

Project Documentation: Yale School of Art Website Redesign

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1. Project Overview

The goal of this project was to redesign the Yale School of Art website—notoriously known for its chaotic, "wiki-style" aesthetics—into a modern, accessible, and user-centric platform. The redesign prioritizes **Cognitive Load reduction** and **Visual Hierarchy** while maintaining the school's creative identity.

2. Analysis of the Current State (The "Before" Challenges)

Through an HCI lens, the original website suffered from several critical flaws that hindered the user experience:

- **High Cognitive Load:** Excessive unorganized elements created "visual noise," making it difficult for users to process information.
- **Lack of Visual Hierarchy:** Important calls-to-action (like "Apply") were not distinguished from secondary content.
- **Navigation Friction:** The site structure lacked a persistent navigation bar, forcing users to "hunt" for essential links.
- **Accessibility Barriers:** The design ignored WCAG standards, making it difficult for users with visual impairments to navigate.
- **Lack of Responsive Design:** The interface was not optimized for mobile devices, leading to a broken experience on smaller screens.

3. Proposed Solutions & Redesign (The "After" Improvements)

The redesigned interface addresses these issues by implementing established UX laws and UI patterns:

A. Information Architecture & Navigation

- **Persistent Header:** Introduced a standard top navigation bar (Home, About, Exhibitions, News, Events) to ensure users never feel lost.
- **Hero Section:** A clean landing area with a clear Call-to-Action (CTA) button ("Apply to School") to guide the primary user goal.

B. Functional Layout Modules

- **Happening at SOA (Events):** We moved from text-heavy lists to a Card-Based Layout. This uses the Gestalt Principle of Proximity to group event titles, dates, and "Details" buttons together.
- **Community Bulletin Board:** Organized text-heavy posts into readable, shaded containers (Chunking) to improve scanability.
- **Calendars & Newsletters:** Replaced scattered links with a dedicated section using clear Signifier (link icons) and bold headers.

C. Aesthetic & Branding

- **Cohesive Palette:** Used a professional color scheme (Yale Navy, Energetic Orange, and Neutral Gray) to reflect both prestige and creativity.
 - **Typography:** Established a clear typographic scale to distinguish headers from body text.
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4. Mobile Responsiveness (HCI for Touch)

Recognizing the shift to mobile usage, the redesign features a dedicated mobile layout:

- **Hamburger Menu:** To save screen real estate while keeping navigation accessible.
 - **Thumb-Friendly Design:** Buttons and links are sized and spaced to prevent accidental clicks (addressing Fitts's Law).
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Conclusion

This redesign successfully applies HCI frameworks to transition the Yale School of Art website from a digital collage to a structured, functional tool. It proves that a website can be "artistic" while remaining highly usable and accessible.