

FEATURES



Looks aren't everything

Leewu endeavors to be a stationery brand with a philosophical twist

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Leewu is a line of book covers, writing paper, notebooks and pencils — but the brand strives to be more than just a stationery peddler. To its creators, designers Scott Lee (李威遠) and Phoenix Wu (吳燕鳳), Leewu is an exercise in applying a philosophical bent to everyday objects.

The brand was launched last fall by the husband-and-wife team, who also run the Taipei-based graphic design firm Scott Vision Communication (思考特視覺溝通). Their clients have included Uni-President, the company that manages 7-Eleven stores in Taiwan, and Coca Cola.

The duo longed, however, for a creative outlet of their very own.

"A lot of our clients already have a concept in mind when they come to us and it is our job to bring that idea to fruition," says Wu, a former journalist. "But we wanted to create something that completely represents our own tastes." The name Leewu was formed from a combination of the couple's surnames and is a homophone of the Chinese word for "gift."

One of the brand's signature products is a series of book covers bearing line drawings by Lee of a solitary female figure. The woman, with long, black hair hanging down her back, looks through a window at pouring rain, sits in front of a computer, leans against a wall or hunches over on a floor in a cocktail dress, and is always alone. The series is called Reading, Not Loneliness (閱讀不·寂寞).

Wu thought of the concept behind the book covers. "Life is very complicated, especially for women. You are always someone's wife, daughter or mother, and even though you fill all those roles, it can be a lonely road sometimes," she says. The women in her husband's drawings are only seen from the back, making it easier for different people to identify with them, the way readers project their own thoughts and emotions onto the characters in a novel.

"When a book you are reading moves you, you don't have to worry about being wrong or being rejected," says Wu. "Everyone has their own interpretation of the same pages and their own way of getting involved in the story. When you are reading is also when you are the most independent, and loneliness and independence are two completely different emotions."

Other Leewu items, like a spiral-bound journal that comes in its own canvas drawstring case, are meant to facilitate connections with other people.

"We wanted to create a set with a notebook and a bag, so you can write and draw in it, and then perhaps leave it as a keepsake for your child or someone else. Then it's like a time capsule of your emotions," says Wu.

Wu hopes that Leewu's line of coffee mugs, Super Mugits, will help office workers stake out their own identity in a workplace. The designs on the ceramic cups are inspired by briefcases, purses and golf bags, with the mug handle taking the place of the bag's strap. Some of them riff on trends, including a cup that is based on the "I am not a plastic bag" canvas tote designed by Anya Hindmarch for US grocery store chain Whole Foods.

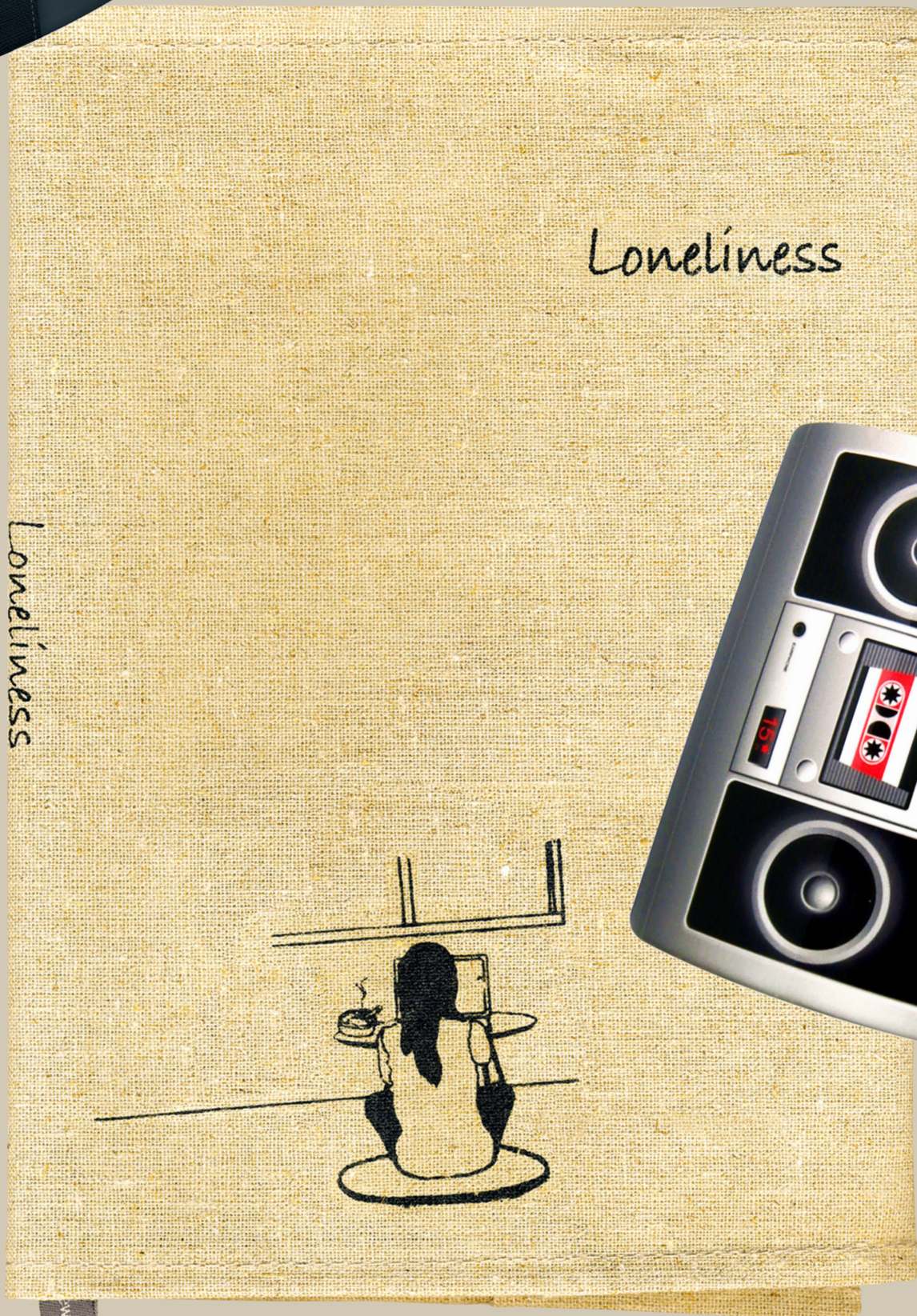
"It's hard to express yourself in an office. But you can get a hint of what someone's sense of style is or what his or her viewpoints are by looking at that person's coffee mug," says Wu. "People's mugs become very important to them. In fact, they sometimes spend more time holding their mug in their office than they do holding a family member's hand."

Other products capture Wu and Lee's own experiences, like a line of pencils and notebooks named The Blue: Ocean and Wood (the blue 海&木). The natural wood casing of the pencils were inspired by the color and texture of driftwood, while the cover of each notebook features a painting of a seascape.

"The notebook covers are meant to evoke the feeling we had when we went to the ocean side. Watching the sea gives you a different feeling each time. It can be carefree or sad. It might help you reflect on things or make you feel lonely," says Wu.

Other items in the Leewu line include small raffia fabric containers that users fold themselves with the aid of cords in each corner, hand-sewn cloth bags, and a line of letter paper and envelopes called Avowal of Love.

"We create a lot of our items for our own pleasure, but we also hope that our stuff will also be seen as practical and useful by our customers," says Wu.



Phoenix Wu created the concept behind Leewu's Reading, Not Loneliness book covers.
PHOTO COURTESY OF LEEWU



The notebooks and pencils in Leewu's The Blue: Ocean and Wood series were inspired by the sea and driftwood.
PHOTO COURTESY OF LEEWU



Leewu's whimsical Super Mugits elevate the common mug.
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