

Design Is Fun

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Design is fun. Go ahead and say it aloud: “Design is fun.” Sometimes having fun when designing feels like a foreign concept, something said by those not truly in-the-know about the complexities of design and the gut-clenching amount of work (abuse?) designers are dealt. But breathe deeply, repeat that phrase as air expands your lungs, and realize there’s some truth there.

Picture me and you beside the pool, the sun not too high in the sky, and I turn to you and say, “Here’s a process that shows designers how to make form first which encourages experimentation.” This play process takes the

traditional way of designing and flips it around. Instead of the final step being form derived from concept development, my process starts with form. You begin with one graphic thing of your making and just build on it until content occurs simultaneously.

This manual outlines a play formula that has no firm direction, no concrete deadline to drag it down. It’s organic. Yet the final creations will always prove surprising and inspiring, and the only thing you must do is make something. The act of making is a creative jump-start to generate ideas. So take this base process, work it until it becomes yours, and go design already.

Play Formula in 6 Easy Steps

Learn the limitations. The only limitations applied to this process are the initial design format (square, horizontal rectangular, vertical rectangular) and the overall timeframe of one week for each project. Any notion of “preciousness” is taken out of the equation by structuring the time and size options.

1 Choose a format and start making. The three format choices each have their own built-in design limitations, visually. Longer shapes won’t fit in the square format with the same impact as the other options, so choosing one structure over the other directly affects the end work. This doesn’t mean the final size dimensions will be the same as the starting size. Remember, this process encourages fluidity.

Choose one.

SQUARE

VERTICAL

HORIZONTAL

Go pick a Seed. The Seed sets the tone and provides an initial visual cue. The Seed can be anything: a photograph, a piece of cloth, or even a piece of lint. Don’t, however, pick a Seed that you’ve already created.

2 That’s cheating and you’ll have pre-existing contextual information to fight against. The whole point is to create something new, without any message already tucked into it.

This Seed is a simple chicken silhouette from an old cookbook.



SEED



This Morsel is a simplified graphic of the Seed.

Create a Morsel. Taking the chosen Seed, distill something from it that you can use as the starting point for your design process.

3 The Morsel is totally open-ended: it can be a shape, color swatch or scheme, or even letterform. Simplify the visual form that's already presented. Take away its definable features and start with a fresh shape.

Let your content evolve. The Morsel drives the whole play development. By starting without any message to guide the design, any resulting decisions and final form will be as experimental as possible. Go left, go straight, go back, go wherever, just make something and keep building.

4

Keep your leftovers. Instead of deleting the individual elements not used for the final

design, why not just drag them off to the side, layering each discarded piece until it becomes its own unconscious work. This chaotic jumble offers a glimpse into the process by collecting the unused components. Frame them and save them.

5

Add some value. What value do you get from all this play? Well, you've learned something new. You've experimented and created fresh experiences that offer techniques useful for future work. Now, go further and use those new skills and make something. Push the design and allow new ideas to spring from the play development.

6

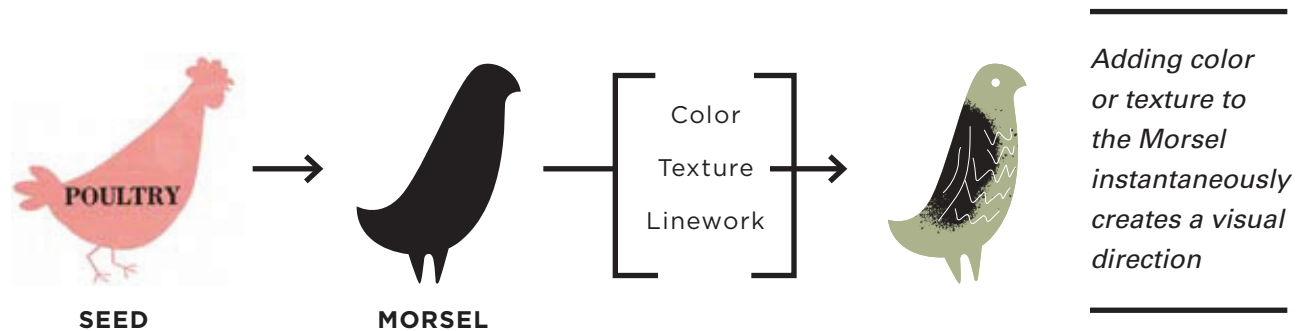
Formula In Use

Project: Illustrated Children's Poster and Book

A blob is characterless, no emotions yet applied. Add a line, however, and out springs a personality worthy of exploration. A little color helps set a mood of playfulness and some texture breaks the two-dimensional barrier in exciting ways. This project's evolution began with a simple chicken silhouette from an old cookbook (Seed). Take away its recognizable features (spindly legs are never attractive) and the leftover shape is still bird-like but free from the confines of that obvious "chicken-ness." Cut from its comb and wattle, the Morsel emerges as something exotic and new.

Thought Map / Process Overview

DAY 1

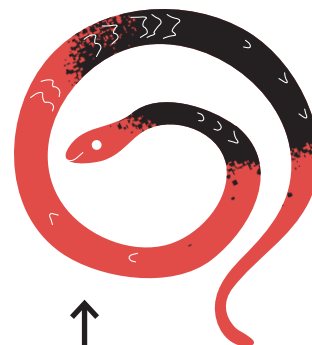
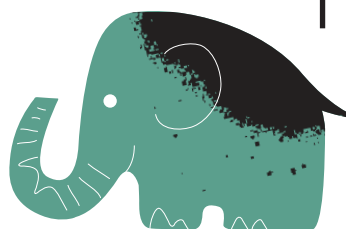
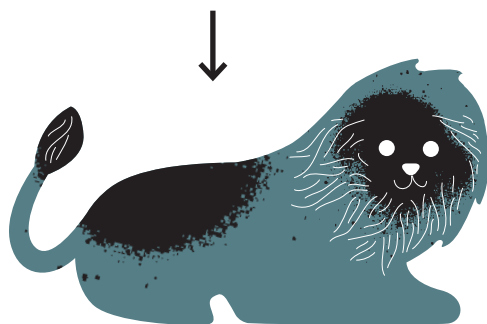




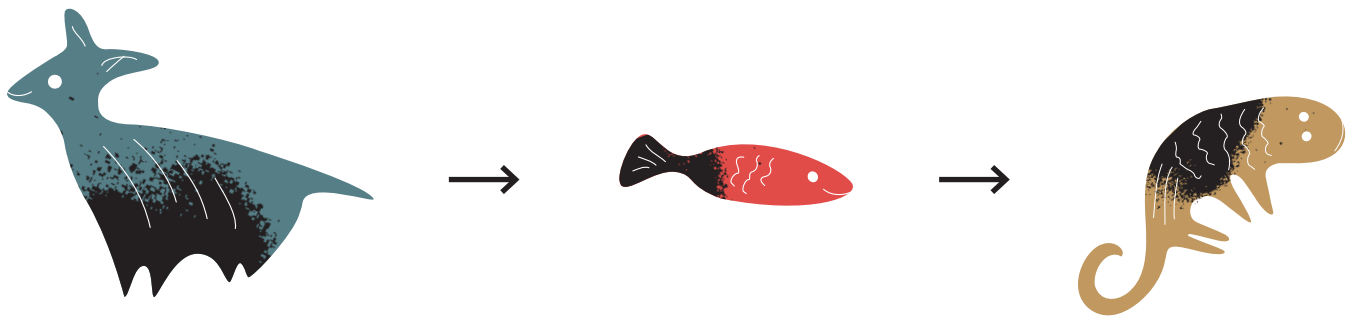
The texture is a bitmapped spray paint mark. Changing scale, rotation, and placement allows an extreme amount of versatility.

DAY 2

Quick Brainstorming. My initial reactions to the finished bird design are to go in a children illustrative direction. The next immediate step shapes another animal illustration in the same technique as the bird.



Content Through Evolution. The same technique that evolved with the Morsel is repeated to create the animal menagerie. The color palette evolves into a fun mix of bright, unusual colors creating interest and whimsy.



DAY 3

Rites of passage into adulthood wind their way through the back roads of life, sometimes hidden behind overgrowth and old barns. One ritual involves learning to fear the correct things of childhood. So, when that red ant hill erupted and that army crawled its way up, the slaps and stings brought about a new consciousness. But try to remember the days when the crayon drawings on the wall still had smiles for everything, even the red ants.

DAY 4

The Story: Morning Glory. With all the mix and match of animals (elephants don't exactly live with dingoes), I asked myself: what's the narrative connecting them together? These chipper, stylized shapes sets the tone for my evolving content of the overall work: a children's poster. A child's imagination has no bounds so I found it perfectly plausible stuffing animals as big as a llama under their beds. Among the dust bunnies live an odd herd of elephants, llamas, dingoes, lizards, snakes, fishes, lions, and birds with a blazing purple sun to light the way.

The Finale. The final form, a poster, is a big visual full of surprise and fun that reads from top to bottom, staying true to a child's narrative.

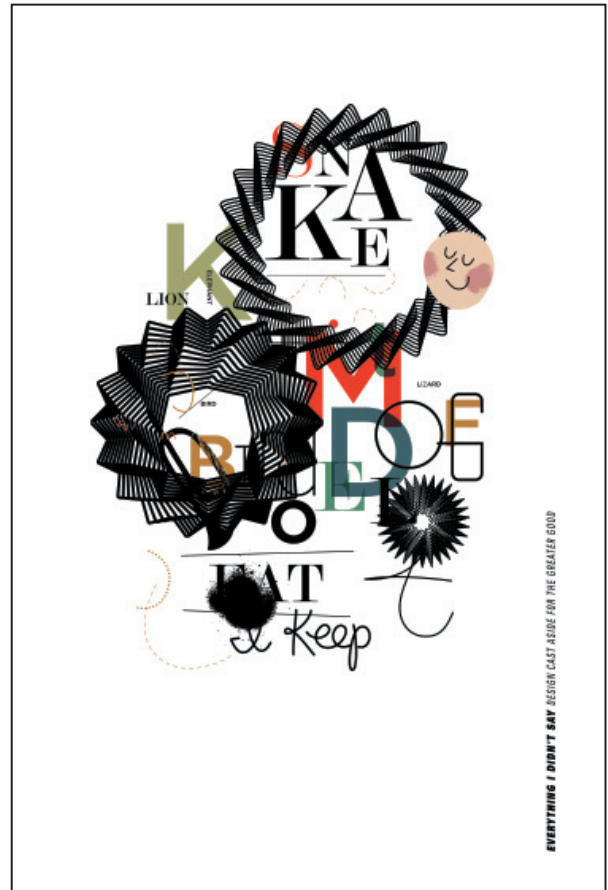


*The child that never appeared.
Look for this sleeping lad in the
Leftover Poster for this project.
His smiling mug didn't make it.*



LEFTOVERS

The final project could have taken a radically different turn. Perhaps a few spirographs too many? All the leftovers for each project compose my poster series entitled: *Everything I Didn't Say: Design Cast Aside for the Greater Good.*



Added Value

The question of what else lurks in the dark depths of a child's imagination (and room) answered itself quite easily. The classic theme of “monsters in the closet” became my next step in experimenting with the techniques established in the play development. I emphasized rhyming and humor to expand the story in the form of a small accordion book. The sleeping lad is no longer content with just animals under his bed. Now, he wishes the monsters in the closet would take his pesky little brother off his hands with a trip down the gullet.

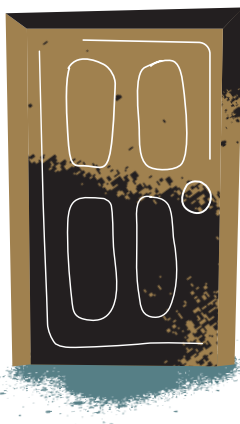
Illustrated Poster

ANIMALS UNDER THE BED

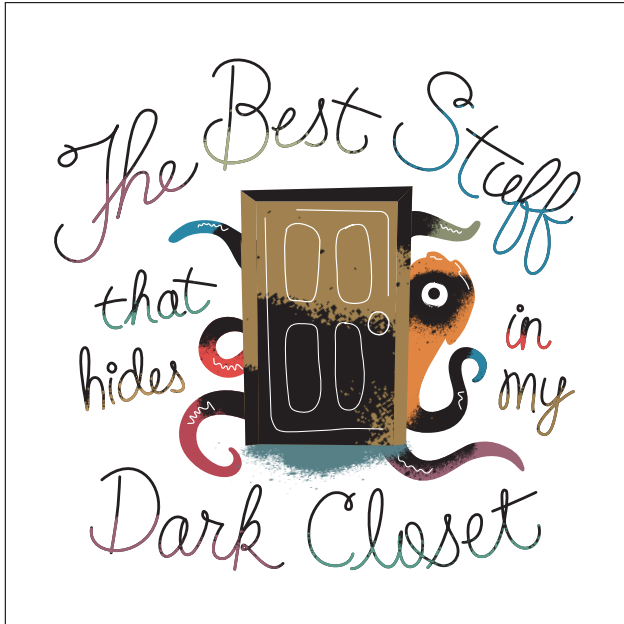


Accordion Book

MONSTERS IN THE CLOSET

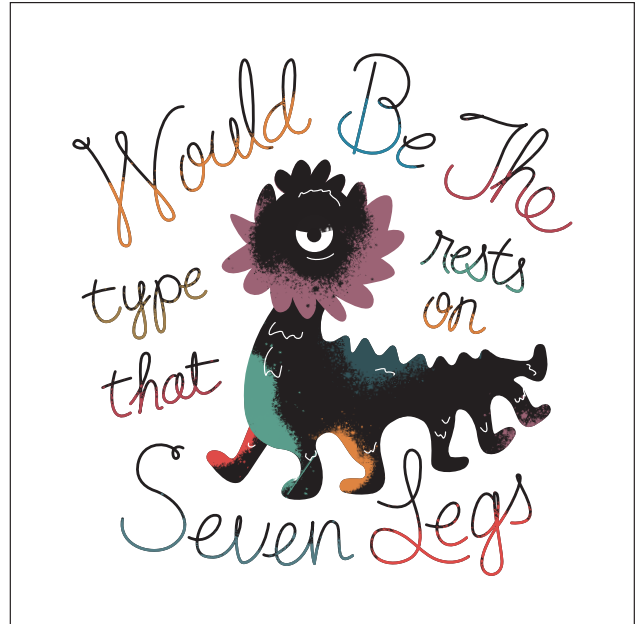


*Seven legs, one eye, four arms,
or tentacles, the monsters needed
touch more menace without losing
their fun charm.*



1

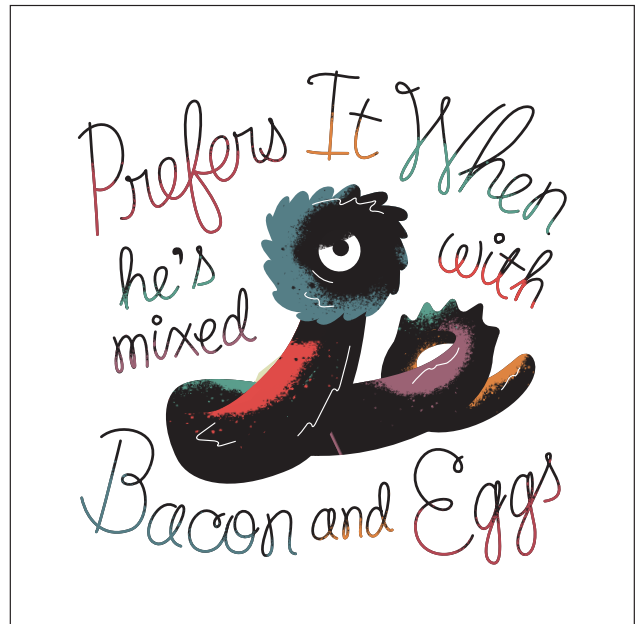
Accordion Book **MONSTERS IN THE CLOSET**



2



3



4

Sharing with Designers

After documenting and talking endlessly about this process, the big question to answer is why this would be beneficial to designers. And the answer is simple, yet still surprising. I've found (and been told) that some designers have difficulty just making form. I feel strongly about and heartily encourage making design everyday. The process outlined in this manual, however, is more tailored for having fun on side projects outside of the work place. Yet, with a little tweaking, this formula is capable of being used in actual client-based design projects. My design formula distills, from an outside source, a single point of departure for the creation of a fully fleshed project by way of form first. The end results are always surprising and inspiring and perhaps by incorporating this new process instead of the traditional formula, designers will learn and shape their own independent design identity.

The formula and case studies will be available on my thesis website linked from the main MICA GD MFA website: graduate.mica.edu/gdmfa