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There Goes Everybody: And This is Where the Magic Happens

Visual Culture

Visual culture fills up the landscape with noise, but that is mostly where visual culture is

successful. The distractions among the visual landscape are overwhelming, overstimulating, and

overbearing. How is this happening in 2015? The billboards and wheat-pasted advertisements

along plywood and sidewalks distract pedestrians. Now, the confluence of editorials and

advertising have fused into one item. As if the editorial and publishing outlets that reviews the

OXO apple corer now has a link to lead you into the Amazon.com of consumer goods. The

advertisers are resilient in keeping up with the style trends, which crawls through interwoven

Pinterest and Tumblr moodboards.

Conceptual Problem

I am studying the relationship between image and text because I want my viewers to

know how the strategies implemented by lifestyle and fashion brands misconstrue consumers'

values (see Fig. 5). I am visualizing this research I collected between September 2015 through

December 2015 will help my readers understand the consumerists' habits are not healthy. What

would the alternative be?

Meta Questions

I have developed the common thread to my research. The conceptual problem lead me to question popular forms of media. Which, then lead me questioning how popular culture in the United States glues sensationalist aura to the images of celebrities (Cornell and Halter). And, this curiosity lead me questioning how I examine conversations with casual encounters, friends, family, and partners. All-in-all, this garnered my curiosity in marrying design, text, and humor together. It is a format that has been driving my process to my forms. The compass that lead me through the terrain had corralled ideas on breaking down mainstream popular culture.

False Starts In Research

Originally, my research dove into the current culture wars here in the U.S. (Haidt). Haidt's anecdotes have explored how the mob mentality between liberals and conservatives in the U.S. are heated. The rift between the public who identify with either liberal or conservative stirred a striking schism. Whether the difference in opinion on birth control, homeland security, or how the sick and needy would be cared for, both conservatives and liberals are on the same sides of the coin. Both liberals and conservatives can unite within the group solidarity (Haidt). I dove further into questioning the role of graphic designers. My curiosity lead me to questioning the ethics of designers responsible for injecting work into the visual culture. Unfortunately, these end products fall into the lap of advertising firms. And, then distributed for public consumption. Frank Chimero's essay "Designing in the Borderlands" detailed how his process on being a designer and writer has merged. And as a result, he realized his role of the designer is akin to a loki or a trickster (Chimero). I viewed Chimero's trickster role relatable to myself. Chimero's essay is garnished with wordplay and double entendres on his role as a cultural maker (see Fig.

3). I identified this to my workflow. However, this essay rubbed against the edges of graphic

design and user interface design. I am not after those forms. For the first week of senior seminar,

I designed several board games. Then, I shot a children's television show. Later, I developed a

felt hanging. Simultaneously, I created a channel on the online research platform Arena. And, I

created a Tumblr that documented my processes. Artist Amalia Ulman's framework was a form I

sought after in uploading images to my Tumblr. Her original content is dispersed throughout the

page, without an attribution to her sources. Tumblr as a platform does not primarily function as a

research platform. So, the assortment of videos, images, and text is a whirlwind of processes

(Ulman).

What is successful is the visual language has surfaced into a digestible package I had

reblogged and dispersed for other users to swallow and remix. But, this is a haphazard gesture.

For one, the visual language that has overwhelmed our visual senses is abrasive. Abrasive,

because the top motive for visual eye candy is a result of the for-profit motive. Lifestyle brands,

clothing brands, and furniture brands garnished our human interactions. They cloud consumers

with false pretenses that buying up these goods would boost their wellbeing. The advertisers and

consumers have an unbalanced relationship. I investigated the relationship between editorials and

advertisements to show my readers trends in visual markers are in a push-pull cycle. I have

showed this in my process to help readers understand why consumers must claim public spaces

back from corporations and advertisers. Graphic designers opted out a while ago to hold

accountability on what fills the visual landscape. Not to buy goods. But, to listen to the needs for

thriving and resilient relationships. These values have been compromised by the rapid trends and

lifecycles between fashion and branding ("YOUTH MODE"). But, consumers forego the

longevity of what is the alternative to advertisements penetrating the visual landscape. Two

resources I dove into were the collective K-HOLE ("YOUTH MODE") and Metahaven's

Uncorporate Identity (Kurk and van der Velden, Daniel). K-HOLE published annual trend

forecasts. The images inside these PDFs have been hand selected to predict how consumers tried

too hard to be a unique individual (see Fig. 1). The authors behinds this annual report proposed

consumers would eventually turn away from luxury brands. And instead, focus on how to be

empathetic humans. This goes beyond the step above behaving a conscious consumer. The

proposal was to re-orient consumers' behavior to be:

- Engaged with newness

- Experimental

- Critical of the past

- Changeable

- Down with groups

- Rebellious

- Free ("YOUTH MODE")

The trend report echoed an example of the Culture Wars detailed in *The Righteous Mind* (Haidt).

There was false starts for drafting my ideas and proposals. Gamify everything. Make

every project a game. This was a funny approach. Which, I can use comedy to mitigate topics

appeared tricky at first. Humor and laughter is on the same side of the coin as revelling in pain

(Carr and Greeves). The third rail that has blurred my process was understanding my conceptual

problem. I returned to researching the visual clutter and noise in our landscape. The essays

detailed in *Uncorporate Identity* explored how defunct companies and decentralized collectives

trailed breadcrumbs to their dormant existence. Redacted logos of Exxon-Mobil and painted over storefronts hauled over by new management were examples of case studies (Kurk and van der Velden). I returned to the dismal futures of how designers cope with advertising commissions. I returned to questioning the use of physical markers that cluttered the environment. Especially, lifestyle and fashion brands that tote their own selves as cool, hip, and fresh.

I had a successful start in one sample of my working bibliography: the comedic gesture. The comedic gesture, specifically, concrete comedy is the serendipitous gesture whereas an object or a movement is the punchline of the joke (Robbins). And that is that, nothing has to be said. And this pointed to the visual gestures.

Comedic gestures and Concrete Comedy

What other false starts happened for my research topic? Well, I felt fulfilled intertwining humor. And, I been attracted to weaving image and text. My compass is pointed to creating image and text as my form. The hanging for my felt piece *I've Felt Felt and I've Felt Silk* was an iteration hung in the Forum Art Space. The curation behind the show was to showcase appropriated art. "Copy and Paste" was the name of the exhibition. The gallery is located at Purchase College tucked inside the Student Center.

A red flag for my false starts was perceiving the process for my senior project as exercises only. The exercises are not simply exercises. They are the drafts. The works in progress are the breadcrumbs leading to the human element to my conceptual problem. Only through drafts I come to understand my crafting and artmaking (Bayles and Orland). My first draft was my felt sculpture. This is 18 inches by 18 inches, an almost perfect square. Laser cut is text appropriated from Lauren Cornell's and Ed Halter's essay, "Mass Effect". The essay was an

exploration of why the act of dispersing a celebrity's images ramped up their sensationalism. The cult of celebrity exacerbated the individual's sense of validation similar to how my family members exaggerated the ramifications of winter. It is funny.

In treating my works in progress as exercises versus actual drats, I did not value my process. And the process is important. In the end, there is a product that is aesthetically pleasing. And would look functional in a gallery. However, I underestimated in the craft of how this pushed momentum in my senior project.

Michael Bell-Smith suggested to create a Tumblr that would embody my ideas and work in progress. Why? Because this is the most low-stakes medium to push my ideas into a higher ground. What I have been chasing after the first five weeks into the semester is investigating and breaking down the visual noise that occupied public space. The reason why is to prove to my viewers that users forfeited their self worth to big data. Big data had been hightailing Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram, and Pinterest users in order to sell products (Rushkoff). This is dangerous territory because this consumerist sensibility had compartmentalized human interactions.

Metrics

Documentarian and writer Douglas Rushkoff got me thinking about the human element in my research. I do not want to be tied down to graphic design trends alone. My purpose in investigating the trends and who is responsible for visual language in 2015 is not because I wanted to create a graphic design project. This is removed from my development. My conceptual problem paved in understanding why visual language has a tug of war between how the public perceived beauty and the underlying profit motives of advertising firms. It is a fight to reclaim attention for actual human empathy. The distraction I scrutinized is equating brands as a

replacement for human empathy and interactions. To avoid the gimmicks, trends, and hype cycles of luxury brands. Advertising in 2015 is not tied to subliminal advertising alone. Rushkoff said at the Neuberger New Media Lecture the products social media users engaged in, if they are unpaid subscription models, end up buying user data (Rushkoff). They are not the users of Instagram, Tumblr, or Pinterest. Rather, the users without paid subscriptions fooled themselves. And they have fooled themselves for thinking they can use adblocking extensions in their web browsers. See, the intersection of editorial and advertising are blurred. The boundaries in viewing what is simply the advertisement and what is the content of an editorial web page is fused.

A Void

In exploring the use of Tumblr as a bricolage of documenting my progress and writing, I turned to nothing. Susan Sontag's essay "The Aesthetic of Silence" has directed me in wondering how art was rebellious by saying nothing. My understanding was nothing is not the split opposite of something. To reframe the definition of nothing, she has written:

> One could trace exactly and in order how the eye of art has panned over our environment, 'naming', making its limited selection of things which people then become aware of as significant, pleasurable, complex entities (Oscar Wilde pointed out that people didn't see fogs before certain Nineteenth-Century poets and painters taught them how to; and surely, no one saw as much of the variety and subtlety of the human face before the era of the movies) (Sontag).

I turned to Seth Price's PDF *Dispersion* in questioning distributed content on the internet. If Sontag's response to interpreting art is to silence content, then Price's response to

interpretation is splice, dice, and chop up the content. This simply meant media can be pushed to higher ground by destroying the original intention of the medium (see Fig. 4). It is a re-examination of McLuhan's view on how differing mediums do not stay separate from one another. But instead, reverberated in a constant feedback loop to repurpose its original function of the medium (McLuhan). Price proposed consumers and viewers, "should pay close attention to these activities, which, despite lying between the arts, have great resonance in the national culture." (Price). Why did this matter to me? It is a call to action on ways artists would subvert the fetishization of images (Cornell and Halter).

Popular Forms of Media to Subvert

Big Data and the users of Instagram have an unusual marriage (Rushkoff). The marriage is a rocky relationship, standing on shaky scaffolding. The reason why is because this cross between advertising and editorial is the result of consumerist motives. I have been attracted to using populist forms of media, and then subvert those forms. The children's television show idea was a push into those meta-questions I listed. The meta-questions lead me researching why the visual landscape is saturated with consumerist tendencies. The trends in graphic design saturated the landscape, and the visual language bled into it. The false start is not the children's TV show (see Fig. 2). The decision to shoot the show was made after I proposed the idea to shoot a TV show that depicted me punching fine art paintings. The absurd humor I sought after during the first week of sketching splintered into the video I shot and edited.

However, the children's TV show is the right path, because the show itself revealed an opening. The path was to understanding why I wanted to subvert populist forms of media. Professor Steve Lambert's references and source material for exploring children's TV shows was

helpful. How helpful? The production designer for Peewee's playhouse opened up my understanding the work habits and disciplines of other artists (White). The source material Steve Lambert given me for comedy has been helpful because comedy is a tool for social engagement. The use of humor and the intersection of social sciences has been helpful in breaking down the norms in mainstream culture. Especially in this year of 2015. Comedy as a tool had not been precisely the end product of my form I would work on. Another roadblock for senior project was visualizing the form. Though, it has been easy to distill and stand on the shoulders of giants. My strengths and my source of excitement was intertwining image and text. And, I have been attracted to asking questions about the materialist culture. Specifically, lifestyle branding and the use of editorials disguising itself as advertisements (see Fig. 5). Personal branding has transpired a source of egotistical and unassuming sense of individuality. The idea that the fashion brands, furniture stores, and even the brands that coexisted in our kitchens lead back to the conceptual problem. I wanted to investigate the intertwining of fashion and lifestyle brands to figure out how come these companies have glued users of Instagram, Tumblr, and Facebook. I hoped to teach readers this is all simply visual noise. The visual language has been consumed by unnecessary branding. It is too much for consumers to absorb. Consumers could use a distance and to ask themselves, how come do social interactions have to be intertwined on the merit of goods. The Instagram photo measures merit by likes (Rushkoff). The user decided to tag the SuperDry brand he purchased. So, why judge social interactions based on this metric alone? Who really thought this was a good idea?

The Timeline of Processes

The children's TV show is a 1 minute long draft of me speaking with an inanimate shark plush toy, named Reverend Al-Sharkton ("Alexander Malander"). I spoke to the plush toy about its plans for the evening and inquired on why eight hours of sleep and eating well matters. The goal of this shoot was to weave in adult themes such as mental well-being for children to absorb. The title of the piece is *Alexander Malander Without a Calendar Extravaganza*. I was satisfied in shooting the segment because I incorporated humor and me playing as a caricature on video. It felt to me as an audition tape to sent to the hit show Saturday Night Live. From what I have learnt from that draft, the lengthy video coverage was fruitful. However, this would be more successful if I written material before shooting. There was no premise written down prior to shooting. I simply winged improvising on camera and hoped the jokes said aloud were funny. This, and the mix of visual gags were strewn into the video. One scene included me throwing on a yellow button-up and admitting to the viewer green is my favorite color--and I could only afford a green shirt.

After, I laser cut the felt piece *I've Felt Felt and I've Felt Silk*. The most successful was experimenting with appropriated text. Then, I created a Tumblr blog. The Tumblr is a mix of 11 different pseudonyms ("gammaslamming"). These fake personalities resembled an artist collective. The purpose was to string too many images to be absorbed by the viewer. The sense of information overload was my objective. I wanted to showcase a body of sketches and drafts that would be difficult to trace its origin (Huberman). The breakthrough in formulating iterations and my ideas is paring down what is the human element? How can I surrender myself to making my art personable? It reminds me of how *Art & Fear* detailed the best art is not only made in

solitude, but only will understanding and trusting the artmaking process be seamless with iteration (Bayles and Orland). The process in iterations was difficult because searched through many text and images for reference. It has been helpful, though I have been fulfilled creating by hand. I am entitled to the fruit, but not the fruit of the labor.

With 'And This Is Where the Magic Happens' _03 min 11sec_, I challenged myself of telling an interview of the projected future between a heteronormative couple. The future is the 2030s. Indeed, where the magic happens is novel, fleeting, or euphoric. I have took the role of the storyteller by carrying the weight of the interviewer in the video. The text behind the rectangles and cat images held a voice of authority. The text shown on the screen, superimposed on the indigo and green rectangles is a conversation between two persons. The two persons are not revealed as human figures. But instead, the person's dialog is read. Not spoken and not sung, but the text is read throughout the video.

The first half of the video sets up the premise of the world. Unfolding as a piece of poetry and wordplay, the video fades in from a solid black. The text tells the viewers of a different reality. Where the Third Place has existed. A Third Place for people to meet and greet. And in the Third Place, leisure is always welcome. The text is a narrative of the bygone days of disembodied people who used to meet for leisure time.

I originally proposed the idea of combining text, humor, and visuals. My struggle back in October was searching for subject matter. I had the conviction to use humor and wit. So, I was confused about my final form. I originally assumed I wanted to make an online reader. Or a PDF. Or, an interactive online reader. Those ideas somewhat fell into place.

Original running time of my video was 12 minutes.

There was a time

when people talked shop

and talked shop

and talked about their anxieties.

Bodies would convene together, in the third place. And the Third Place was warm.

I considered writing poetry pieces in the form of PDF readers. Or pamphlets. Or zines.

From my growth in the New Media program here at Purchase College at SUNY, I have been curious about the growth of interpersonal relationships. The length of how interpersonal relationships have grown and been nurtured - those questions come to my mind. The question about how different persons become interdependent on different people was my motivation. I had set myself up to question this thesis: Why is there anxieties in a person trying to connect to another person on an interpersonal level? Simply stated, what steps is possible for one person to connect and feel vulnerable with another human being?

Those questions came to my mind when I had explored the intertwining of visuals, text, and humor back in October of 2015. I did not have the answers, yet. But, these questions peaked my curiosity. And, I was stubborn to explore those questions in my thesis. I recognized the visual language in my video was a symptom of my thesis. Meaning, the use of appropriated images was a symptom of piecing together how to archive and preserve images of the 2010s. I was set out to find a way to historicize the animated GIFs. And I was determined to historicize the visual language of Geocities pages.

THE FIRST HALF

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The prologue of the video was not imagined until February of 2016. I storyboarded the scenes December 2015 throughout February 2016. In the beginning of storyboarding, the gathering of storyboards was set in one sketchbook. Each board was simply consisted of pencil drawings, felt tip marks, and even sumi-e calligraphy ink renderings.

I had scrawled throughout lined notebooks. And later in the Spring 2016 semester, I have isolated each storyboard frame onto blank 3 x 5 inch index cards. I have also drafted scripts inside spreadsheets. The spreadsheets were hosted and edited inside Google Sheets. The step in drafting dialog inside spreadsheets was important in the process. I have visualized the banter between the text of the left hand side of the video. And, I visualized the text on the right hand side of the video.

The composition matters in _And This is Where the Magic Happens_ because I wanted to simulate two individuals talking back at each other. And, I wanted the banter to feel rapid. I wanted the conversation between both individuals to feel speedy and witty. The 02 minute and 07 second mark is the first instance the person on the left speaks. The text reads the instance where they recall leaving an actual city, New Haven Connecticut. The conversation makes the viewer feel disjointed already since the text is inferred a significant lifestyle change occurred. The lifestyle change was both disembodied speakers (who are being interviewed).

Another exploration in the video was showing disembodied voices from actual persons. The text on screen is not paired with images of human figures. My intention was to hone in on the tone of the dialog. And in doing so, I felt creative working with a specific economy and constraint. The constraint was to work without representation of human figures. The scale of the

text, the composition of the typography, and the pacing of superimposing the text determined the

mood and tone of the dialog. Therefore, the dialog is quick banter between both persons

speaking on screen.

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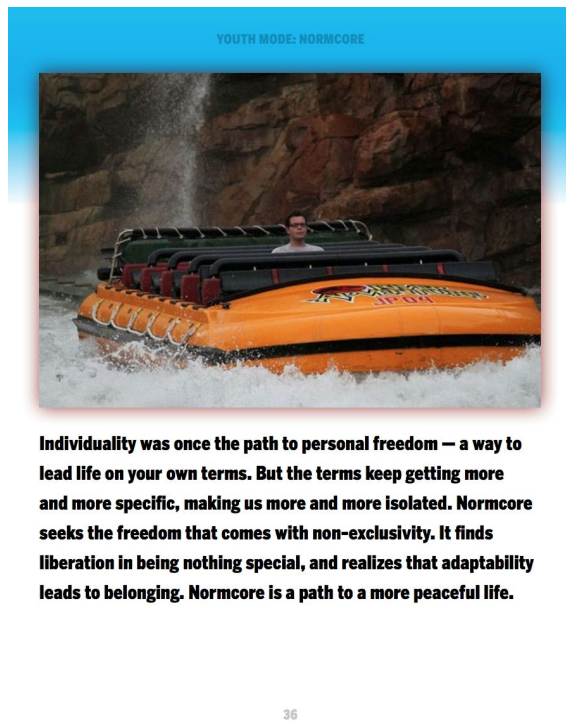
<http://khole.net/issues/youth-mode/>.

Appendix

YOUTH MODE: NORMCORE

Individuality was once the path to personal freedom — a way to lead life on your own terms. But the terms keep getting more and more specific, making us more and more isolated. Normcore seeks the freedom that comes with non-exclusivity. It finds liberation in being nothing special, and realizes that adaptability leads to belonging. Normcore is a path to a more peaceful life.

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Fig. 1. Page 36 of K-HOLE's annual report PDF titled *YOUTH MODE.*
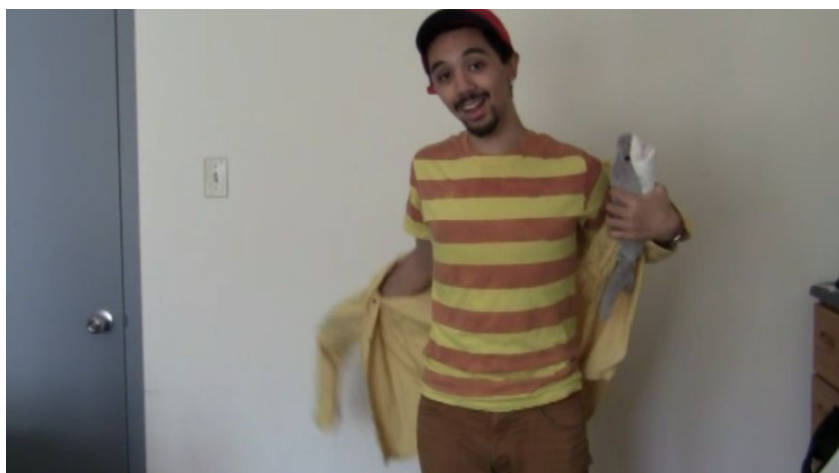
Fig. 2. Screenshot of the video *Alexander Without a Calendar Extravaganza.*
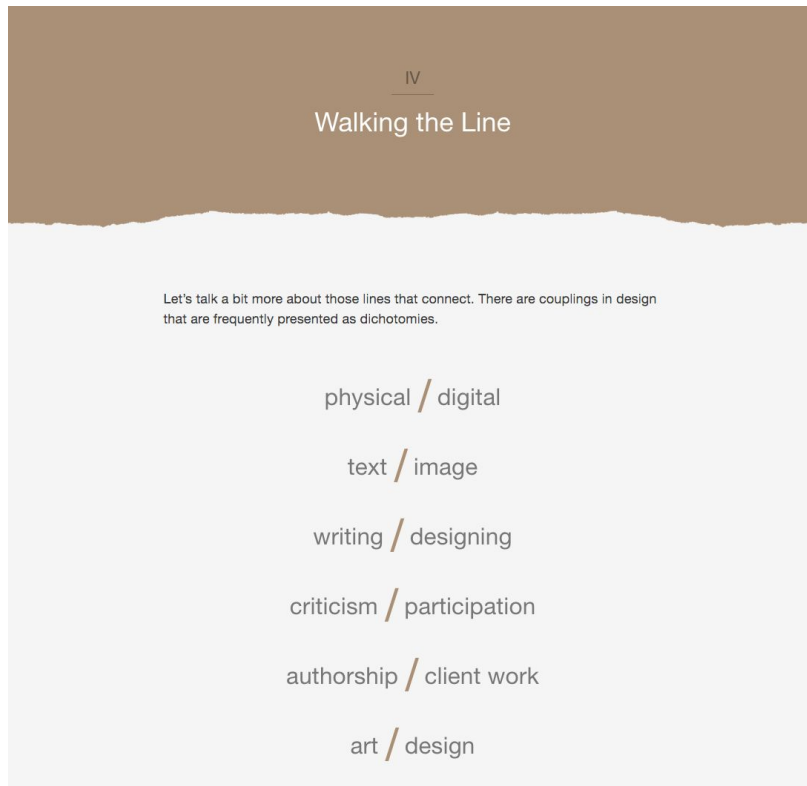
Fig. 3. "Designing in the Borderlands" a talk written by Frank Chimero. Screenshotted is the pairing of opposites Chimero illustrates as 'Walking the Line'.

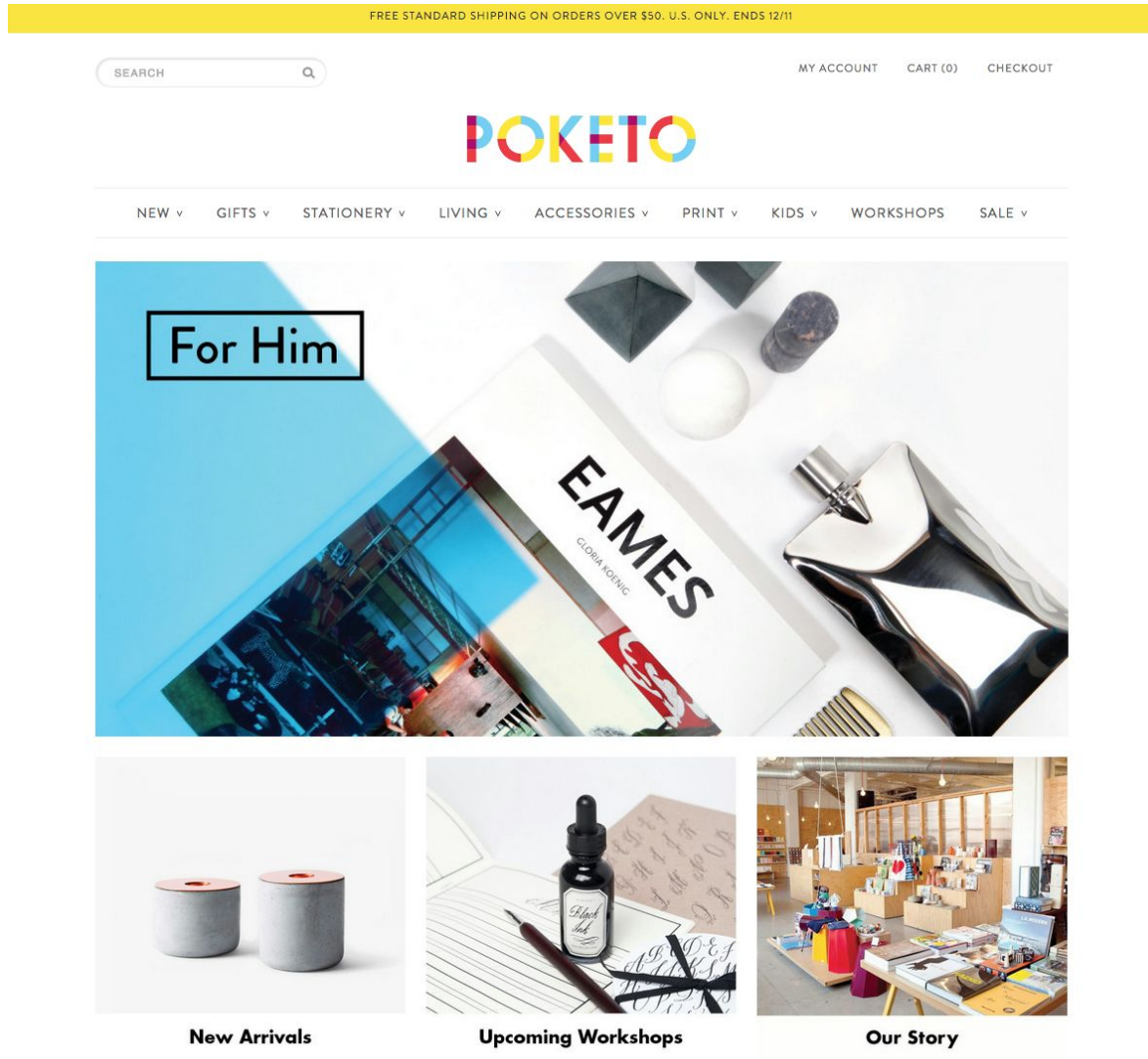Fig. 4. Documentation of *Dispersion* in assorted color treatments laid against a backdrop.

Fig. 5. Homepage for the website Poketo, a luxury brand shop intersecting a mode of blog posts, workshops, and an Instagram showcasing home goods.