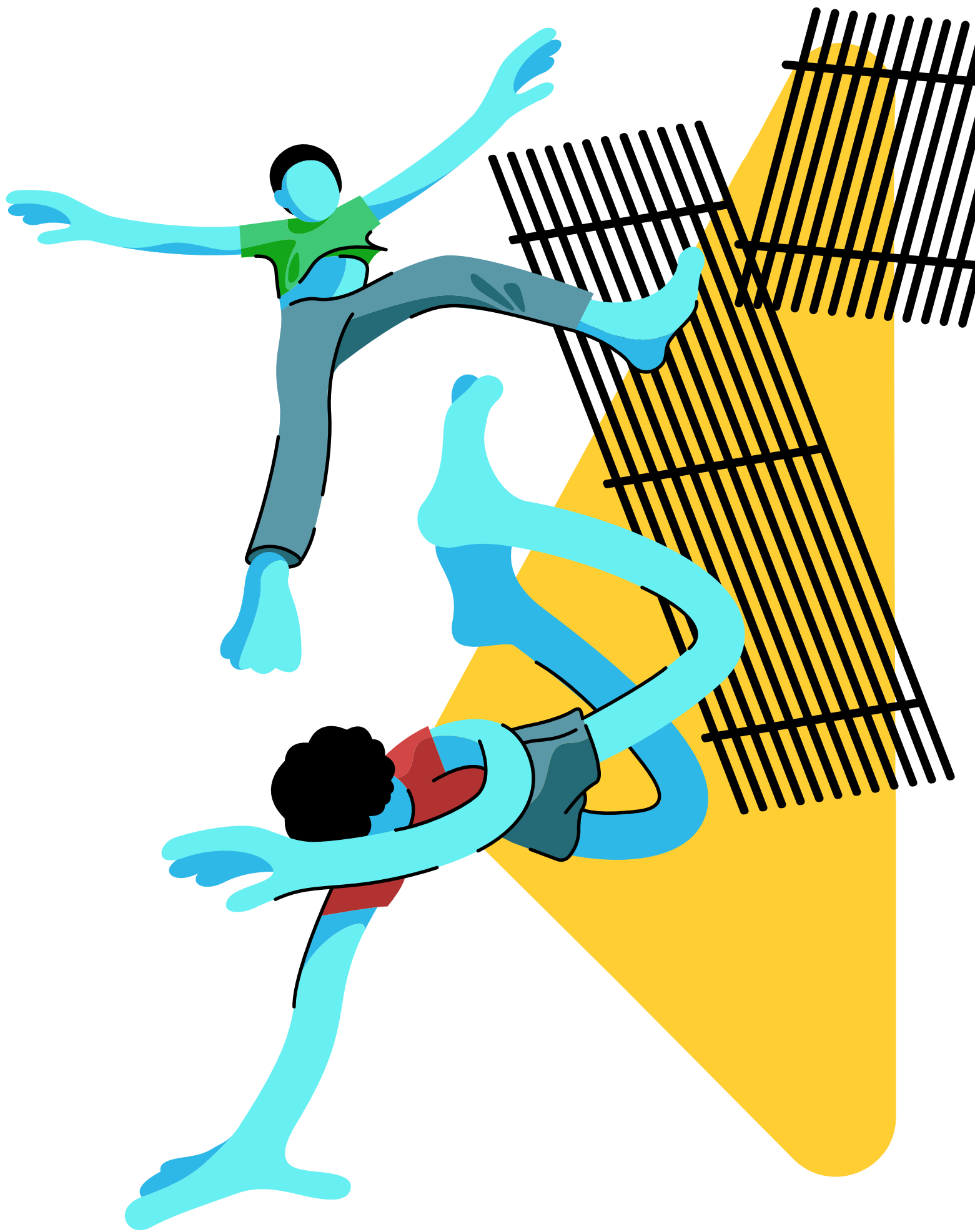
Aid From Padre
Héctor Rondón, 1962

On June 4, 1962, Venezuelan photographer Héctor Rondón Lovera documented the El Porteazo military uprising in Puerto Cabello. While he captured multiple compelling scenes during the brutal encounter, the photo of Navy chaplain Luis Manuel Padilla grasping a wounded soldier who was also holding onto him as he sought to pull himself up was the most emotional of them all. Despite the gun fire, Padillo was seen walking around and delivering last prayers to fallen soldiers regardless of nationality.
Lovera travelled sixty miles from Venezuela's capital, Caracas, to Puerto Cabello, arriving just in time to see government tanks enter the city. Lovera won the World Press Photo of the Year in 1962 for *Aid from Padre,* which also inspired American painter Norman Rockwell's 1965 painting *Southern Justice*.
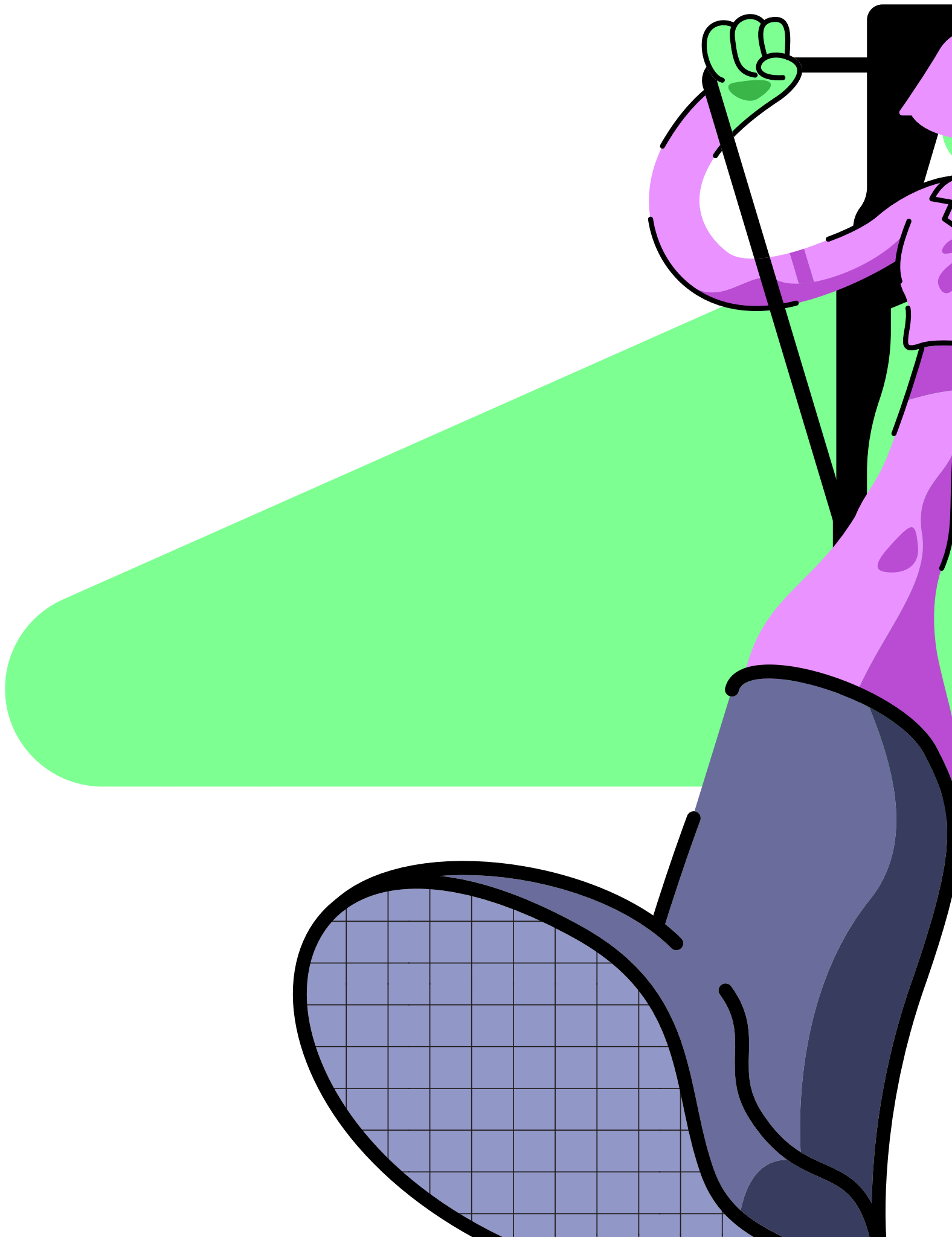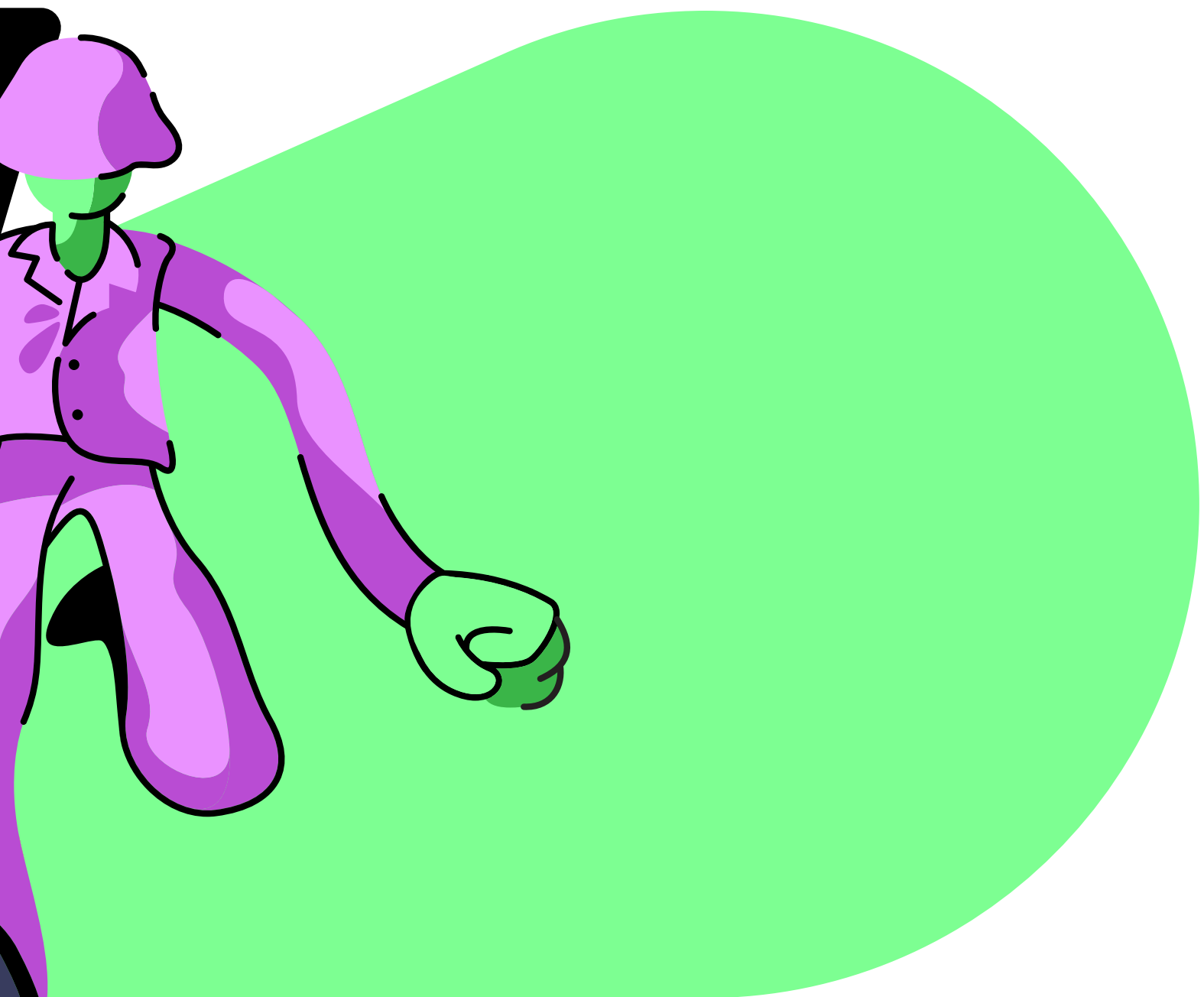
Leap into Freedom
Peter Leibing, 1961

Conrad Schumann's leap across the barricade that would become the Berlin Wall was immortalized in this 1961 photograph. This photograph became a symbol of pursuing independence and a sign of hope for thousands of people, as photographer Peter Leibing documented this six-second leap.

Lennon & Yoko
Annie Leibovitz, 1980

Annie Leibovitz shot the most iconic image in rock 'n' roll history on December 8, 1980. The image, shot for *Rolling Stone*, shows artist Yoko Ono resting flat on a cream carpet while dressed in blue pants and a black long-sleeved top. As she turns to face her husband, John Lennon, her long, black tresses spread around her head. The late Beatles singer is naked and curled up in a fetal posture over his wife. He kisses her face and frames her head within his arm, with his eyes softly closed.

Hours after Leibovitz shot this Polaroid, Lennon was fatally shot outside his building by a jealous former security guard, Mark David Chapman. When *Rolling Stone* published Leibovitz's portrait on its January 22, 1981 cover, the world was grieving the renowned rock musician. The famous photograph finally documented the celebrity couple's final hours together and may have captured their last kiss. In present day, it is still regarded as one of history's most powerful portraits of both love and loss.

V-J Day in Times Square
Alfred Eisenstaedt, 1945

V-J Day in Times Square showcases a sailor kissing a nurse in Times Square, New York. Alfred Eisenstaedt's photo was taken moments after news broke out of Japan's surrender in WWII. His photo is often considered the embodiment of the war's end, capturing the emotions of everyone involved. The nurse claimed that she was non-consensually kissed during the scene, leading to minor friction during the *#metoo* movement. Regardless, the image is still defined as the end of WWII for America.

The Face of Aids
Therese Frare, 1990

In November 1990, _LIFE_ magazine published a portrait of David Kirby, captured by Therese Frare. In the picture, Kirby was surrounded by his heartbroken family members as he breathed his final breaths, his body ravaged by AIDS, and his gaze fixed on somewhere beyond this world. The heartbreaking image of Kirby on his deathbed immediately became the image most profoundly associated with the HIV / AIDS epidemic, which had infected millions of people throughout the world by that point. Frare's shot humanized the epidemic's victims and put the virus's severe pain and suffering on display, contributing in the fight against prejudice, and being recognized as "the picture that changed the face of AIDS."

Iraqi Girl at Checkpoint
### *Chris Hondros,* 2005

Taken by Chris Hondros, the image of Samar, a 5-years-old Iraqi girl, screaming and splattered in blood after American soldiers opened fire on her family's car in the northern town of Tal Afar in January 2005, captured the horror of civilian casualties in the Iraq war. For days, the photo was published in newspapers and media outlets worldwide, pressuring the US military to rethink how it managed checkpoints and raising further questions about the US involvement in Iraq. It also became one of the most famous images of the Iraq war. The Iraq war produced few memorable images for the public imagination, partly because the country was too dangerous for photographers to roam freely. In an age of over-abundant media coverage and short attention spans, news images may find it more challenging to stay in the collective memory.
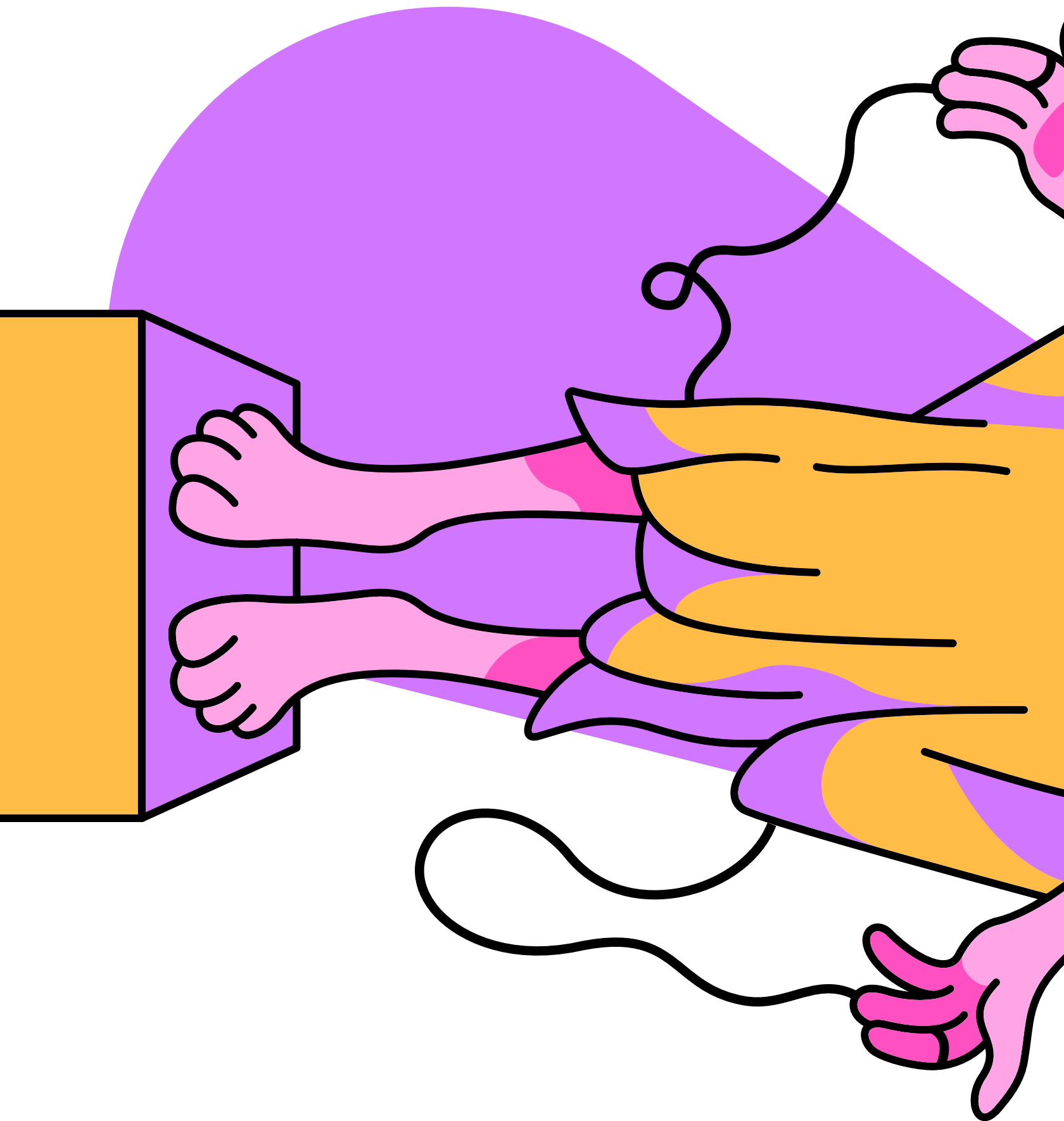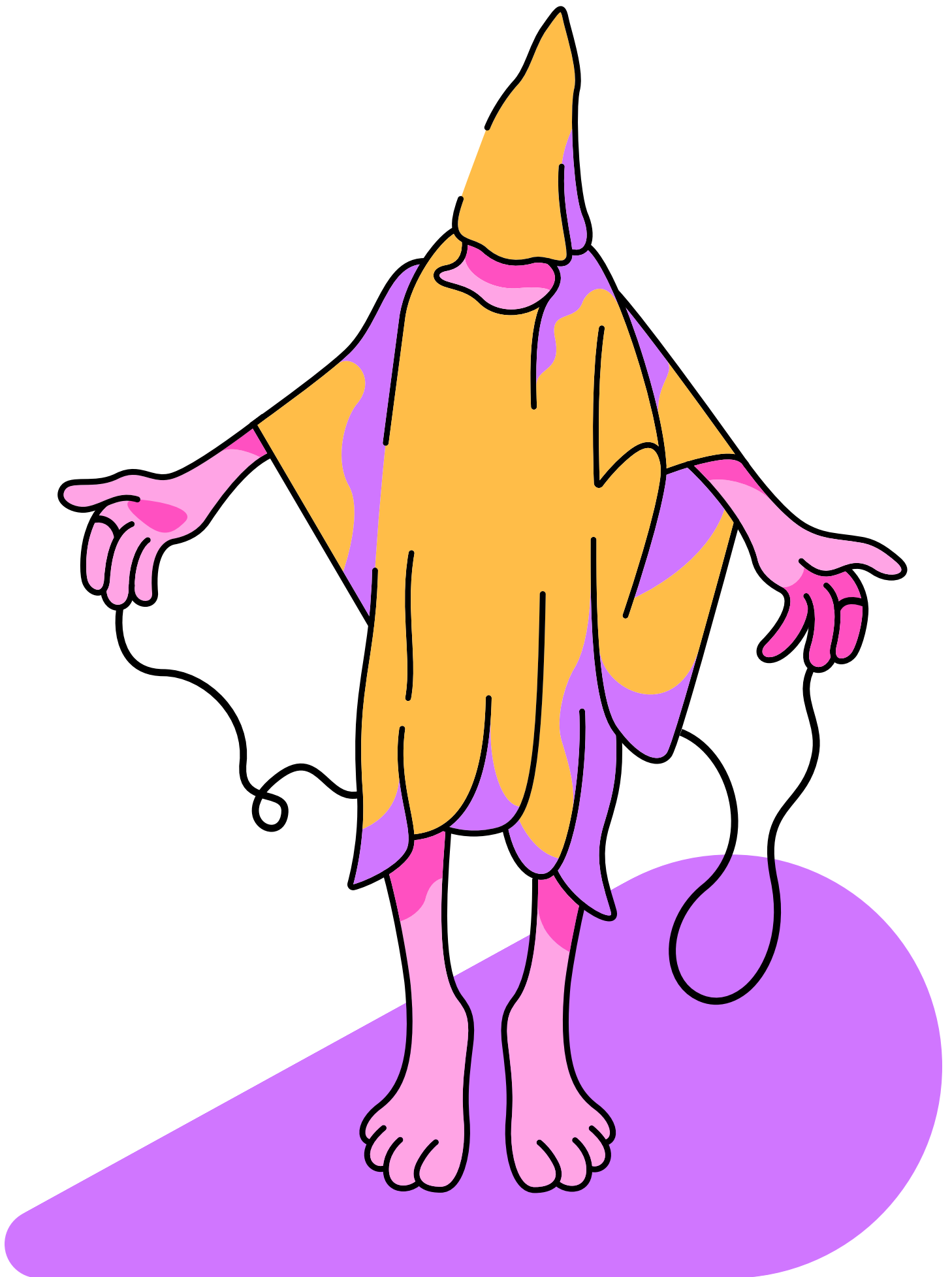
THE HOODED MAN
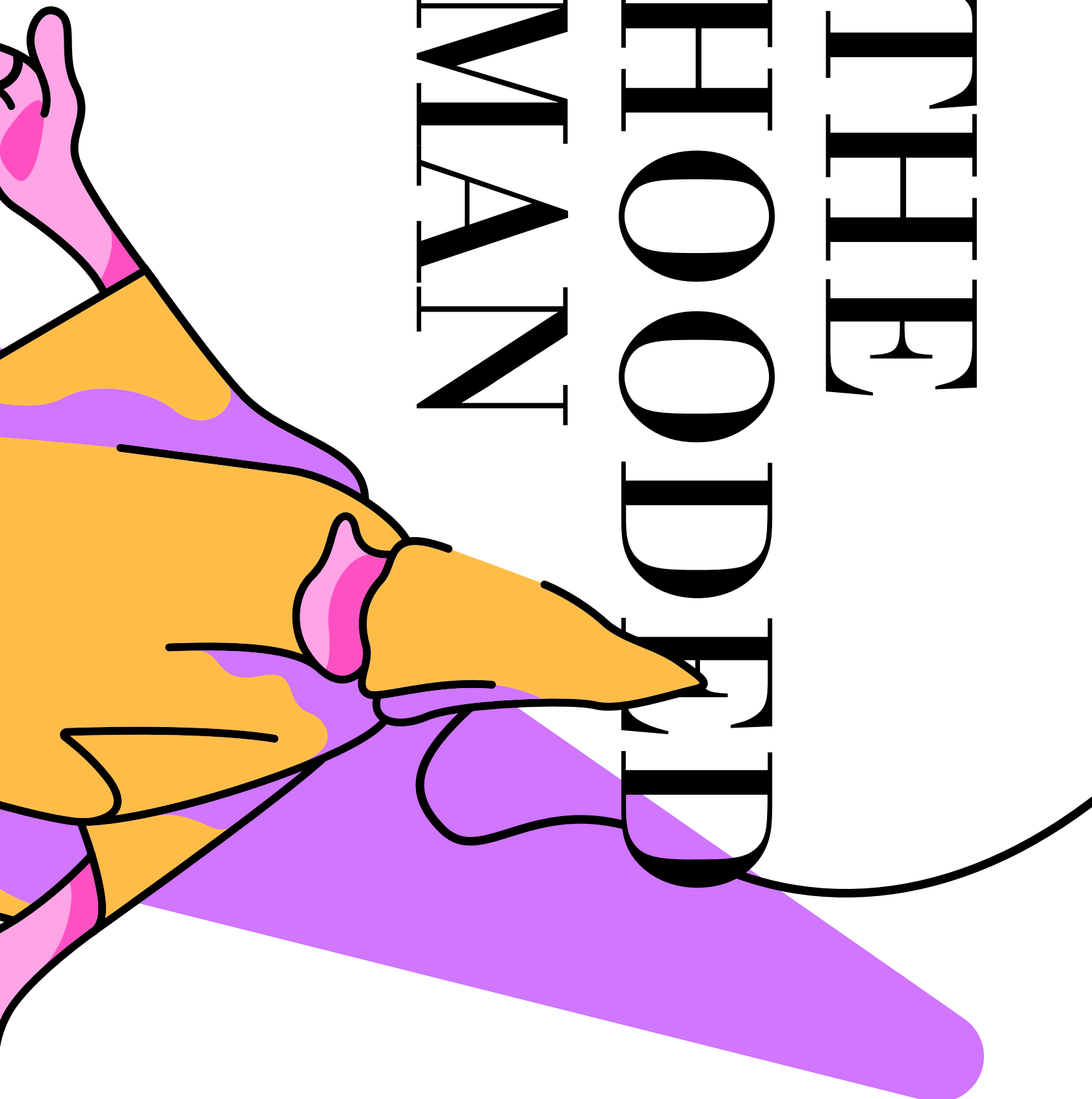
The Hooded Man
### *Sergeant Ivan Frederick*, 2003

The most memorable and notorious images from the war in Iraq were taken not by a photographer but by US Army staff sergeant Ivan Frederick, one of several soldiers to torture Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib. The picture of a hooded Iraqi prisoner standing atop a cardboard box, attached to electrical wires with his arms stretched wide in an eerily prophetic pose, became the indelible symbol of torture and dehumanization. The outpouring of horror and disbelief in the United States was rapid and overwhelming. The dehumanization actions showing in these photos also spark continuous debate. Susan Sontag, an American writer, captured the images' impact in an article published shortly after their release, writing that "the horror of what is shown in the photographs cannot be separated from the horror that the photographs were taken with the perpetrators posing, gloating, over their helpless captives".

The Falling Soldier
Robert Capa, 1936

The Falling Soldier, taken at the start of the Spanish Civil War and depicting the precise moment a bullet struck a Spanish loyalist soldier, has become a hallmark of the medium's unparalleled ability to represent death. As the first war monitored by modern media, the Spanish Civil War led to the production and publication of war photography that was never seen before until then. Even though the scenario depicted is peculiar to an event that has passed in time, it retains its profound effect through a barren landscape in the backdrop, dramatic light and shadow, and its eternally anticipated moment of death.
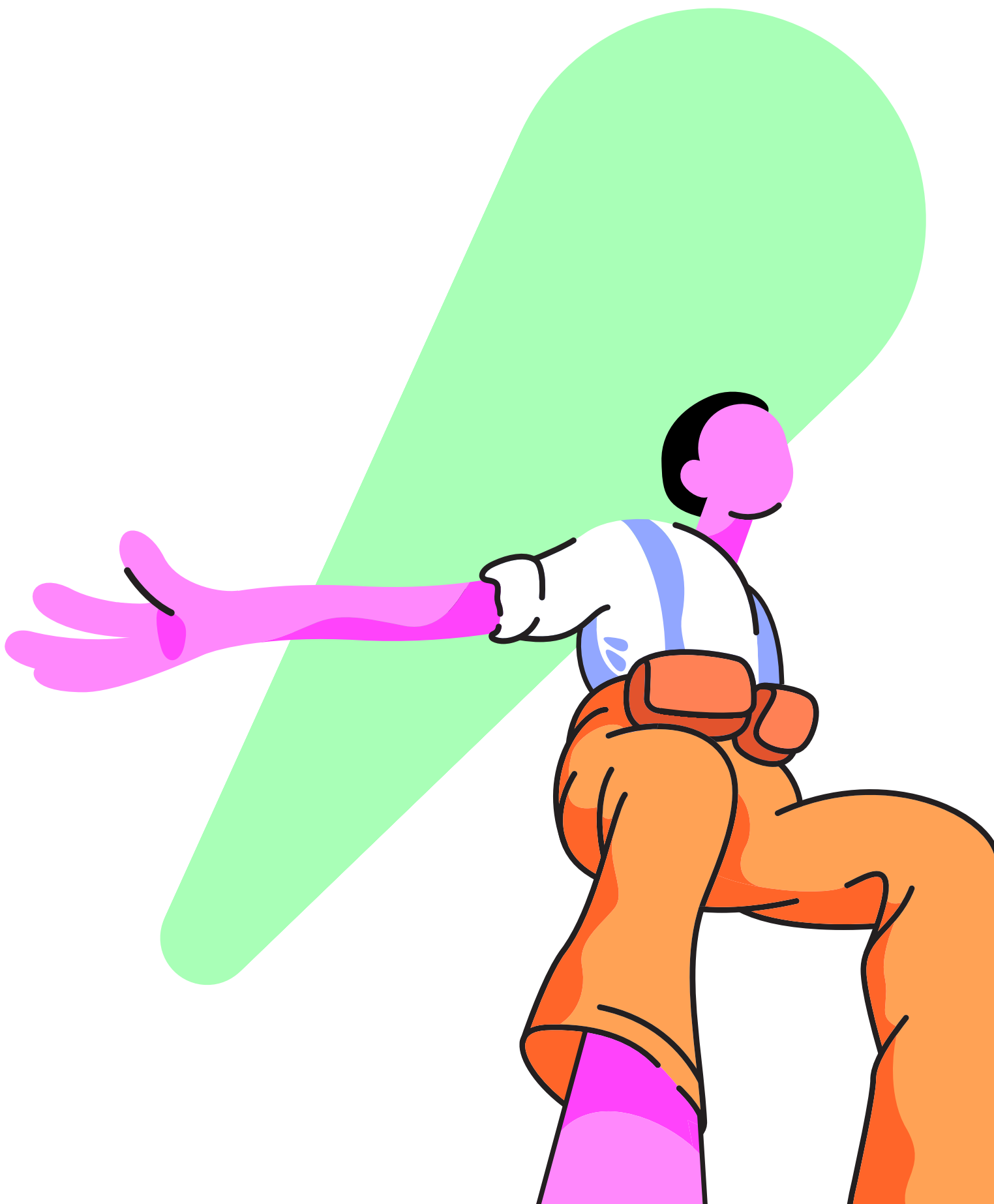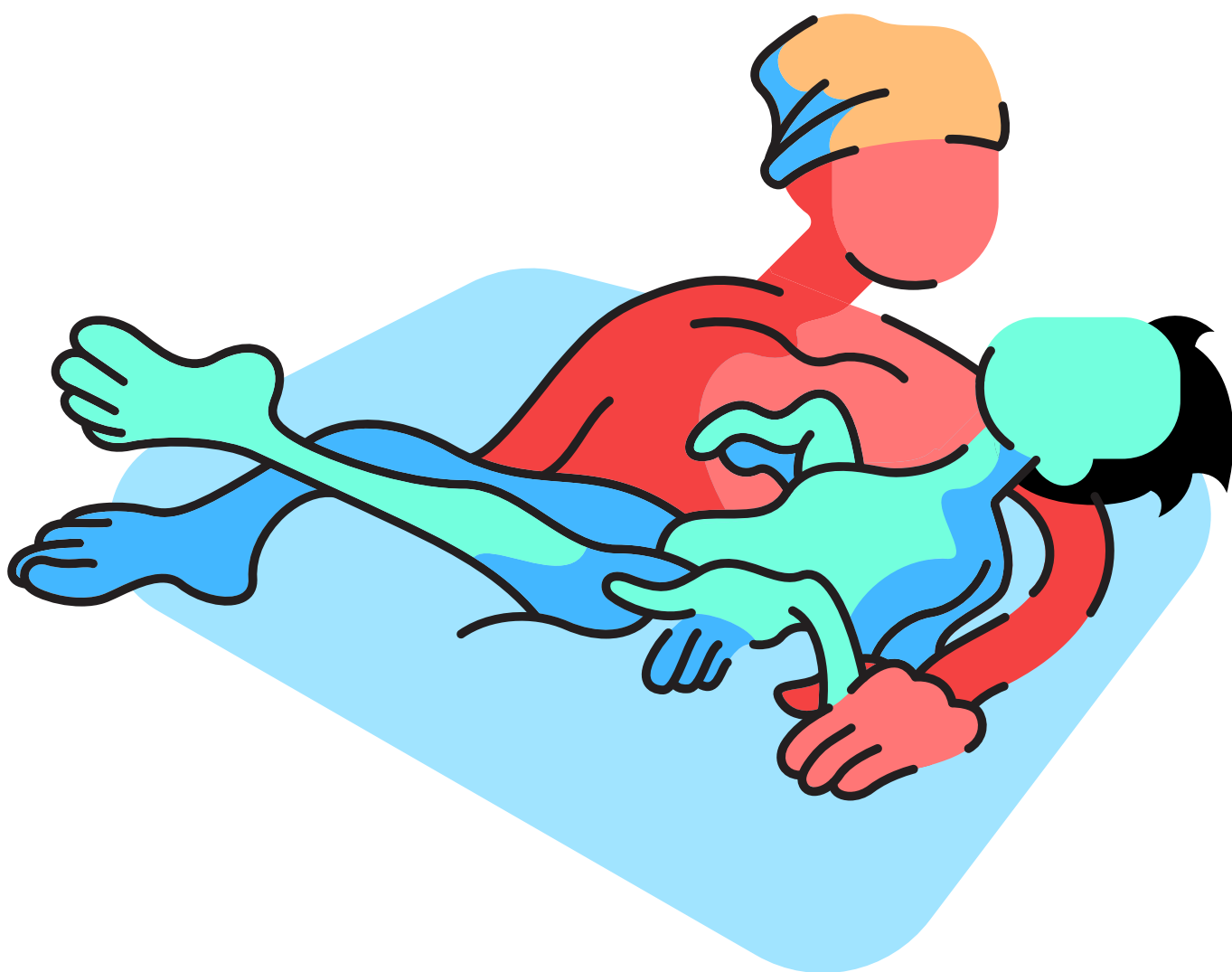
Tomoko Uemura in Her Bath
W. Eugene Smith 1972

This photography is considered to be one of the best works in Eugene Smith's series *Death-Flow from a Pipe: Mercury Pollution Ravages a Japanese Village*. The series of photographs was created by the Smiths to raise international awareness of the Minamata illness and the sufferers' fight for recognition and compensation. The photograph was posed and lit by smiths to mimic the composition of Michelangelo's *Pietà*, a sculpture in which Mary holds the dead body of her son Jesus. *Tomoko Uemura in Her Bath*, aims to become a tool to fight against corporate pollution and ultimately the Japanese government.
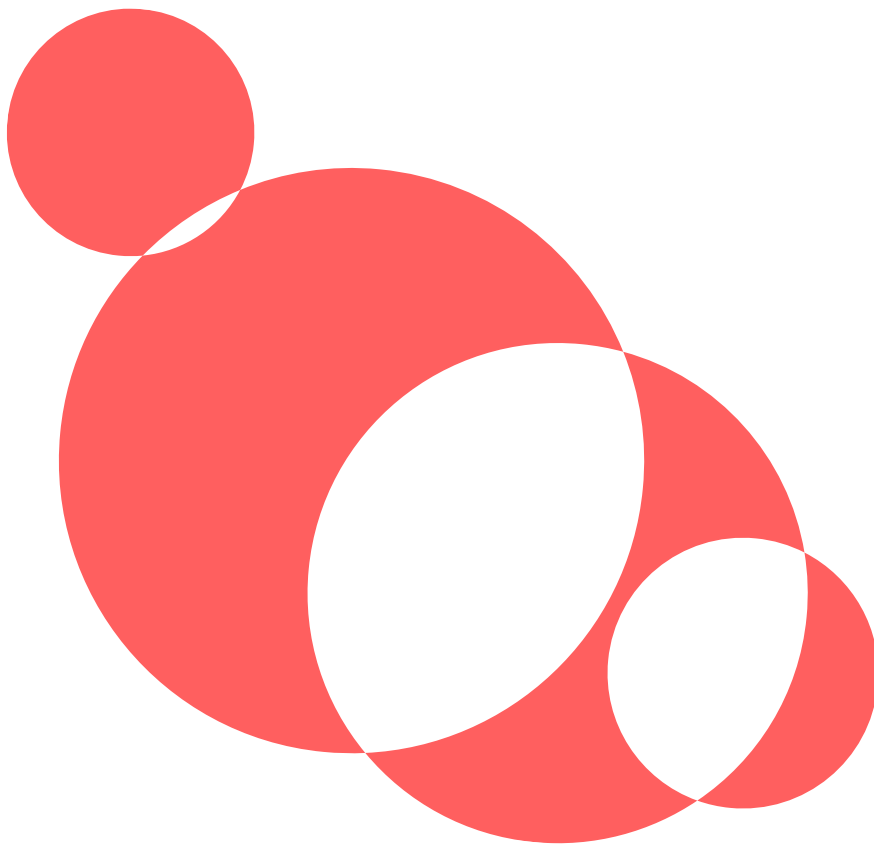
CLOSURE

So... What do you think.

If you view the works as weird, funny, or meaningless,… same.

The deciding criteria for the photos chosen are their composition and capability to express strong emotions. The composition should have clear figures in the foreground, showcasing the visual elements of the style. Vague human figures or irrelevant objects in the background are either removed or replaced by a solid color. Chosen photographs must have the main figure's upper torso visible, as they provide the best opportunities to showcase the disproportionate human anatomy of Corporate Memphis.

Secondly, the photographs chosen should convey a strong emotion, regardless of the audience's prior knowledge of its background. This is necessary to showcase how the CM style strips human-like characteristics and humanity away from the illustrated figures. This allows us to dissociate the figures from humans to mere organisms.

As previously mentioned, this is my subjective viewing and understanding of my work. If none of the passages above seems logical and understandable, I would fail to convey my stance through my work.

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Corporate Memphis: Exposition

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