



P.T. BARNUM  
CIRCUS

THE  
**GREATEST SHOWMAN**

A play performed in the round  
BA Performance Costume

**OWEN SCULLION**





# THE GREATEST SHOWMAN



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## CONCEPT STATEMENT



### ACTION

This production is based on the life of P T Barnum and tells the story of the creation of his circus and the lives of its star attractions. It starts with Barnum's childhood in the early 1800s when he was working with his father and met his future wife Charity. When Barnum lost his job as a clerk in a trading company he took advantage of this misfortune and borrowed money to buy a museum of oddities. This developed into him bringing together a collection of human oddities whom he teaches to perform. Although initially viewed as freaks, Barnum gets them to put on a show that wins over audiences. The production promotes inclusion and the theme of no dream being impossible. It features catchy musical numbers, exotic performers and daring acrobatic feats. After creating the greatest show on earth Barnum's dreams of fame and fortune lead him to lose his way. In the end, he realises that his wife and children are the most important things in his life.

### THEMES

The Greatest Showman has a variety of themes. One of the main themes is about inclusion and creating a culture in which difference is celebrated rather than opposed. Another significant theme which is promoted through the powerful medium of song and dance is that everyone should have a dream and the idea that no dream is impossible. In the story, we see Barnum building a sense of family among his performers and this builds their confidence and self-esteem. Facing life's challenges with courage is another theme that comes through in the story. The final and enduring theme is the idea that material wealth and fame is not as important as family and spending time together.

## PRODUCTION OBJECTIVES



I have chosen this project because of my love of the 2017 film *The Greatest Showman*. The message of the story is that everyone should have a dream and that no dream is impossible. This is a particularly important message for me. Staging the play in a big top tent would be the perfect setting for a story that is, in part, about the excitement and romance of the circus. I want my production to be staged in a big top tent at The Meadows in Edinburgh during the Edinburgh Fringe. The stage setting will seat the audience like a theatre-in-the-round which reflects the design of the earliest circuses founded by Phillip Astley, the father of modern circus in 1768. I want this production to take the audience on their own magical journey back in time to the golden age of the circus. My intention is to produce an unforgettable spectacle that combines the uniqueness of theatre-in-the-round with the thrill of the circus.

## DESIGN OBJECTIVES



I will approach the costume design process with the message of the story firmly in mind. I will take the point of view that everyone can have a dream and that no dream is impossible. I will create a look that is colourful and will paint a picture that is fantastical and romantic. While the story is set in Victorian times, my costumes and fabrics will not be restricted to the Victorian age but will be timeless and magical. I will not be over concerned with historical accuracy. My costumes will be free of conventions, just like Barnum's circus was. I will consider the personalities of the individual characters and their dreams in life to decide on the colour palettes and patterns in their costumes.

## TRANSLATION OF THE DESIGN

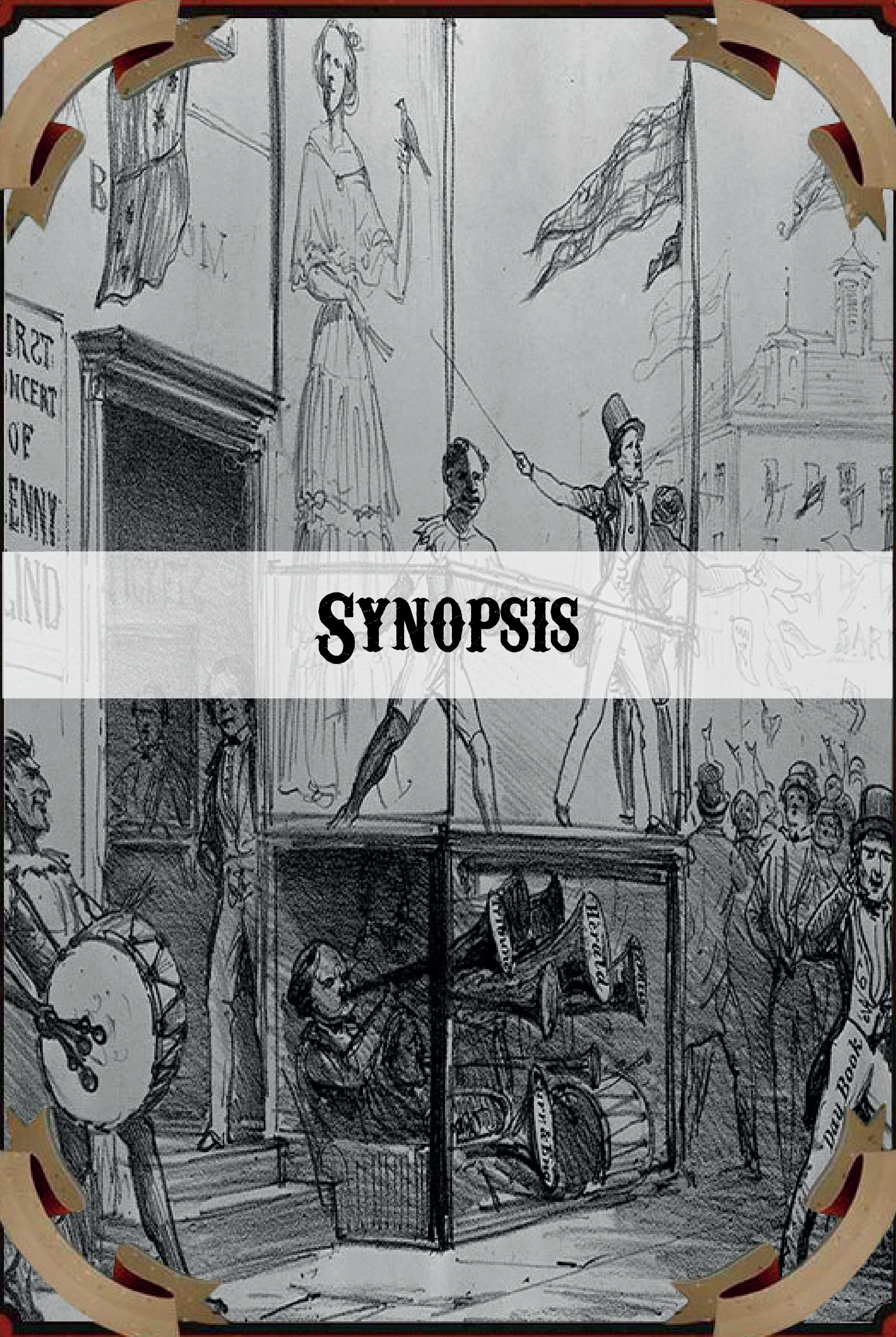


I plan to use what I know about the characters and their dreams as well as what I have learned from my research to plan my characters' costumes, hair and accessories. I will also use my research into circuses to inform my costume designs where appropriate. The personal traits of each character and their dreams will influence their colour palettes and fabric designs.

## CHOICE OF PERIOD, STYLE, AND FORM



Although the play is set in Victorian times the use of prints, textiles and colours will not be confined to those seen in Victorian times. This will allow me freedom to be creative in the use of fabrics and colours for costumes and accessories. The designs will reflect the message of the story from the point of view that we should all have dreams, and that no dream is impossible. There will be no firm restrictions to my design ideas even though there will be a Victorian influence.



## SYNOPSIS

My play starts with P T Barnum as a boy. He meets his future wife Charity, but her father forbids him from going near her. Charity is forced to go away to a finishing school, but they write to each other and eventually reunite as adults and marry.

Barnum, now married with two girls, works for a trading company until his boss tells everyone that they are bankrupt after their trading vessels have sunk. Barnum hatches an idea and goes to the bank for a loan and uses the deeds to the sunken trading vessels as a guarantee. Barnum opens up a museum devoted to oddities, but he struggles to attract customers until he introduces human oddities. Among them are Charles Stratton who has dwarfism and a bearded woman named Lettie Lutz. Although initially viewed as freaks, Barnum manages to get them all to put on a musical number that wins over crowds. He renames his attraction P T Barnum's Circus.

Barnum's circus becomes a success and when he meets a playwright named Phillip Carlyle they go into partnership. The circus goes to England, and they are invited to meet Queen Victoria. Barnum and Phillip meet the Swedish opera singer Jenny Lind and invite her to perform for the show so that she may become known worldwide.

When Jenny goes to the United States and performs, the audiences love her. After her performance, Barnum hosts a party, but when the rest of the troupe wants to join the party, Barnum turns them away. Although sad at first, the troupe decides not to let this get them down, as they decide to follow their dreams, regardless of how they are viewed.

Phillip finds himself falling for the show's trapeze artist Anne Wheeler. He tries to introduce his new love, who is of African American heritage, to his parents but they disapprove of her because of her race.

When Barnum goes on a world tour with Jenny he leaves Phillip as the ringmaster of the show. On the tour, Jenny develops an attraction for Barnum, but he rejects her. Before quitting the tour Jenny kisses Barnum in front of the press.

Back at home protesters gather outside the theatre to harass the Barnum troupe because of their differences. Phillip confronts them, but they set the theatre ablaze. Barnum returns home from his tour and saves Phillip from the blazing building. The circus troupe reminds him that he was the one who saw them all as more than freaks and gave them a real family and home. Phillip then offers to provide the money to restart the circus and he and Barnum become 50-50 partners. They restart the show in a tent and audiences turn out in droves. Barnum then decides to hand over the job of ringmaster to Phillip so that he can watch his girls grow up. Barnum realises that Charity and the girls are more important to him than the fame and fortune he has been pursuing



## RESEARCHING CIRCUS HISTORY



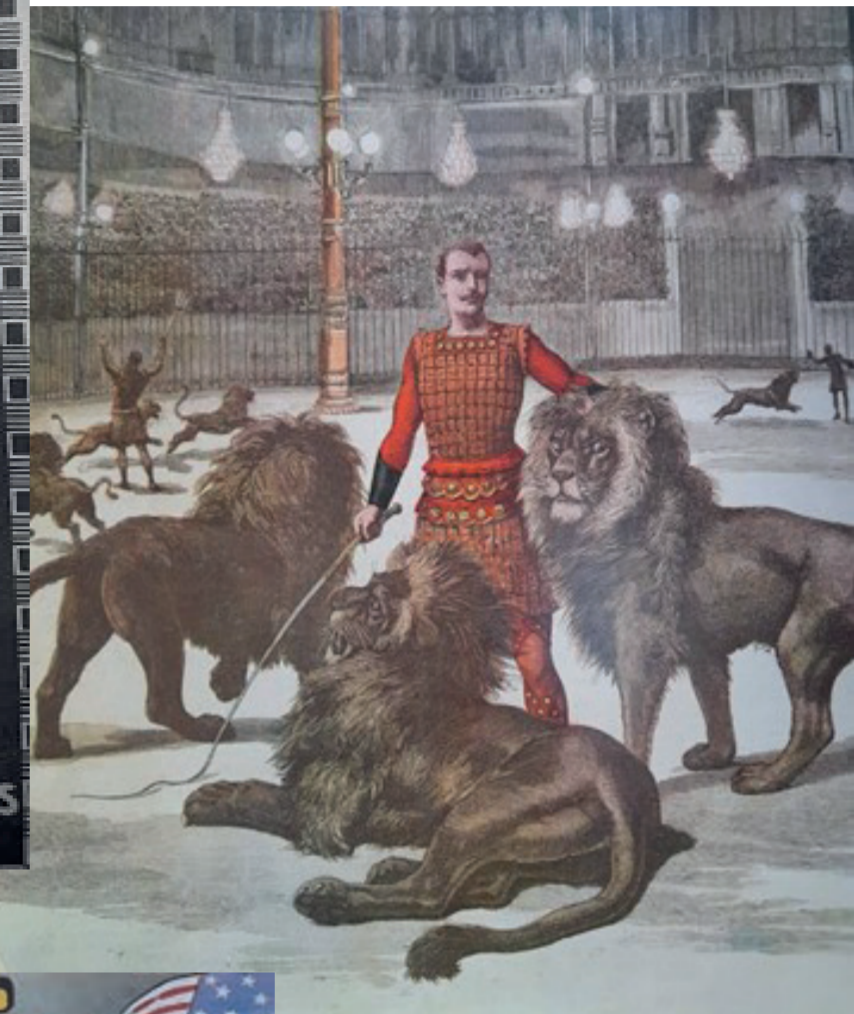
The origins of the circus go back as far as ancient Greece and Rome. Evidence of this can be found in ancient artefacts such as this ancient Greek vase which shows a female acrobat performing an elaborate handstand. There are many ancient objects showing chariot racing such as this terracotta relief of a Roman charioteer in the Circus Maximus in Rome and the Roman mosaic found at Gafsa in Tunisia which shows chariot racing but also a variety of activities including a display of wild beasts. In more modern times this late 18th century watercolour shows a slack rope dancer performing.

# THE ROLE OF HORSES IN CIRCUS



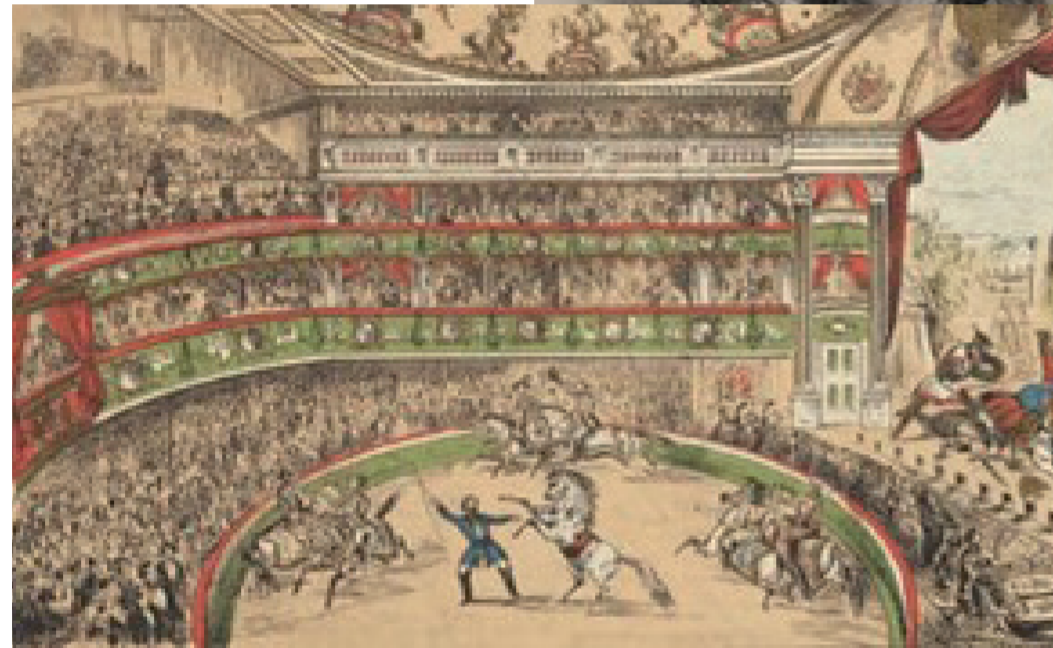
Images of the Roman chariot races at Circus Maximus in ancient Rome show that horses were an important part of the earliest forms of circus. Two thousand years later at Philip Astley's riding school in London, the modern circus was born in the 18th century. Modern circus has been recorded by many artists in their work. Famous French artist Toulouse Lautrec produced a series of pastels that were dedicated to the circus one of which is shown above. The final image shows a painting by Spanish artist Celso Lager called Circus Scene which was painted in 1922.

# CIRCUS PERFORMERS



Many circus performers took to the air. Circus posters often showed trapeze artists like The Great Aerial Smiths in 1910. They are hanging upside down on the trapeze. However, not all circus acts took to the air. Here you can see a lion tamer trying to evoke the atmosphere of the ancient Roman Circus. Folies-Bergere has never been a circus but as this 1890 poster shows it was a showcase for many circus acts. Acts like fire eaters were often found in the modern circus too.

# PHILIP ASTLEY — FATHER OF MODERN CIRCUS



Philip Astley was born in Newcastle-under-Lyme, in 1742. He joined the first Light Cavalry Regiment of the British Army at 17. He was famous for his trick riding and in 1768, he and his wife Patty established Astley's Riding School where he performed his trick riding. He rode in a circle because this set-up allowed audiences to always keep sight of the riders during their performances. By 1780 he had added a platform, seats and a roof over the entire arena. This was where the modern circus was born. Philip Astley's story is told in a theatre production called Astley's Astounding Adventures. The theatre production was performed at The New Vic Theatre in Newcastle-under-Lyme. This is an in-the-round theatre and is uniquely placed to bring Astley's inspiring story to life. The theatre-in-the-round system lends itself to becoming a big top which is perfect for the circus scenes.

# RINGLING BROTHERS & BARNUM & BAILEY



In 1880 two great circus rivals, the Cooper and Bailey's Circus and the P T Barnum Circus agreed to join forces and adopted the name Barnum & Bailey Circus. They sold their circus show as The Greatest Show on Earth. Barnum & Bailey had a rival circus called Ringling Brothers Circus which was billed as The World's Greatest Show. In 1919 these two great circuses joined into one circus called Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows. This circus gave its last performance in 2017. In 1952 a Hollywood film called The Greatest Show on Earth was released. It was set in the Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus and had many famous stars like Charlton Heston and James Stewart. The real Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's Circus troupe also appear in the film.



# PHINEAS TAYLOR BARNUM



P.T. Barnum was born on 5 July 1810. When he was 15 years old his father died, and he had to support of his mother and four siblings. In 1834 he moved to New York City where he found his vocation as a showman. In 1850, he promoted the American Tour of Swedish opera singer Jenny Lind paying her an unprecedented \$1,000 per night for 150 nights He started his circus in 1870 when he was 60 years old. His circus was the thing that made him famous. In partnership with James A Bailey, Barnum made the American circus a popular and gigantic spectacle the so-called Greatest Show on Earth. The film *The Greatest Showman* is a 2017 film based on the story and life of P T Barnum and the lives of his star circus attractions. The set design for the circus scenes in the film shows an arena with the audience watching the performers in the round.



My production of *The Greatest Showman* is based on the screenplay written by Jenny Bicks and Bill Condon. The 2017 film stages the circus in a theatre in the round auditorium. This style of the amphitheatre is reminiscent of Philip Astley's 18th-century arena where modern circus was born. It also mirrors the look of the in-the-round auditorium at the New Vic theatre where Astley's *Astounding Adventures* was staged. This is what I want for my production. To achieve this, I plan to stage my show in a big top tent. A spiegeltent is a large travelling tent, constructed from wood and canvas and decorated with mirrors and stained glass. The Famous Spiegeltent, built in 1920, was first used as an Edinburgh Festival Fringe venue in 1996. It has become a regular feature at the Fringe and would be the ideal venue to stage my production.

# SET DESIGN - THE SPIEGELTENT



# COSTUME RESEARCH

The circus ringmaster introduces the circus acts and guides the audience through the experience, directing their attention to the various areas of the circus arena and helping to link the acts together. The traditional ringmaster costume consists of a bright tailcoat, often red with gold trim and with a waistcoat and a black top hat occasionally with a bow tie, cravat or stock tie.



# P.T. BARNUM RINGMASTER COSTUME

# PHILLIP CARLYLE COSTUME

In the 1870s fashionable men such as Phillip Carlyle often wore sack coats. These usually had three or four buttonholes and were often worn buttoned only at the top button. Sack coats were usually worn with trousers and a waistcoat which could match the coat or be made from different fabrics and be of different colours. The waistcoat could be single or double-breasted.



Charity Barnum was a dedicated wife and mother and would have spent much of her time at home. When she was at home Charity would have worn a comfortable tea gown or something similar. These became popular around the mid-19th century and are characterised by unstructured lines and light fabrics. They were worn without a corset or assistance from a maid but were still intended to be elegant. Tea gowns or similar day wear usually had high necks and long sleeves.



# CHARITY BARNUM COSTUME

# JENNY LIND OPERA GOWN

Born in Sweden in 1820, Jenny Lind was one of the most famous opera singers of the 19th century. She shot to a new level of fame, when she began a tour of the United States, under the management of P.T. Barnum. Jenny did not wear elaborate or flashy fashions but performed in an understated white gown. In portraits, she is usually depicted in elegant, if simple and modest, fashions. That was part of her appeal.



The art of trapeze performance developed in the early to mid-1800s. There are different types of trapeze but the form used in the circus is known as the flying trapeze. Flying trapeze artists dress in costumes designed to draw the eye, protect the body, enable movement, and complement the circus artist's performance. The circus costume must be a balance between fashion and function that enables the performer to create an almost superhuman display.



# ANNE WHEELER TRAPEZE COSTUME

# LETTIE LUTZ COSTUME

A bearded lady is a woman with a naturally occurring beard normally due to either the condition known as hirsutism, or the condition known as hypertrichosis. There are numerous references to bearded women throughout the centuries. Lettie Lutz, the bearded lady in The Greatest Showman, is a woman and as such her costume will be a beautiful and feminine gown to perform in the show.



Dwarfism is usually caused by a person inheriting a mutant gene, which produces a defect in development. In the 19th century in the United States, people with dwarfism were a major attraction of many circuses. Charles Stratton was one of the most famous of these people. Barnum provided him with expensive and exquisitely performance costumes. In my production, Charles Stratton will have a grand costume.



# CHARLES STRATTON COSTUME

# COSTUME DEVELOPMENT

*Trapeze Exercise*



Here you can see my initial sketches for P. T. Barnum based on my costume research for Circus Ringmasters. All of my early designs show P. T. Barnum wearing a traditional style ringmaster costume consisting of a bright tailcoat and with a waistcoat and a top hat.

P.T. BARNUM COSTUME DEVELOPMENT

# PHILLIP CARLYLE COSTUME DEVELOPMENT



Here you can see my initial sketches for Phillip Carlyle based on my research into what fashionable men wore in the 1870s. My early designs show Phillip wearing a sack coat with trousers and a waistcoat. The waistcoats in my initial designs show the waistcoat could be either single or double-breasted.

# CHARITY BARNUM COSTUME DEVELOPMENT



Here you can see my early sketches for Charity Barnum based on my research into what women wore in the 1870s. My initial designs show Charity wearing a tea gown or a skirt and blouse. These designs are based on what I think Charity would wear when she was at home with her husband and children. Her day wear would have had high necks and long sleeves.

# JENNY LIND COSTUME DEVELOPMENT



Here you can see my early sketches for Jenny Lind based on my research into what the real Jenny Lind wore. My initial designs are influenced mainly by the clothes she wore in portraits where she is usually portrayed in simple but elegant fashion.

# ANNE WHEELER COSTUME DEVELOPMENT



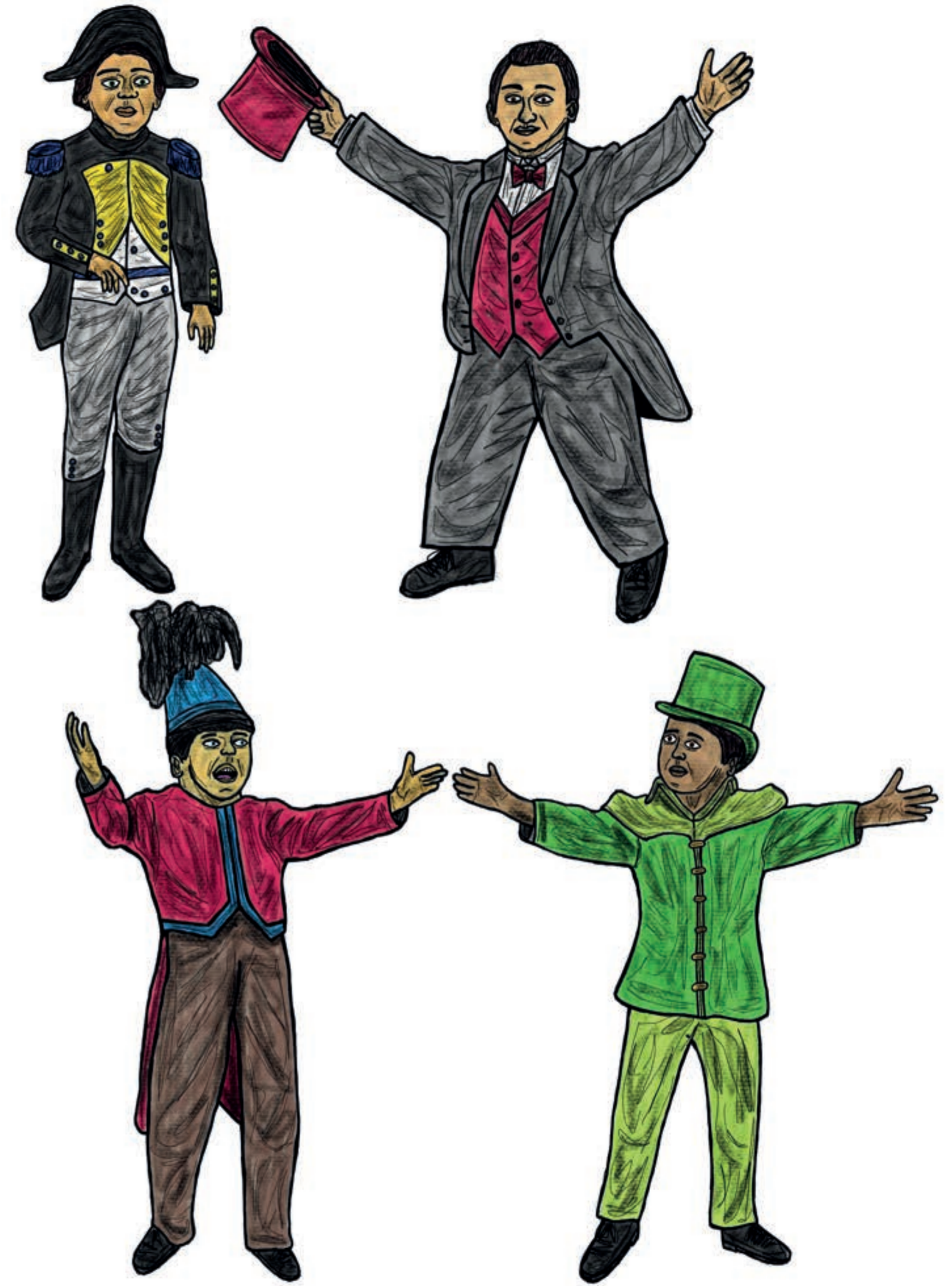
Here you can see my initial sketches for Anne Wheeler based on my costume research for Circus Flying Trapeze Artists. All of my early designs show Anne wearing a traditional trapeze artist costume designed to be eye-catching but also allow the performer to move freely and be safe whilst performing their stunning



# LETTIE LUTZ COSTUME DEVELOPMENT

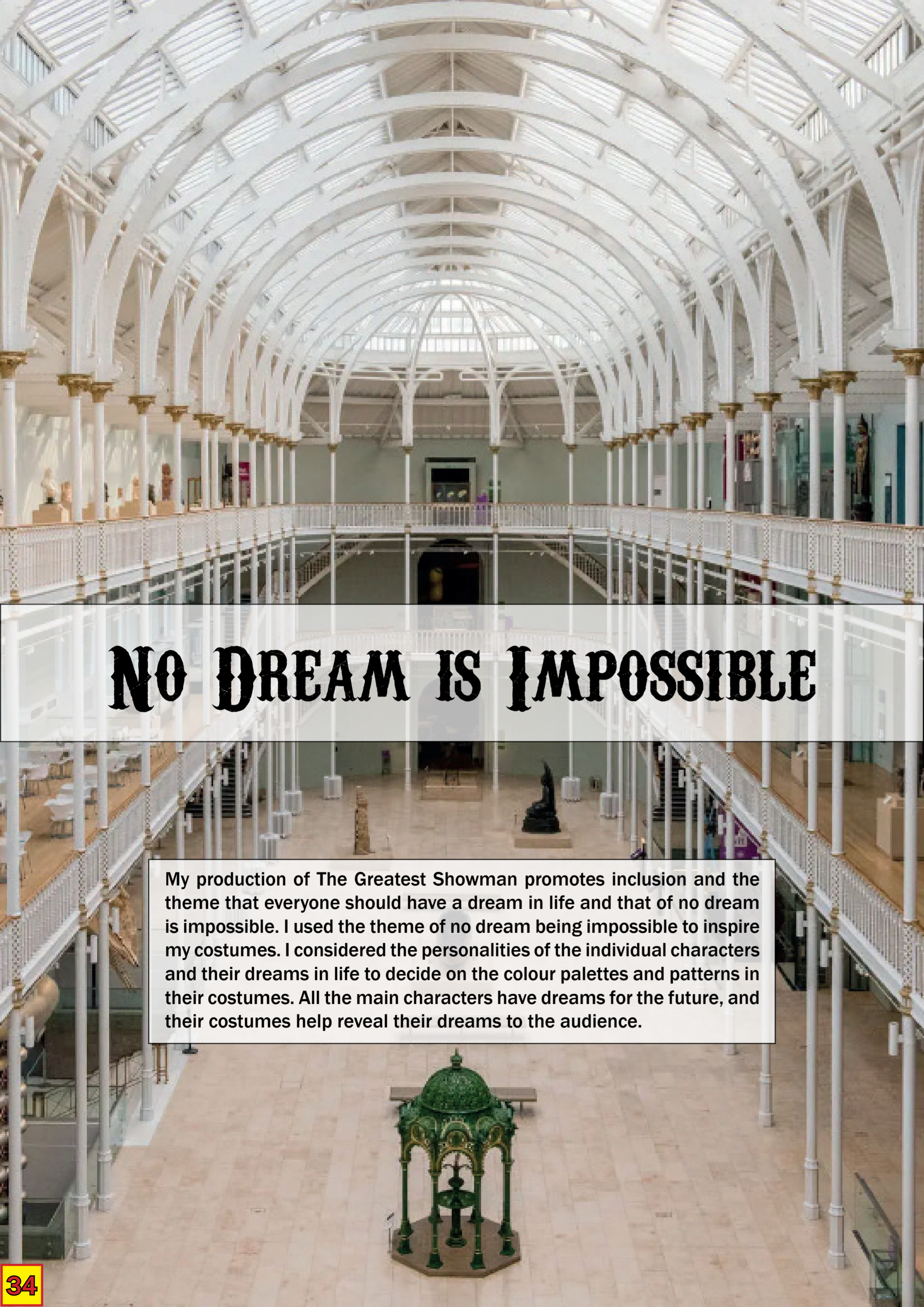


Here you can see my early sketches for Lettie Lutz, The Bearded Lady, based on my research into the real bearded ladies who performed in the circus. My initial designs are intended to make Lettie look beautiful and feminine in these beautiful gowns.



Here you can see my sketches for Charles Stratton based on my research into what people with dwarfism in the circus including the real Charles Stratton. My initial designs show Charles wearing custom-made costumes for his performance. Because of Charles' size, all of his clothing would have had to be specially made.

# CHARLES STRATTON COSTUME DEVELOPMENT



# NO DREAM IS IMPOSSIBLE

My production of The Greatest Showman promotes inclusion and the theme that everyone should have a dream in life and that of no dream is impossible. I used the theme of no dream being impossible to inspire my costumes. I considered the personalities of the individual characters and their dreams in life to decide on the colour palettes and patterns in their costumes. All the main characters have dreams for the future, and their costumes help reveal their dreams to the audience.



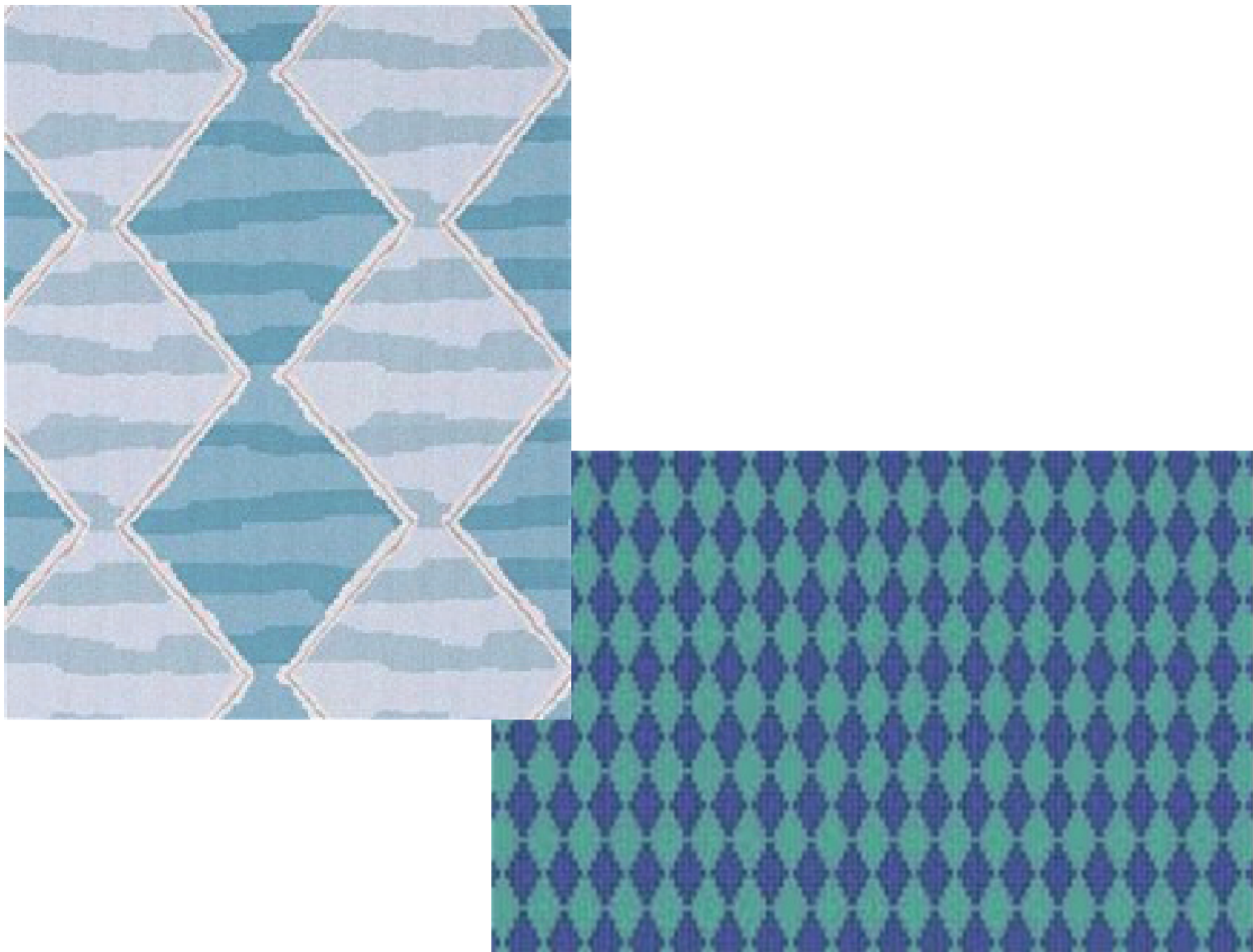
P T Barnum grew up poor, wanted more for himself and his family and dreamed of making lots of money. The symbols that represent his dreams are the \$20 bill and the dollar sign. I decided that these money symbols would be integrated into Barnum's costume design.



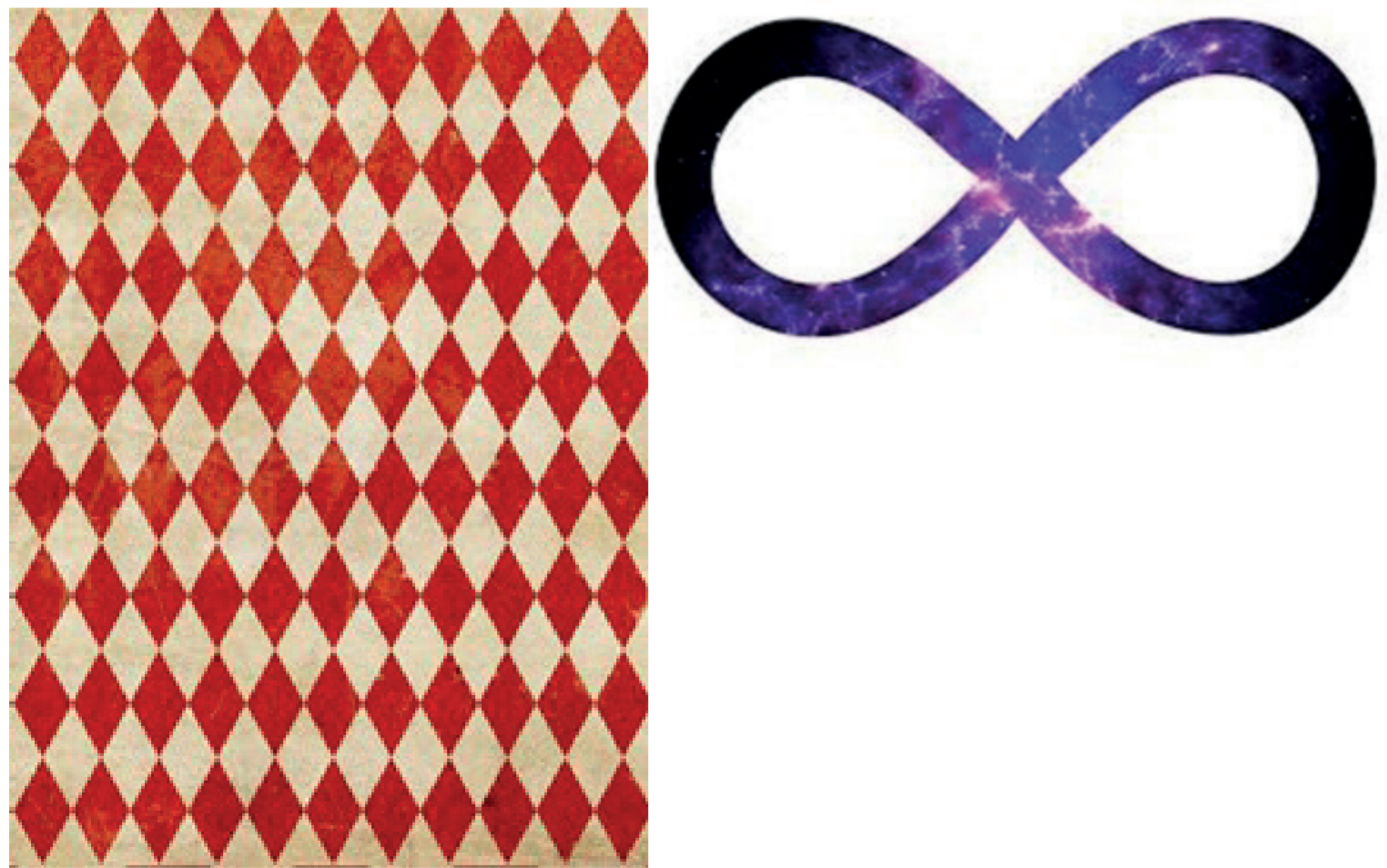
Phillip's dream is to be with the trapeze artist, Anne Wheeler, the woman he loves. The symbols that represent his dreams are a red heart and a pair of white swans both of which symbolise love. These symbols will feature in his costume design.



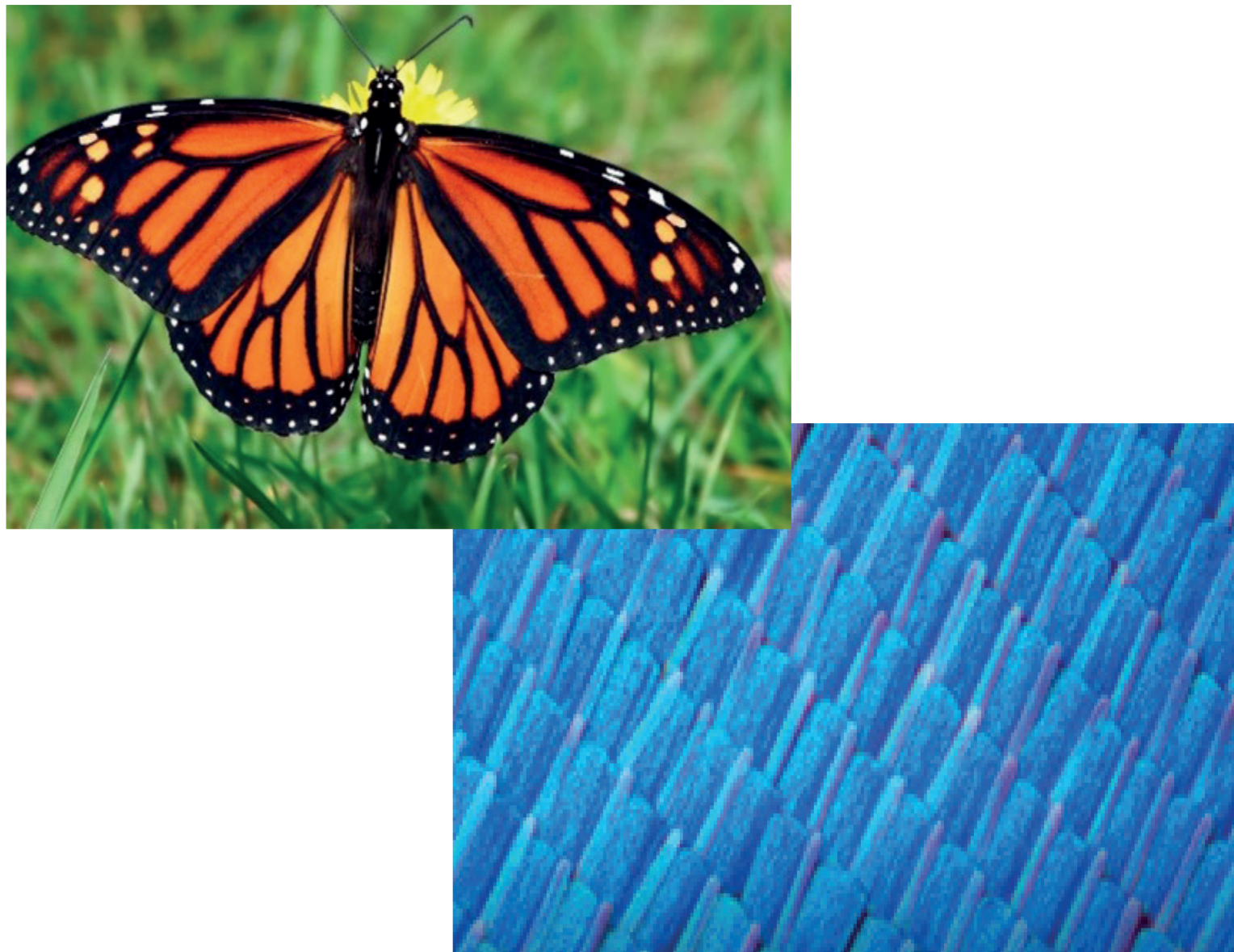
Charity met P T Barnum when they were children. Her dream was to marry him and succeed in the role of wife and mother. The symbol that represents her is the ancient triskelion symbol that signifies three phases of womanhood. This symbol will appear on her costume.



The Swedish opera singer Jenny Lind had always dreamed of having the voice of an angel. I saw a link between the Gustavian-style triangular patterns found in Swedish design and the Harlequin patterns linked with the circus. I found a symbol that merged these two design styles. This symbol will be incorporated into her costume design.



Anne Wheeler's dream is to spend the rest of her life with the man she loves, Phillip Carlyle. The symbol that represents this dream is the infinity symbol. Anne is a trapeze artist, an iconic circus act, and the iconic Harlequin pattern that is associated with the circus will feature on her costume along with the infinity symbol.



Lettie Lutz's dream is to be transformed like a butterfly to be accepted for the beautiful woman she is. The symbols that represent her dreams are the butterfly and the patterns seen when butterflies are looked at under the microscope.



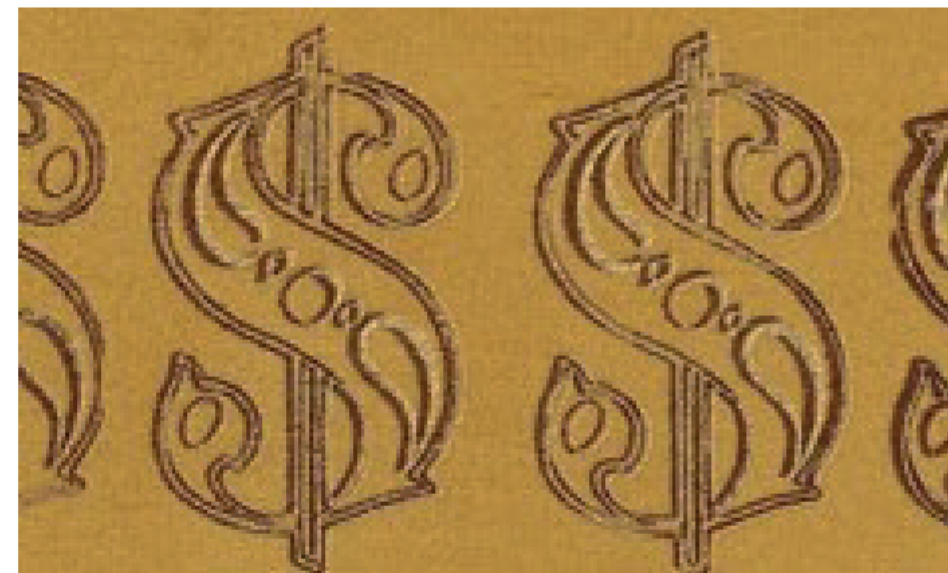
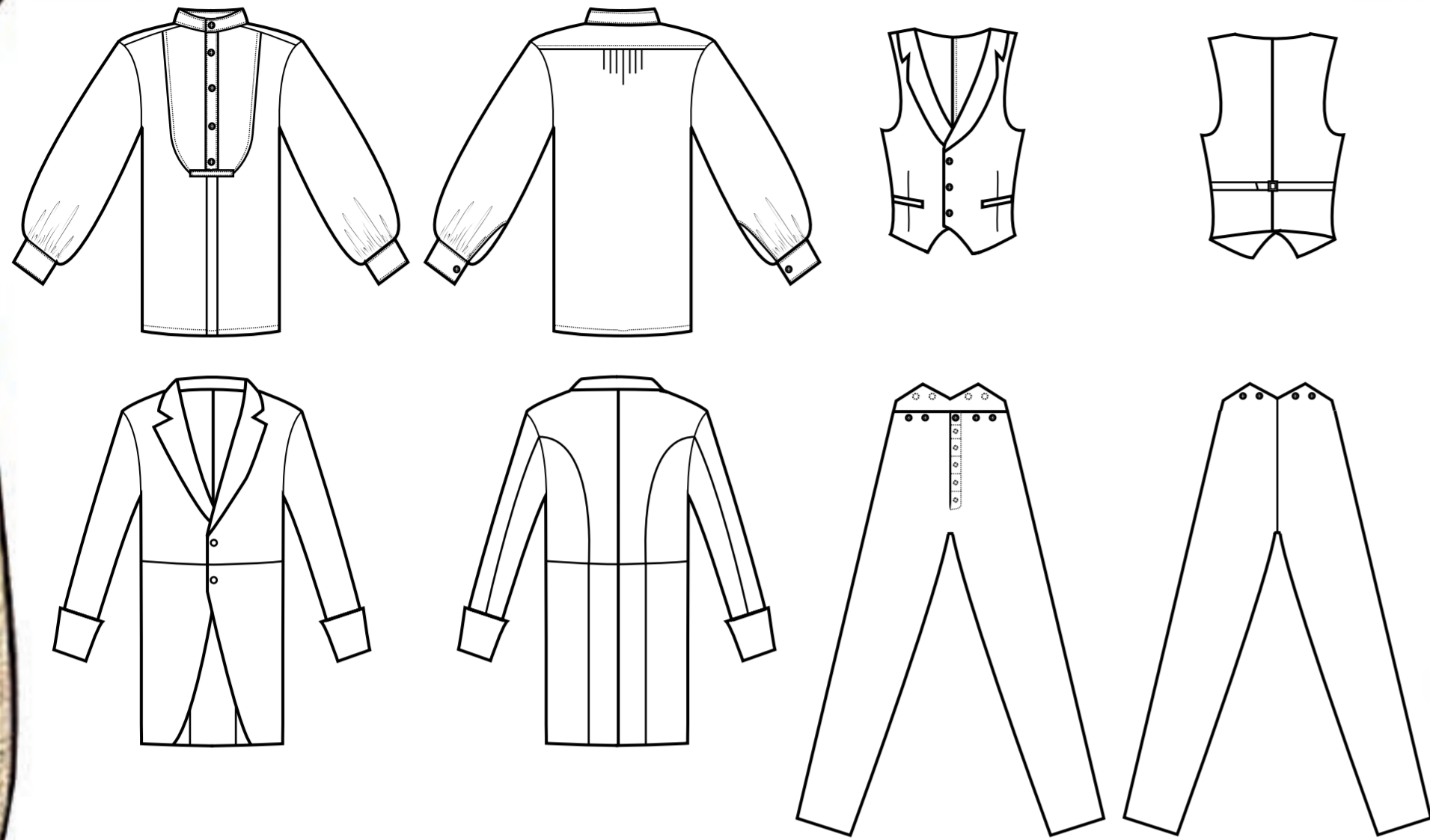
Charles Stratton is very small and has a Napoleon Complex or Small Man Syndrome. I decided to design Charles' costume based on the Coronation Robes worn by Napoleon at his coronation as Emperor. Napoleon used the bee as his emblem, and this is the symbol that will feature in his costume design.



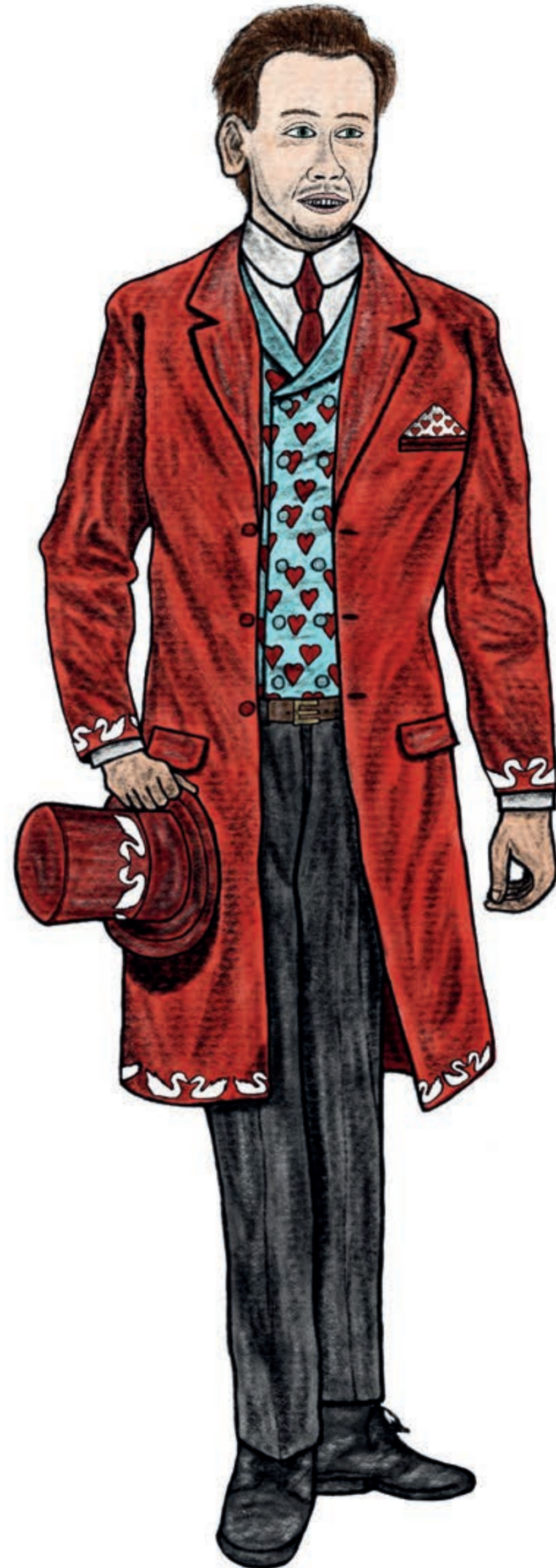
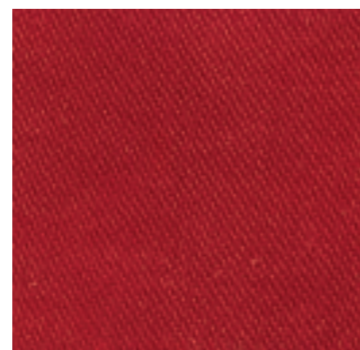
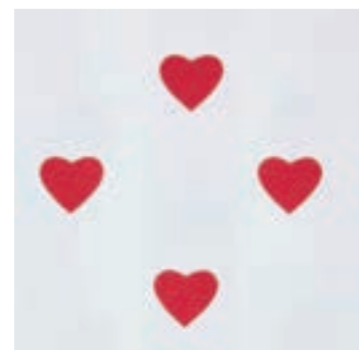
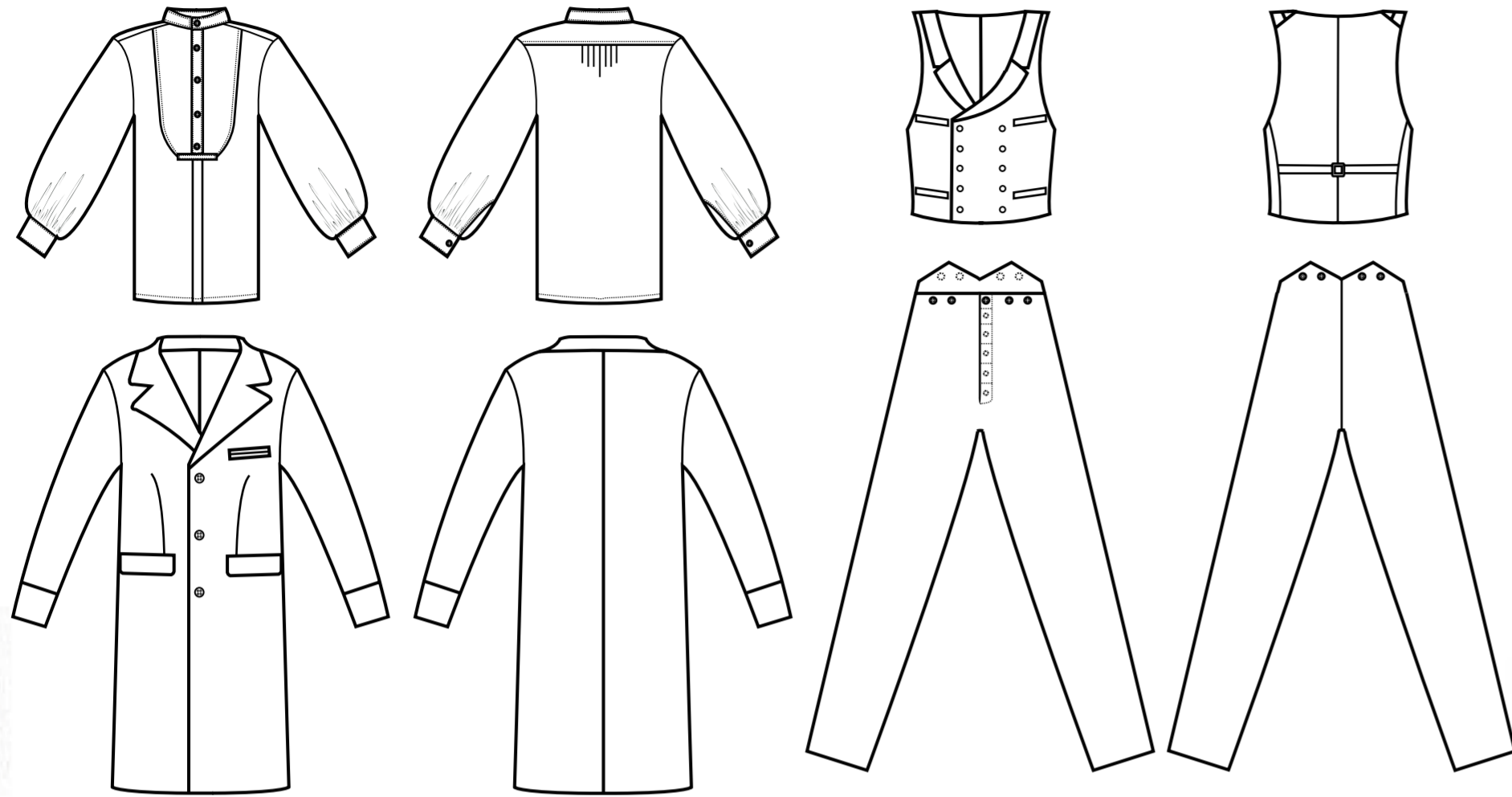
# CHARACTER ILLUSTRATIONS



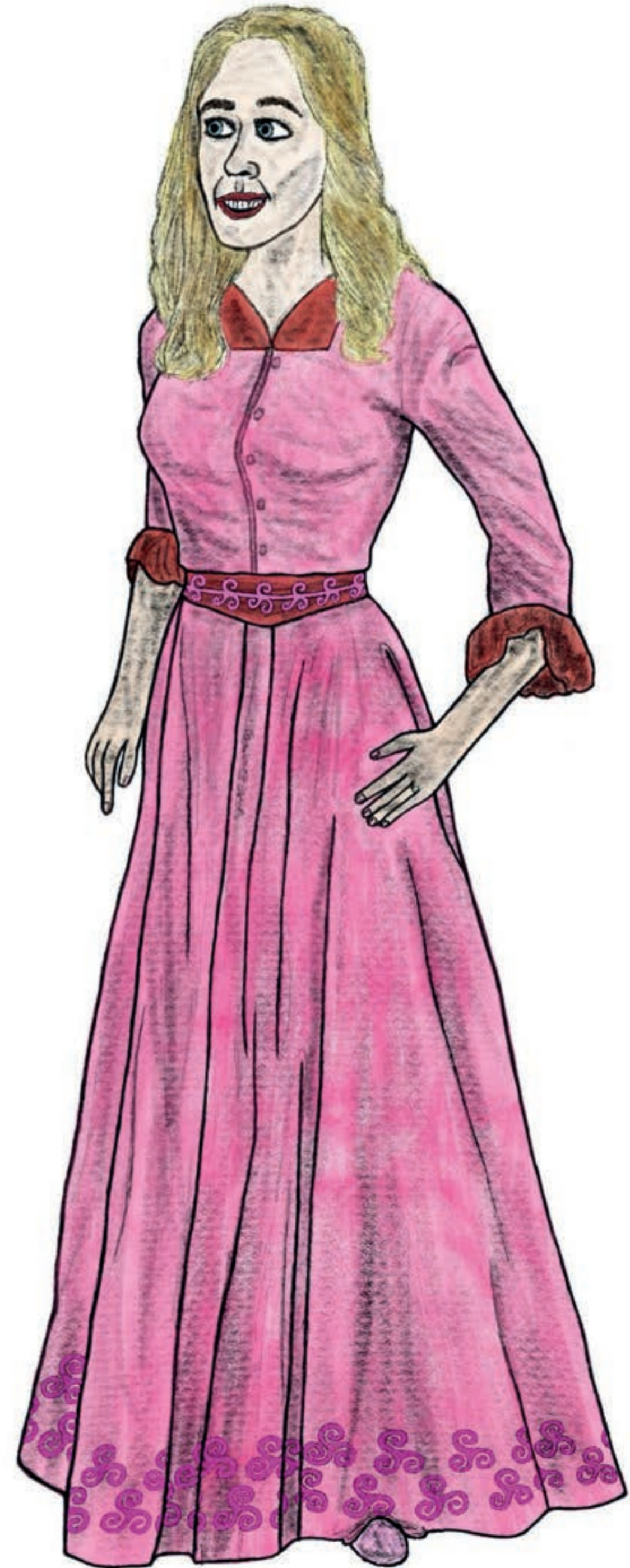
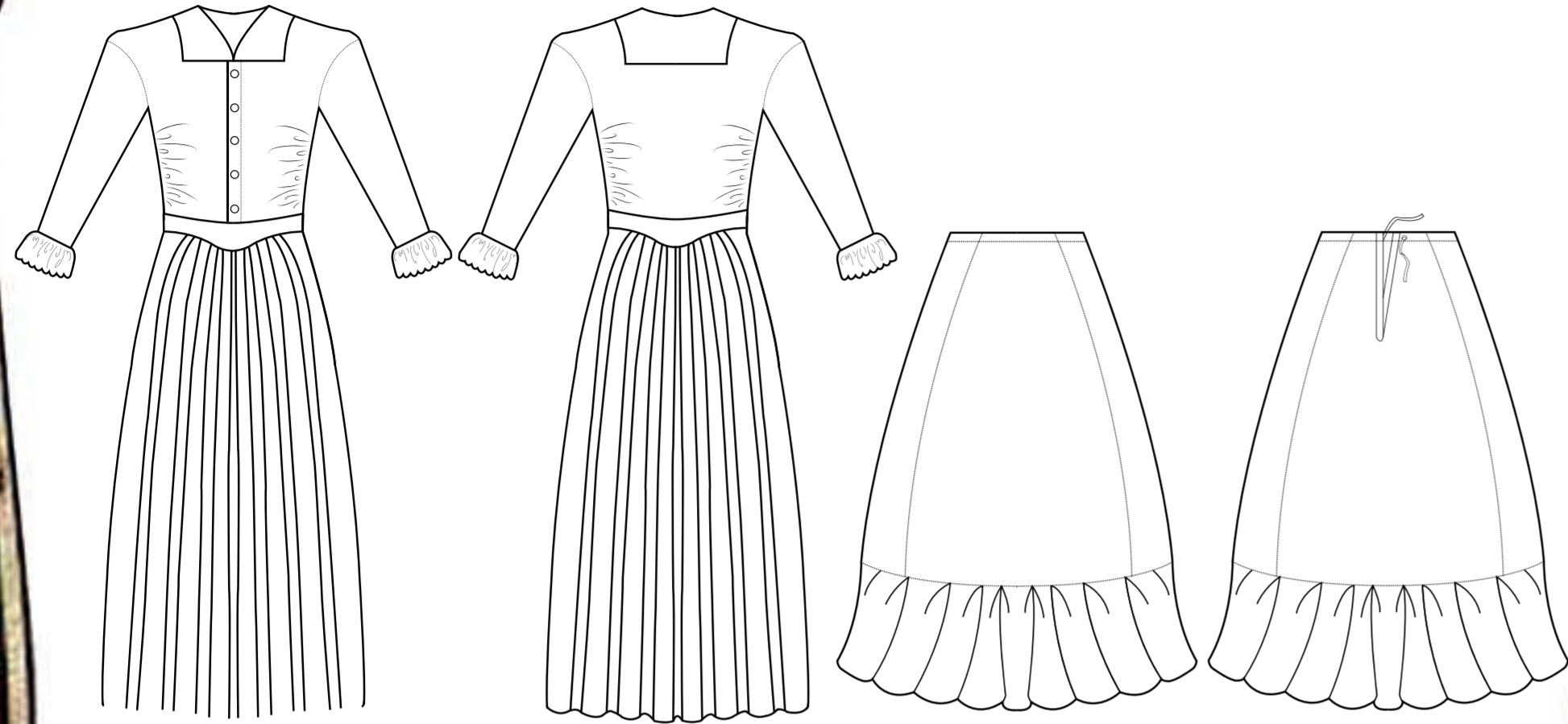
# P.T BARNUM



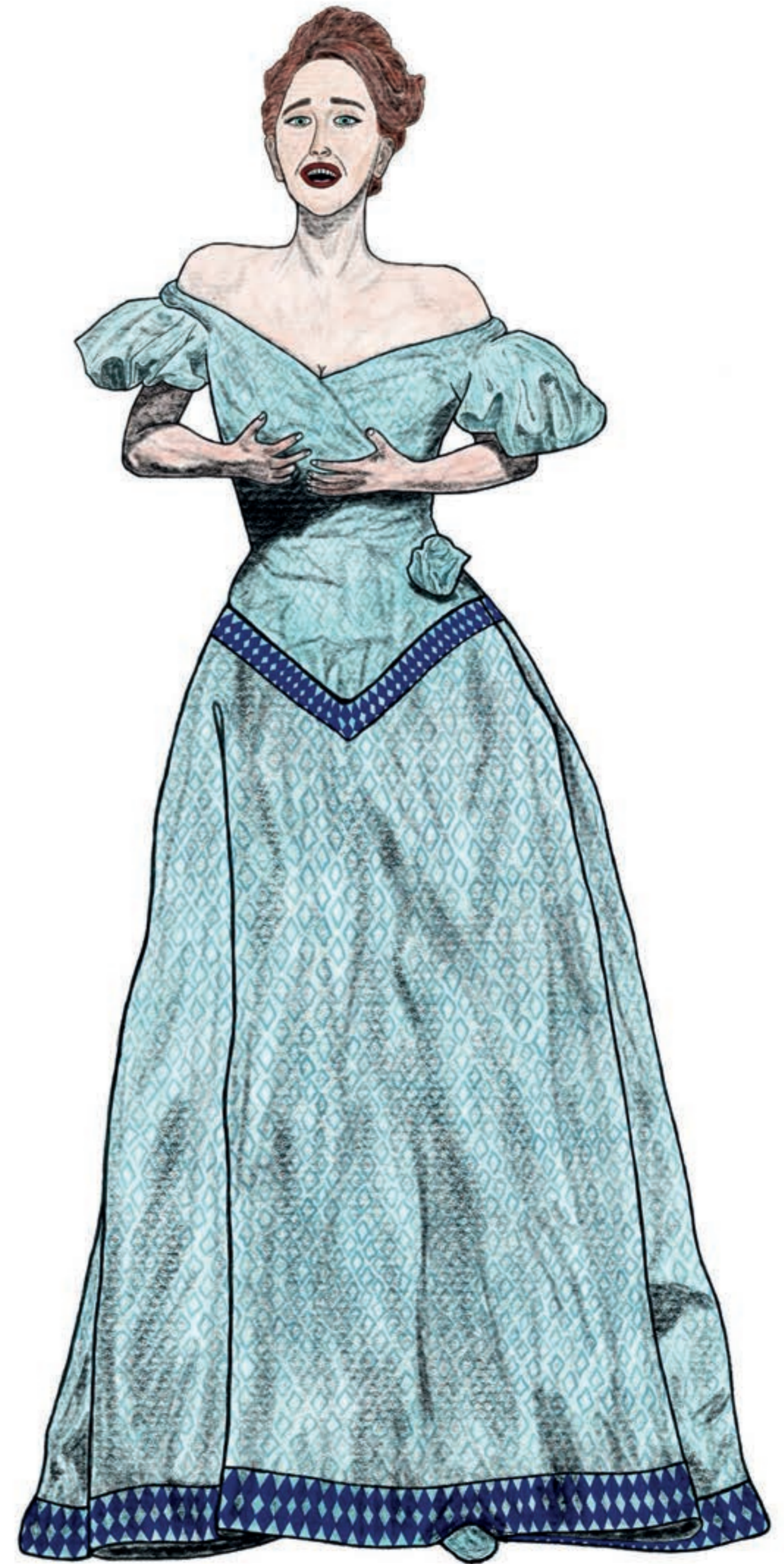
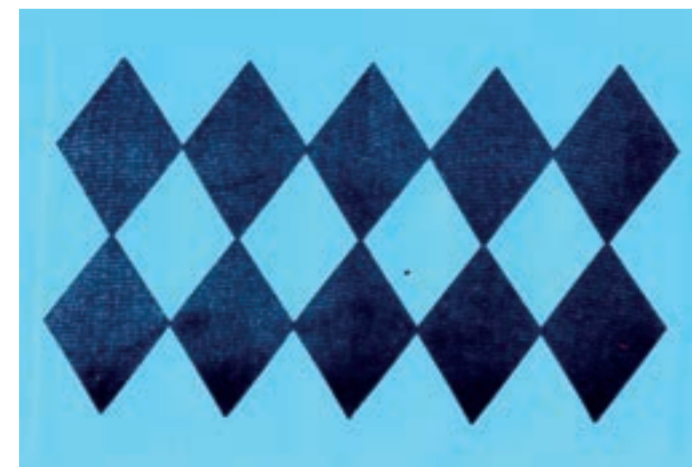
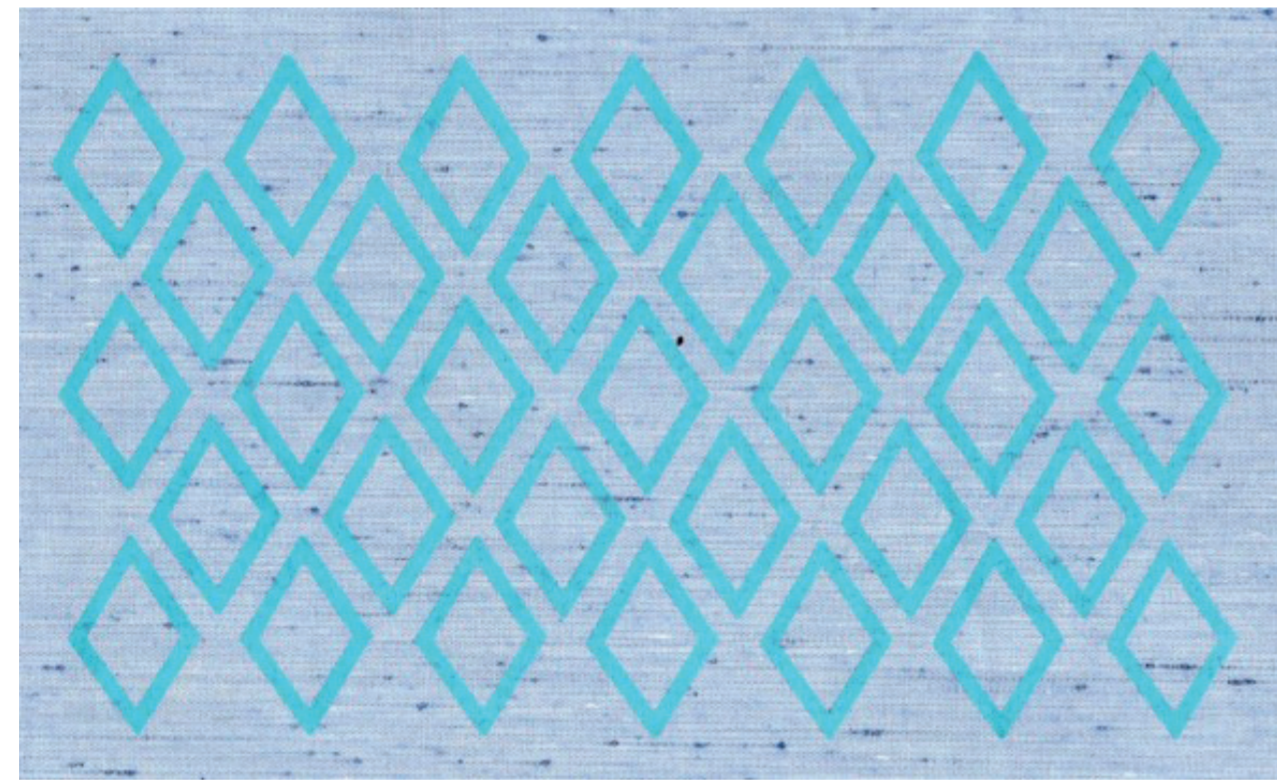
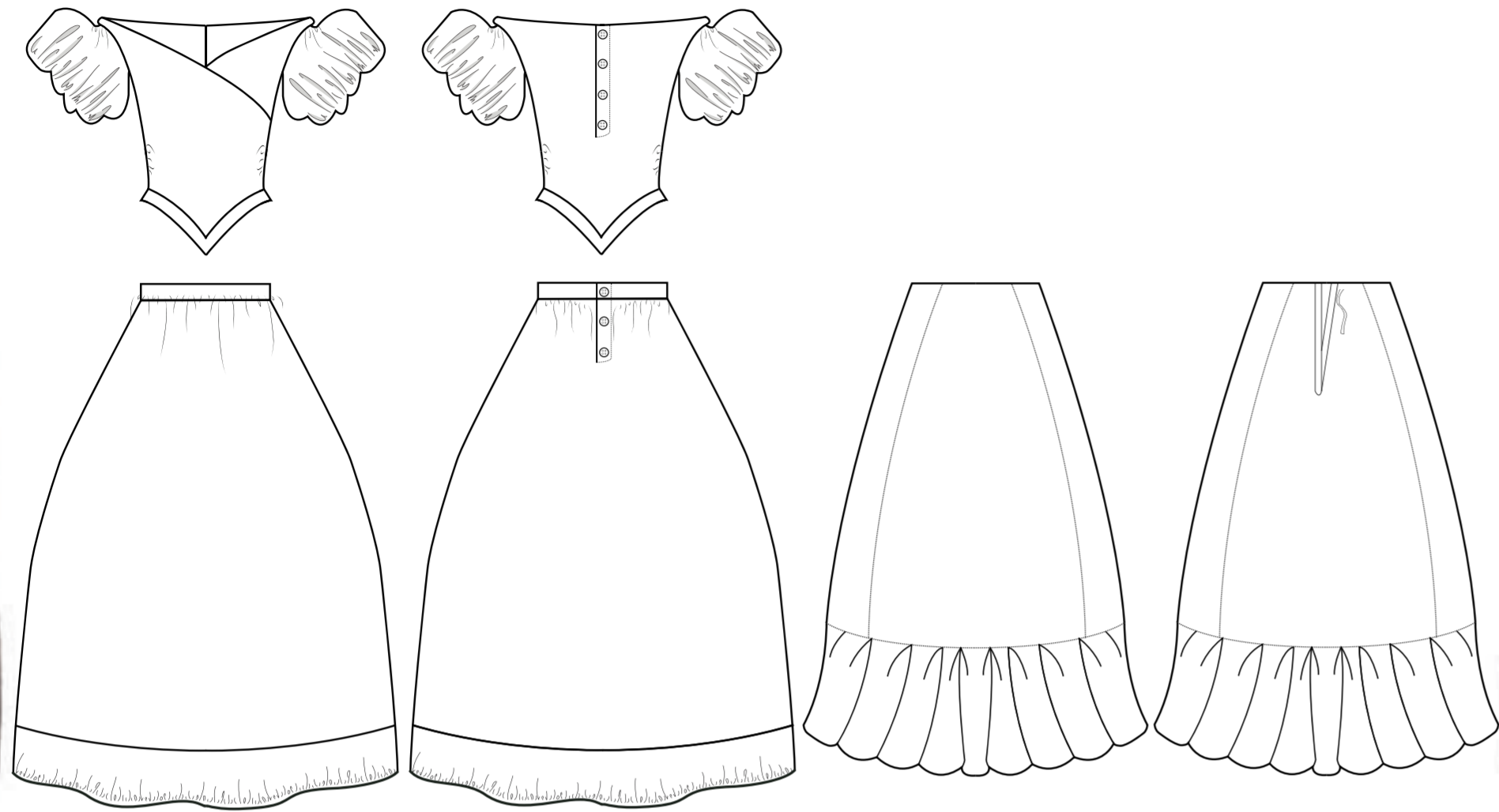
# PHILLIP CARLYLE



# CHARITY BARNUM

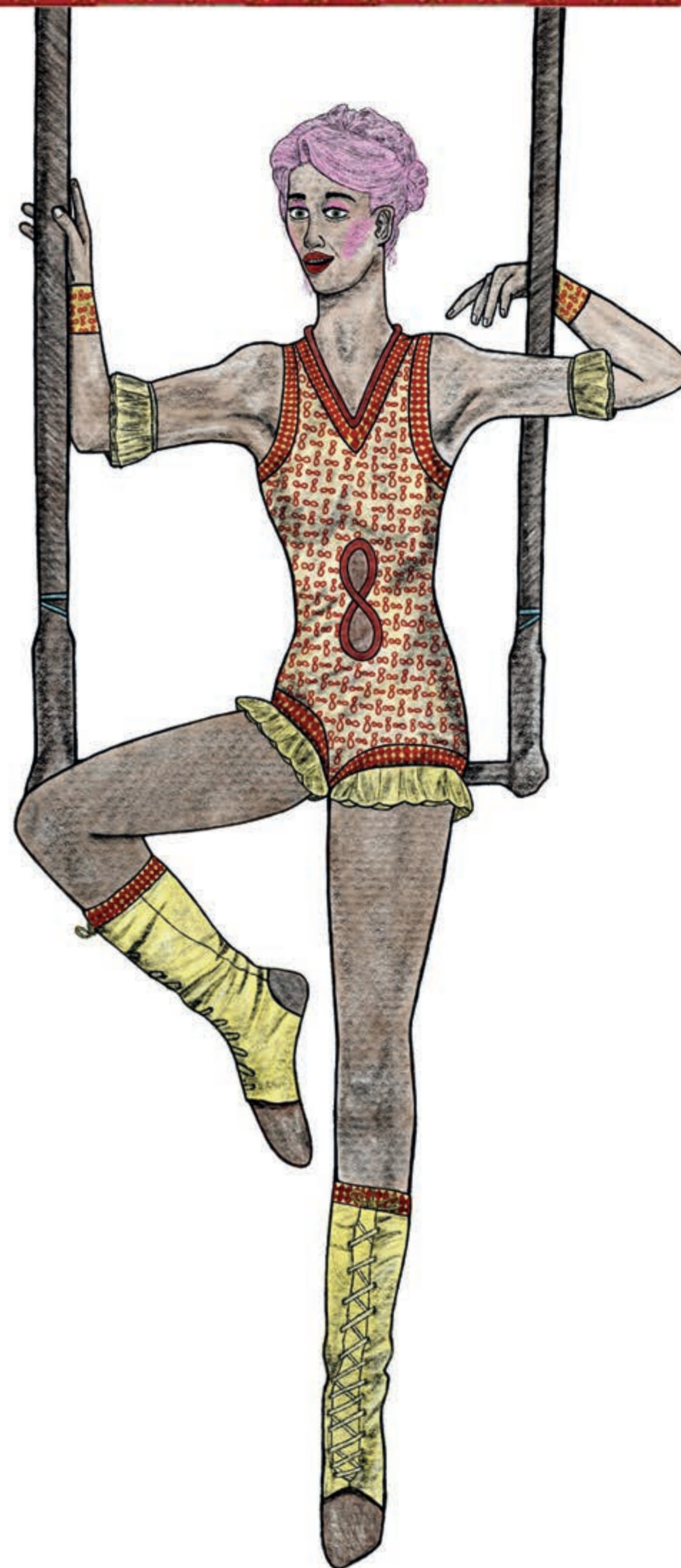
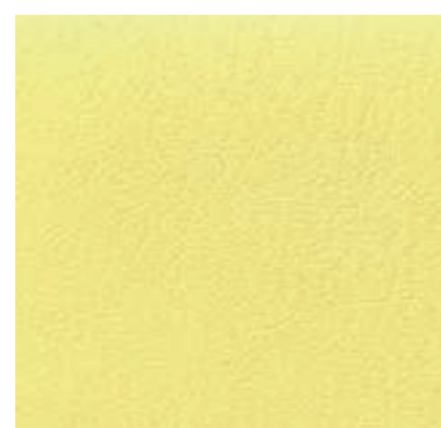
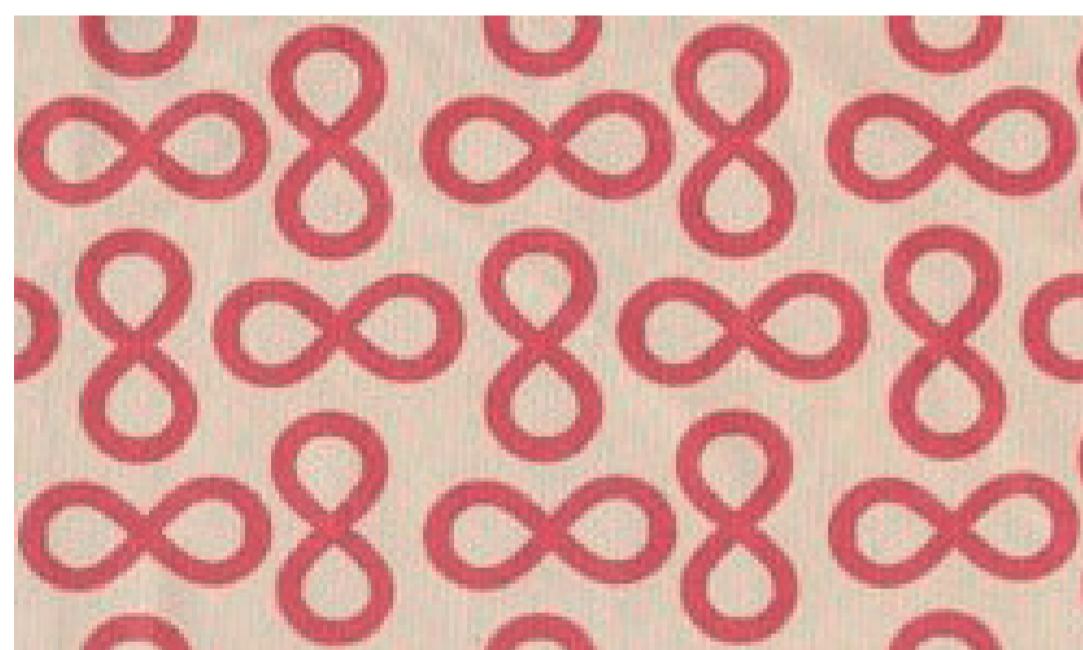
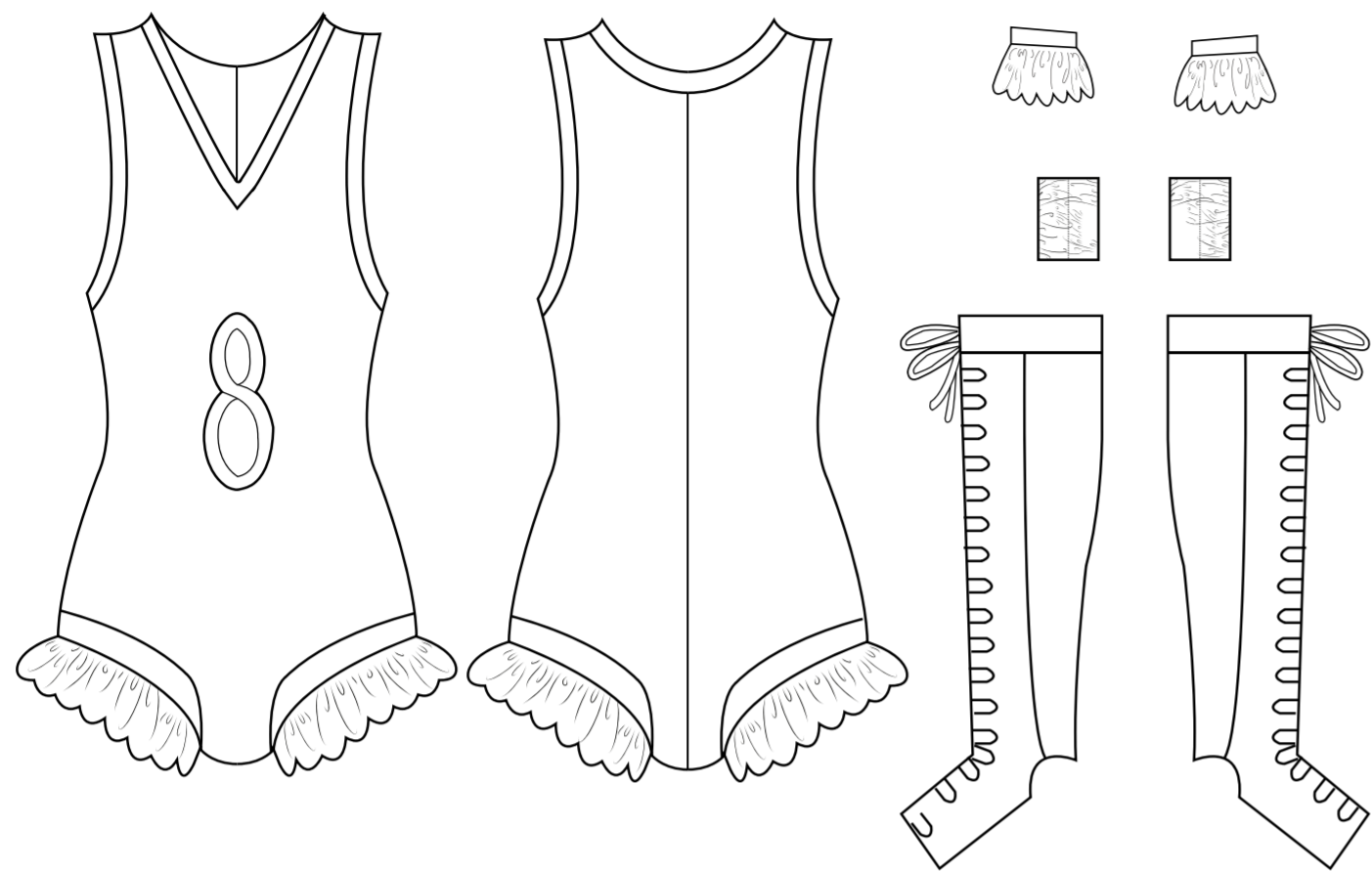


# JENNY LIND

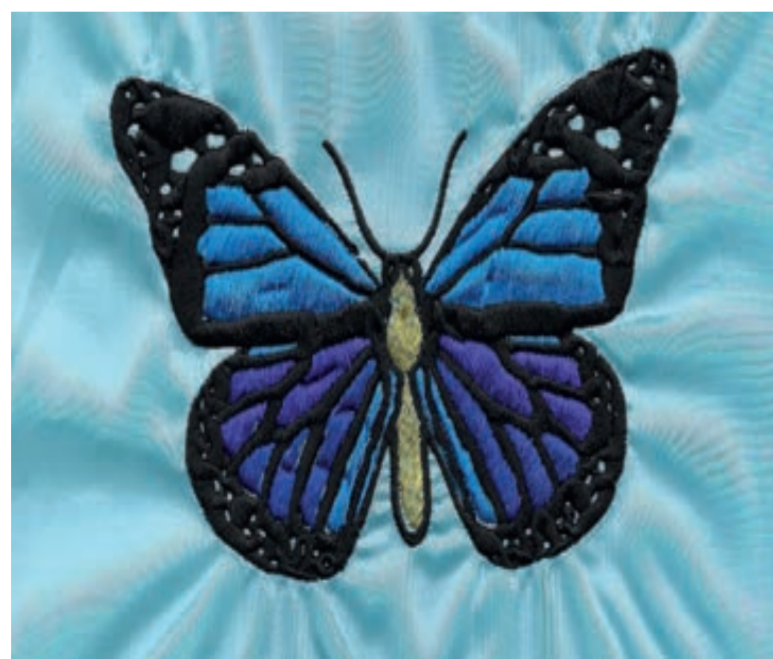
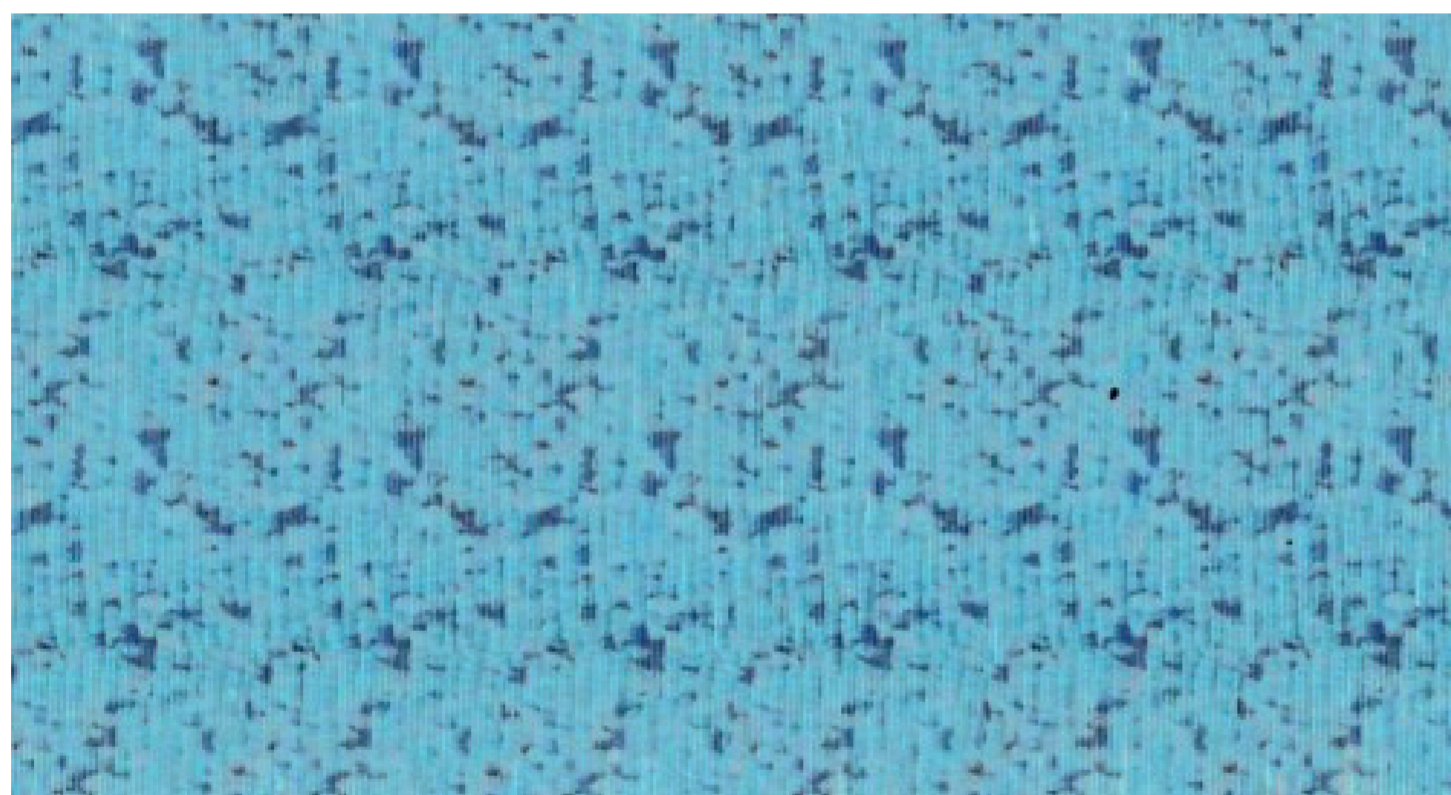
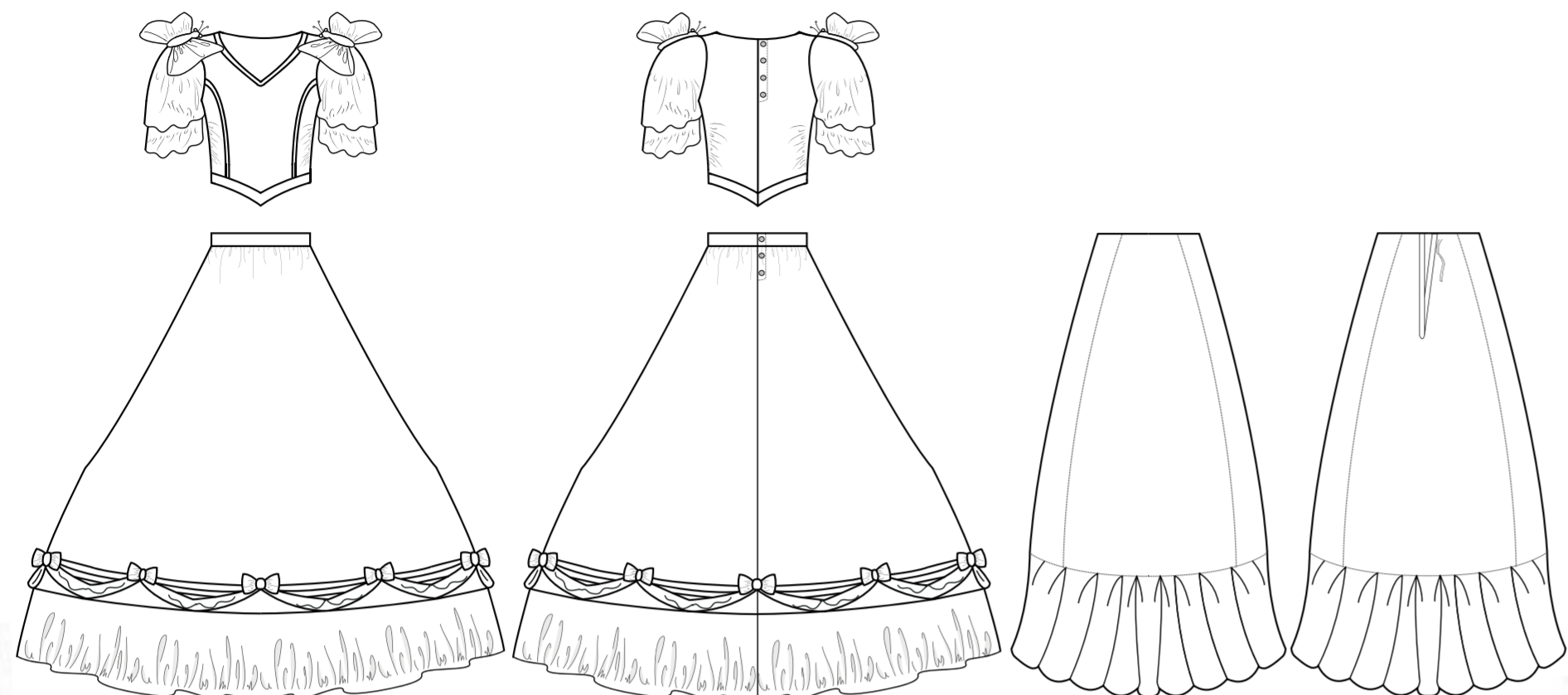




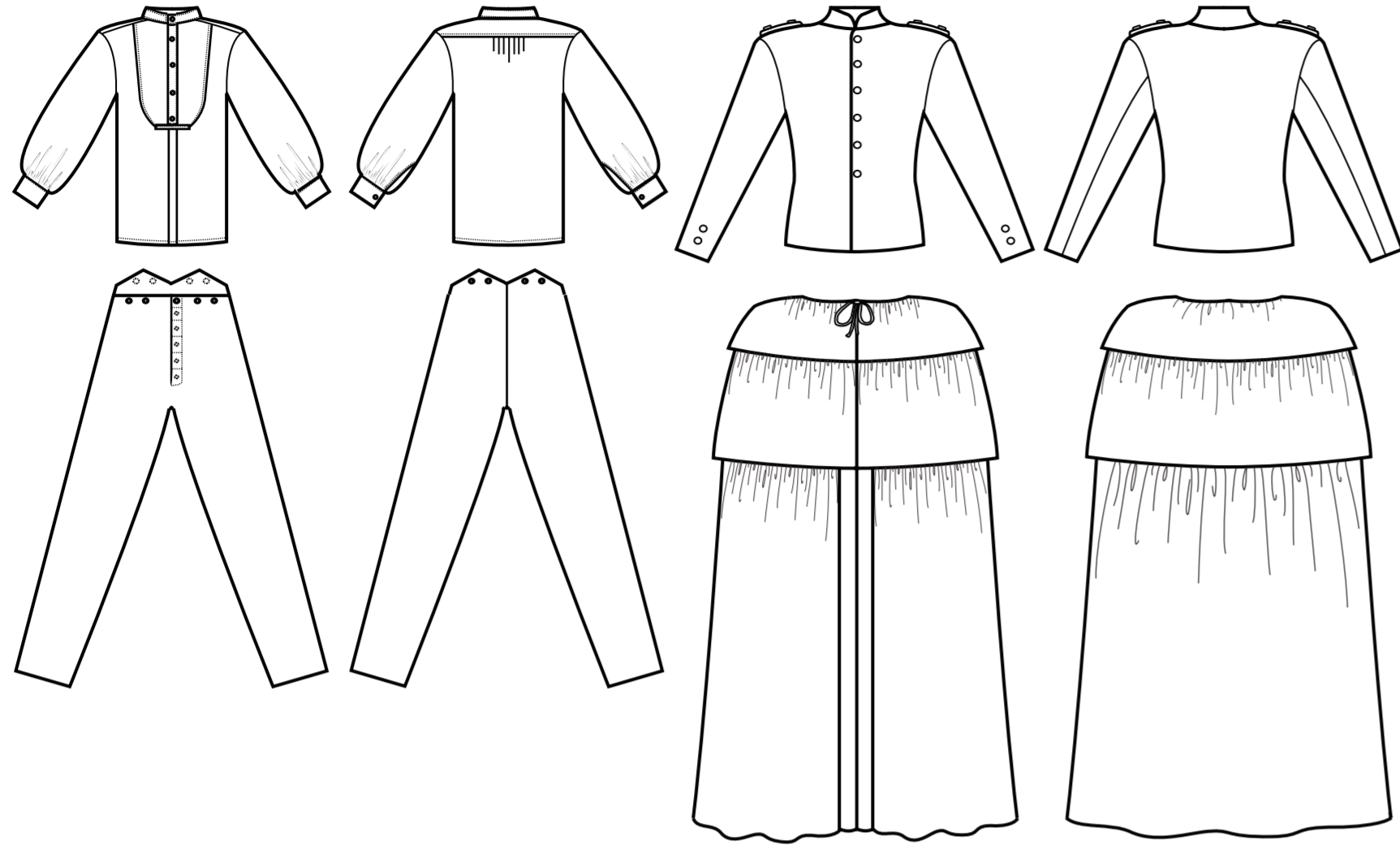
# ANNE WHEELER



# LETTIE LUTZ

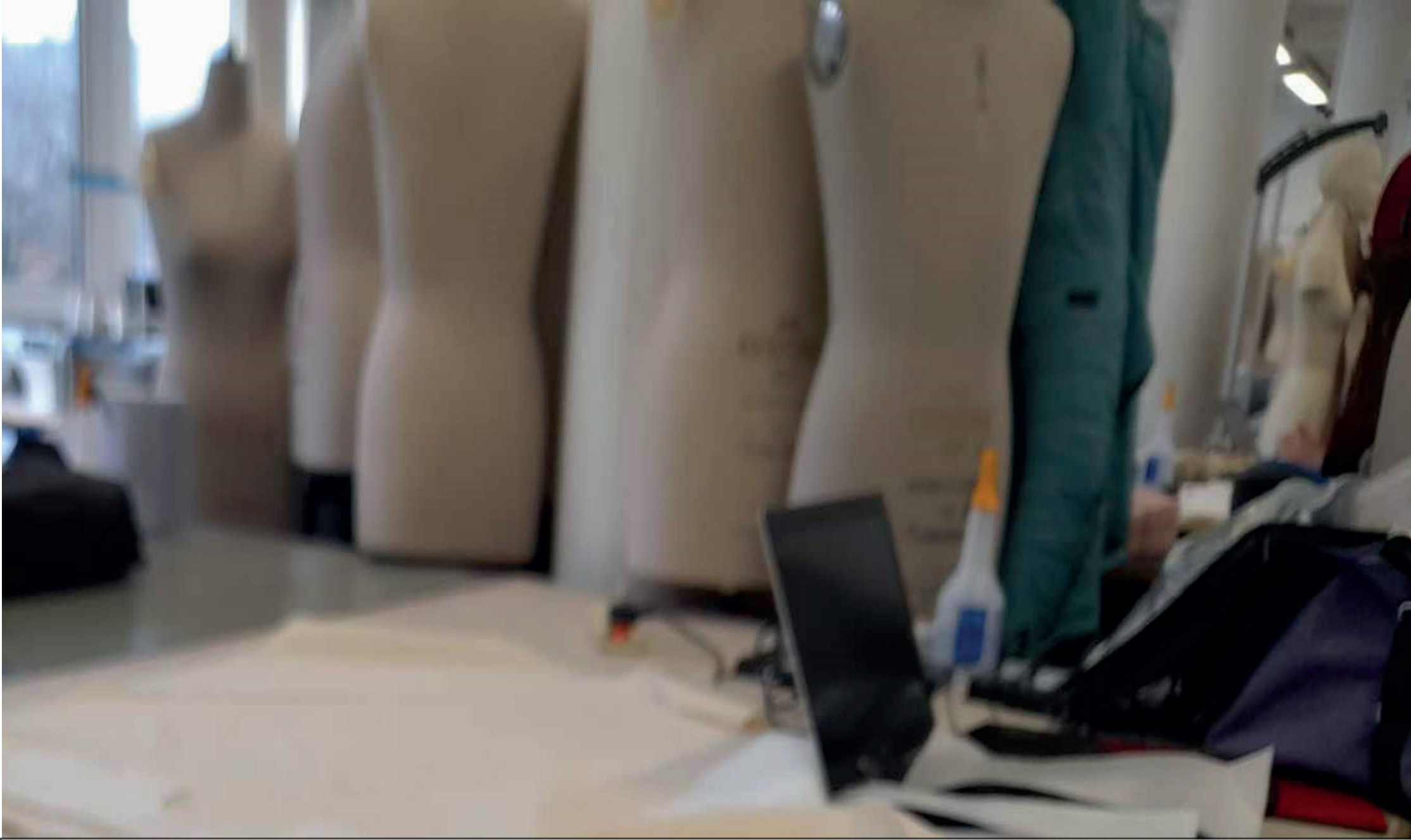


# CHARLES STRATTON

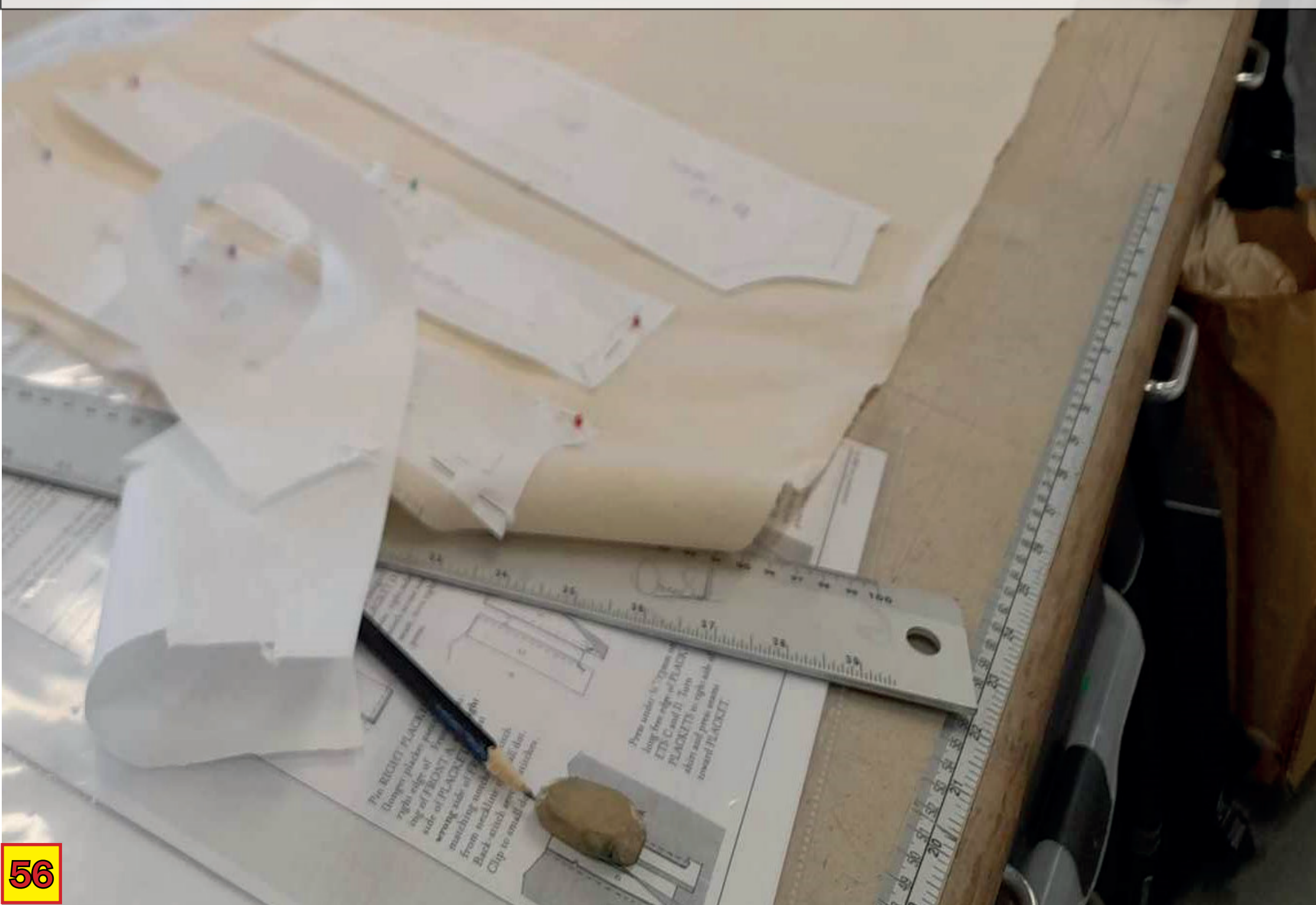


# THE CAST





# MAKING P.T. BARNUM TOILE

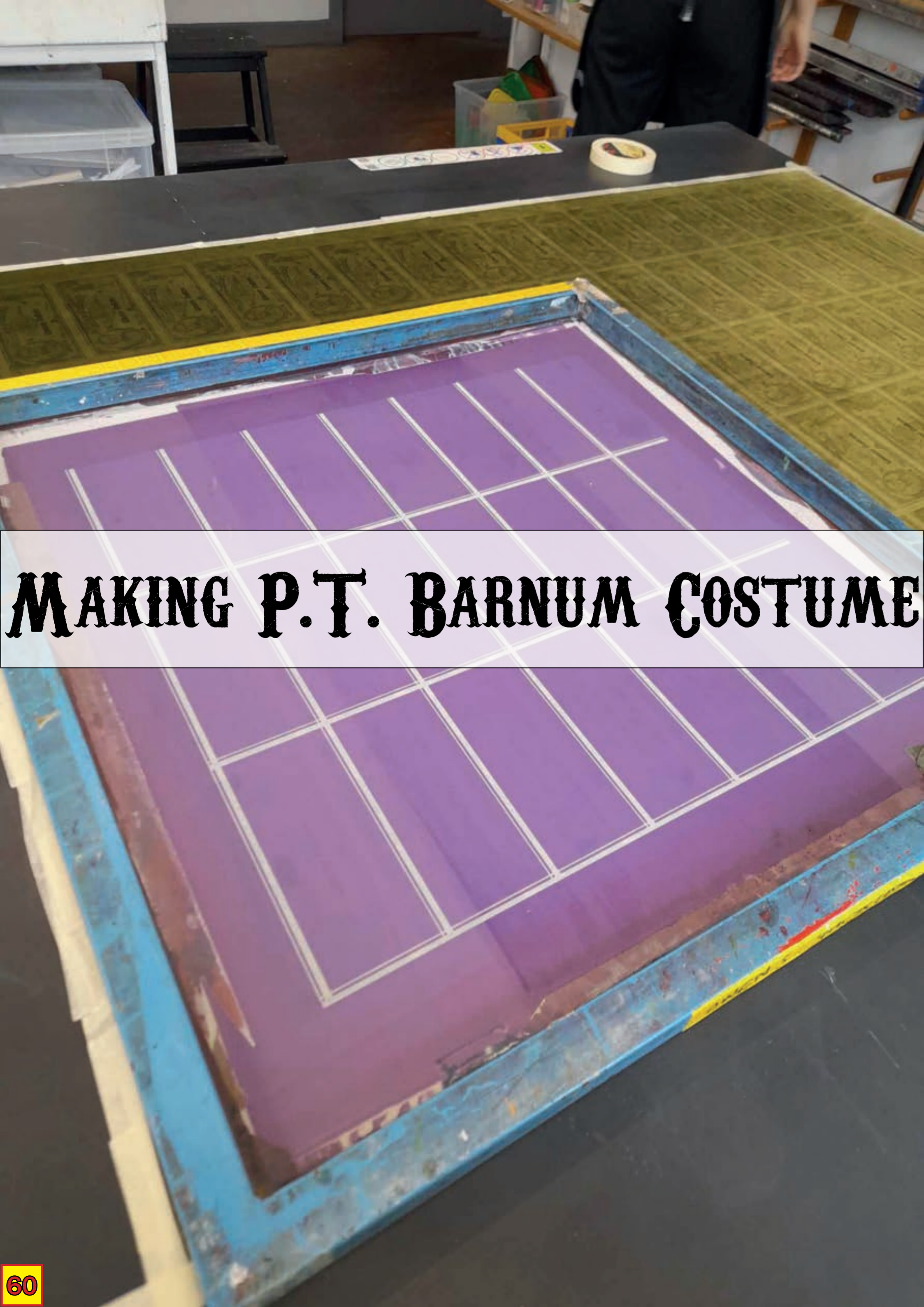


I made a toile for the P.T. Barnum costume before making the actual costume.

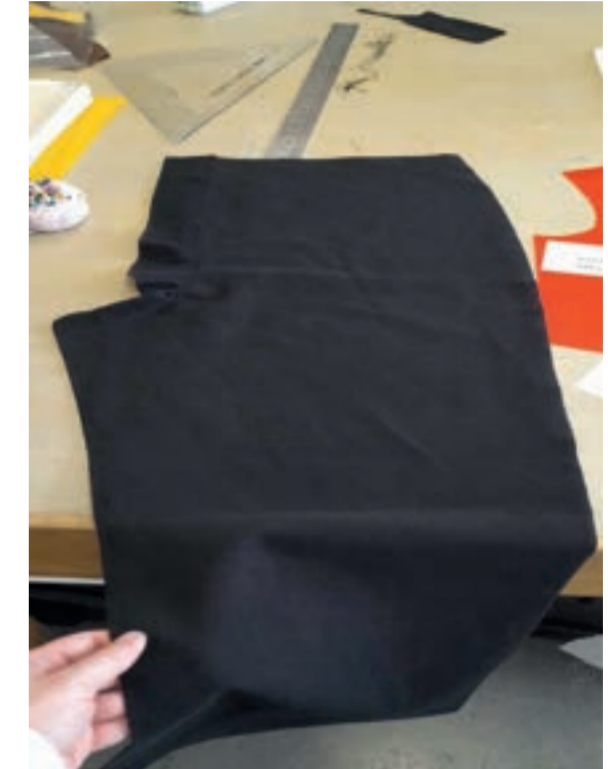
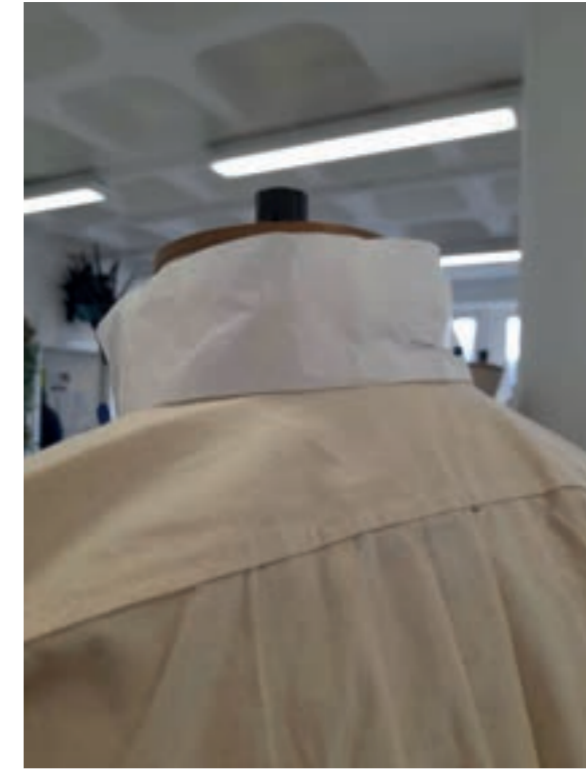


**P.T. BARNUM FINISHED TOILE**

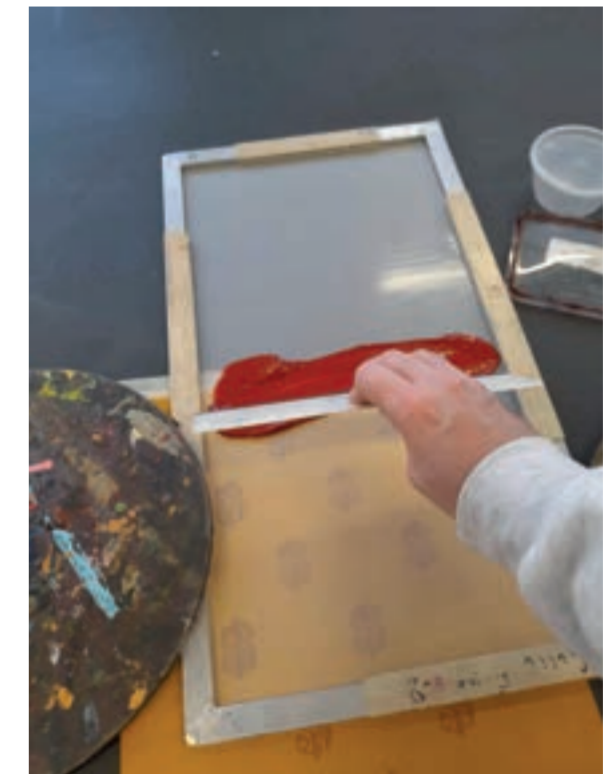




# MAKING P.T. BARNUM COSTUME

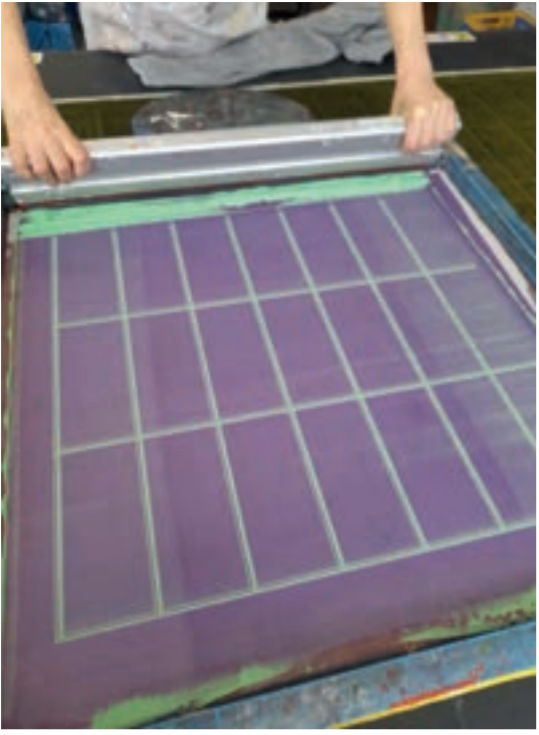


These images show the construction of the shirt, trousers and waistcoat for P. T. Barnum.



# MAKING THE SHIRT, TROUSERS & WAISTCOAT

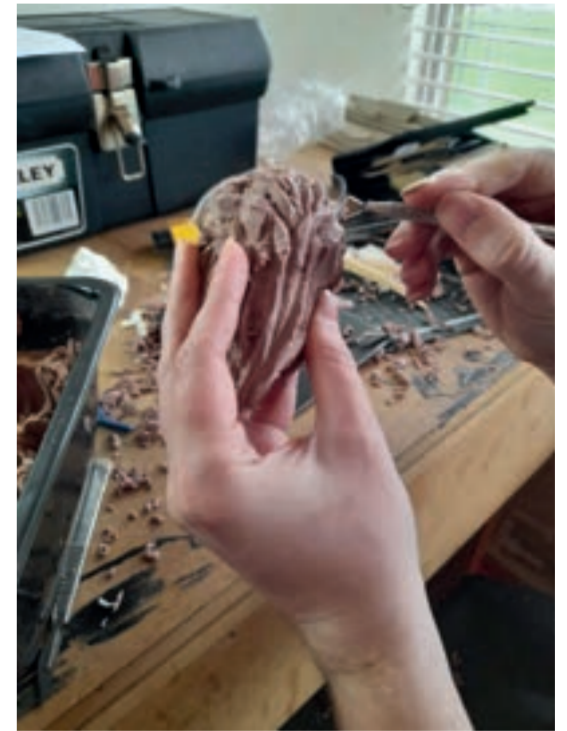
# MAKING THE JACKET



These images show the process of the construction of the tailcoat for P. T. Barnum.



These images show the construction of the top hat and cane for P. T. Barnum.



# MAKING THE HAT AND CANE



**P.T. BARNUM FINAL COSTUME**



**P.T. BARNUM IN REHEARSALS**

These photos show P. T. Barnum rehearsing a scene for my production of The Greatest Showman in the Spiegeltent

