

MUSHROOM LOG

A TYPEFACE BASED ON SYMBIOSIS



THE PROBLEM

DESIGN BRIEF

DESIGN STATEMENT

The design brief presents an interesting task to create a unique typeface inspired by the concept of 'symbiosis'. What makes this project stand out is the need to visually represent the intricate relationships found in symbiotic interactions through typography.

The challenge within this brief lies in effectively translating the complexities of symbiotic interactions into a typeface whilst maintaining readability, ensuring that each character of the typeface not only conveys its own form but also its relationship to the other characters. This requires careful use of spacing, alignment, and overall design to ensure that clarity is not sacrificed.

Despite these challenges, the brief also presents exciting opportunities to experiment with organic forms, textures, and engage in storytelling through typography.

THE CONTEXT

INSPIRATION

DESIGN STATEMENT

During my exploration of existing fonts and artworks for creative inspiration, I found that I was more invested in designs that blended elements of nature, particularly plants and animals which tie in with the brief's theme of symbiosis.

Among the many works and designers, I discovered Alejandra Vindas' portfolio which is one that stood out to me. Within her portfolio, I found a collection of font designs that strongly resonated with the essence of the design brief and seamlessly aligned with the vision I had for my own design.

Vindas' works (figures 1 & 2) both capture a realistic effect within, however figure 2 uses a more cartoonish form when it comes to human hands. Vinda's creativity not only aligned with my vision but also became a valuable source of inspiration for my own designs.

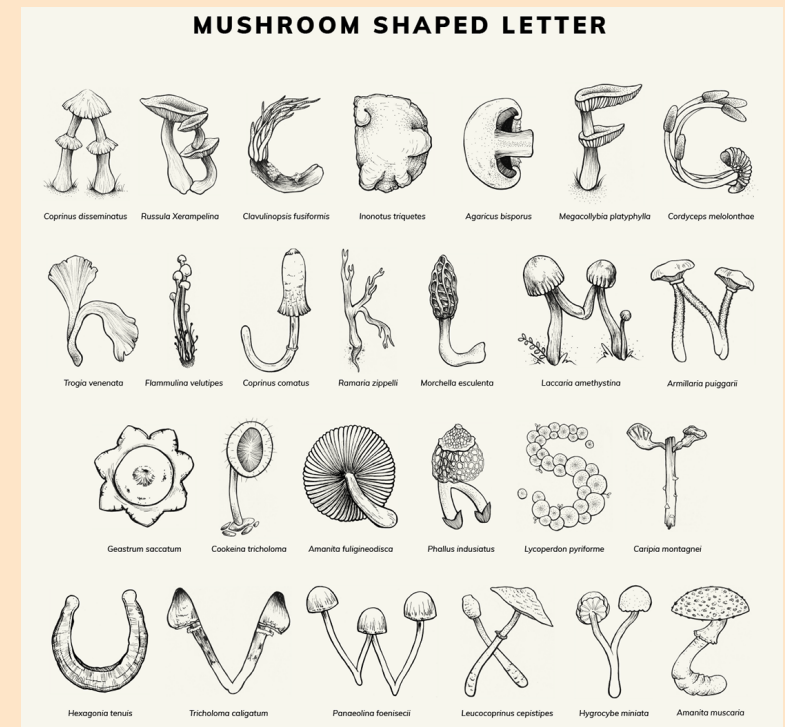


Figure 1. Mushroom Shape Letter, Vindas

THE CONTEXT

INSPIRATION

DESIGN STATEMENT

In her design, Alejandra Vindas demonstrated a remarkable ability to implement realism into her creation, skillfully leveraging the relationship between shape and shading to a sense of authenticity.

Notably, in Figure 1, Vindas skillfully captured the essence of real mushrooms, elevating the visual impact of her work by giving each letter with depth and lifelike qualities. However, in her pursuit of realism, Vindas presented herself with the challenge of clarity and readability. While certain letters in Figure 1 show intricate detailing and lifelike features, they often sacrificed clarity in favour of achieving heightened realism.

This decision, while intending to instill a sense of authenticity, inadvertently hindered the readability of the font, which reduced the font's overall legibility. Moreover, the font predominantly relied on thin-stemmed mushrooms for many of the letters, and in some cases, use thicker mushrooms which deviated from the cohesive style, disrupting the visual harmony and consistency of the design. Therefore, achieving a balance between realism and readability is an integral part of font design.



Figure 2. No name, Vindas

THE CONTEXT

INSPIRATION

DESIGN STATEMENT

Alejandra's Vindas' design, as depicted in Figure 2, presents a captivating combination of animals, plants, and human hands, aligning perfectly with the project's brief. Her use of the hands as a consistent element in each letter inspired me to attempt a similar typographic design. However, although her design links well with the brief, she continued to struggle with clarity in her typeface as she did with Figure 1. In certain instances, such as with the letter 'D' resembling a 'B', and 'Q' potentially being mistaken for 'O', the intended letter fails to stand out due to the lack of distinction in Vindas' design, impacting legibility.

Inspired by Vindas' approach to font design, I looked to craft a typeface that not only achieves a balance between natural imagery and legibility, but also encapsulates the concept of symbiosis. Drawing upon Vindas' work, I strived to create a typeface that integrated recurring elements seamlessly within each character of my font.

Through thorough iteration and refinement, my aim was to address the clarity issue that seemed to be overlooked in Vindas' work, by utilising the interdependent relationship between natural elements and typographic clarity. By Infusing the typeface characters with elements inspired by nature, I strived to evoke a sense of unity, relating to the concept of symbiosis.

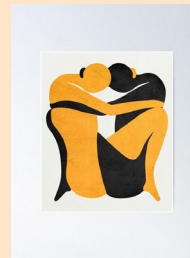
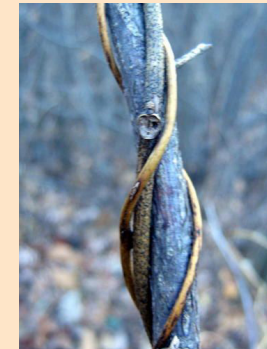
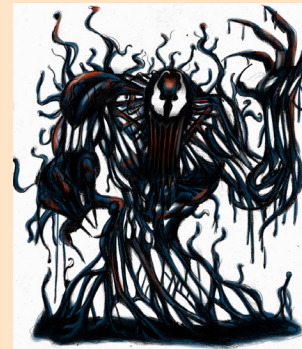
THE RESPONSE

MOODBOARD

DESIGN STATEMENT



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Figure 3. Moodboard

TYPOGRAPHIC DESIGN

DVB201

THE RESPONSE

DESIGN STATEMENT

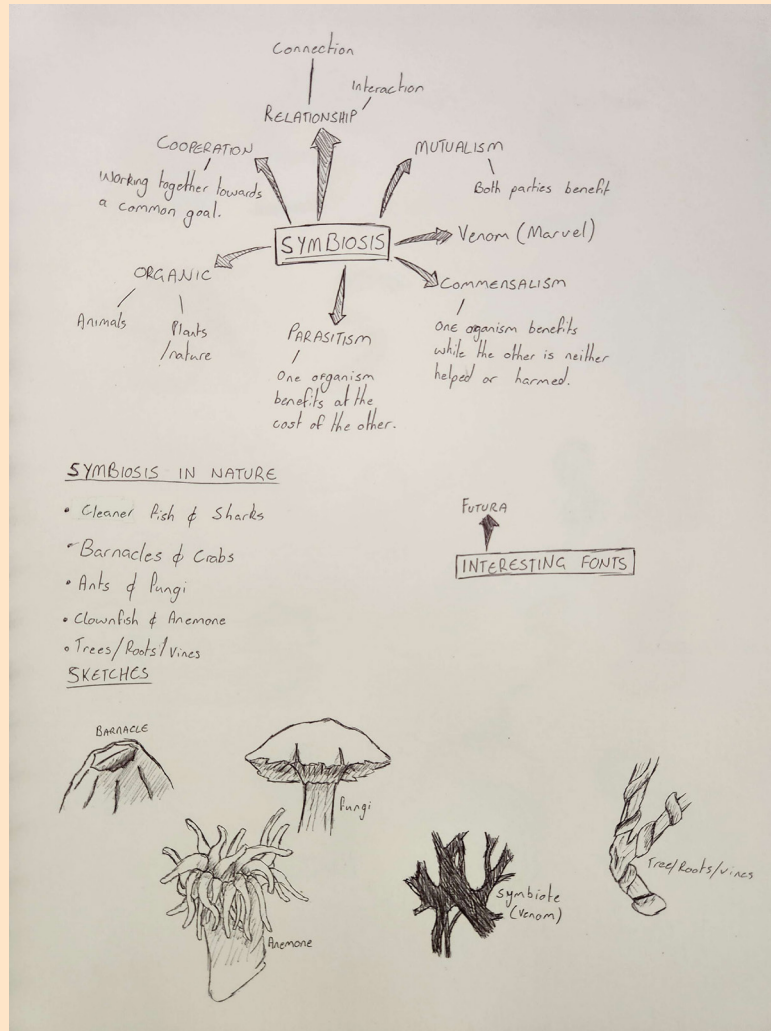
After thoroughly understanding the project brief and investigating the context, I created a mood board filled with fonts sourced from designers on Pinterest, along with images of animals and plants that I felt aligned with the concept of symbiosis.

From the moodboard, I generated a mind map and wrote notes on where symbiosis can be seen in nature accompanied by some sketches to explore potential directions for the typeface. I explored further with the sketches by drafting some designs using the letter 'S' as a foundation. By refining and combining ideas I produced a page of new designs that I believed not only fit the brief, but were also unique and maintained legibility.

THE RESPONSE

FIRST SKETCHES

DESIGN STATEMENT



THE RESPONSE

REFINED SKETCHES

DESIGN STATEMENT

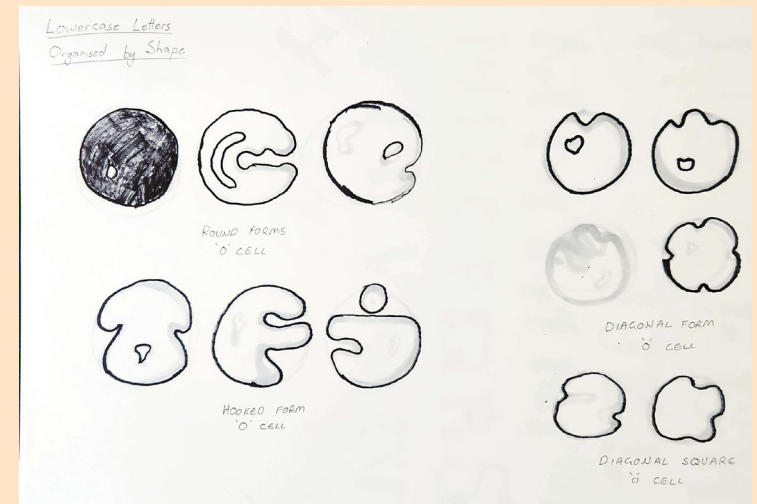
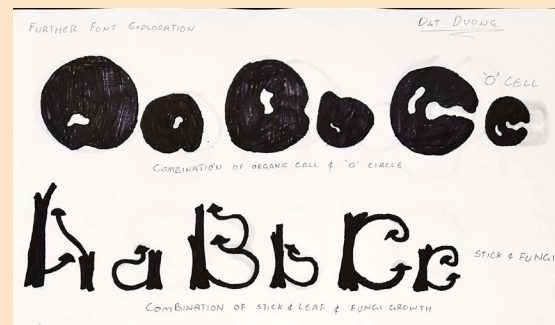
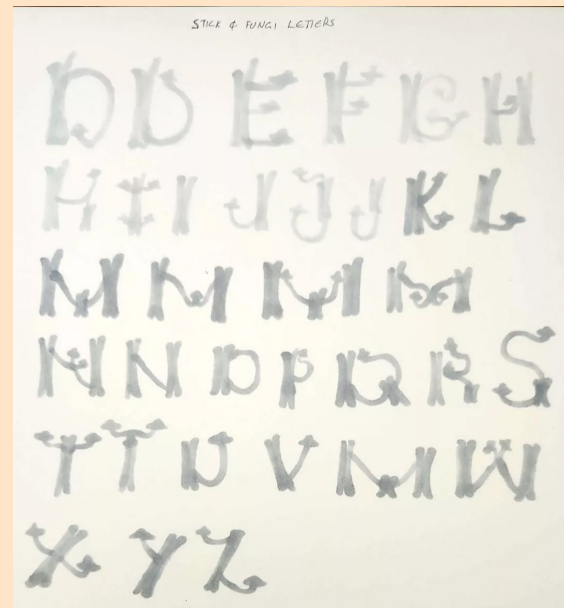
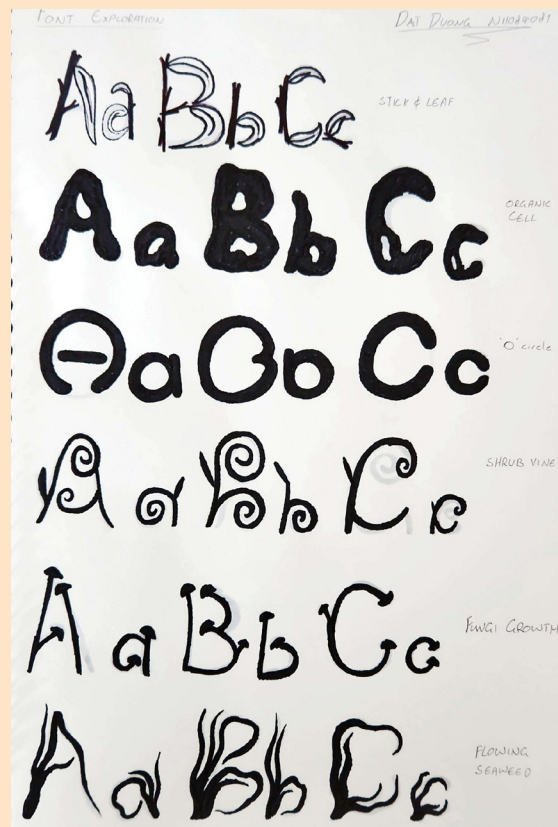


Figure 5. Refined sketches

THE RESPONSE

DESIGN STATEMENT

After careful consideration and iterations, I settled on a design that featured mushrooms and logs, merging past sketches to create a unique typeface. This design primarily depicted a tree stump adorned with spotted mushrooms, scientifically known as *amanita muscaria*. I began the design process by sketching each letter of the alphabet in a cartoonish style, then moved to digitalising them in Illustrator.

When initially creating the first character, 'A', in Illustrator I found that creating each character with a unique stump and mushroom would become time consuming. So to avoid this, I created assets that could be used across all characters. These assets included a tree stump with a nested bird, along with variations, and the mushroom head. This method, streamlined the creation process significantly.

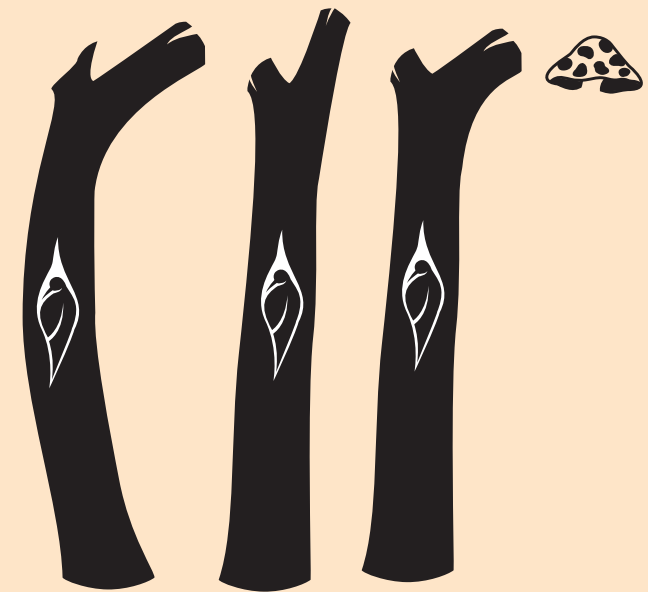


Figure 6. Font assets

THE RESPONSE

After completing the first draft (figure 7), I found that the design lost it's hand drawn appearance as it was redrawn using illustrator rather than scanning, however, I did not think of this as a setback, rather as an opportunity to embrace a clean, minimalistic aesthetic. I also felt that the design felt a bit too bland as the typeface was intended to be a solid colour. Once identifying this issue, I opted to introduce additional details such as a bird nested within the solid coloured tree stump and spots on the mushroom head with a dotted line along the stem. The choice to use these simplistic detail solutions was to address my lack of skill using Illustrator and absence of instruments to scan hand drawn details.

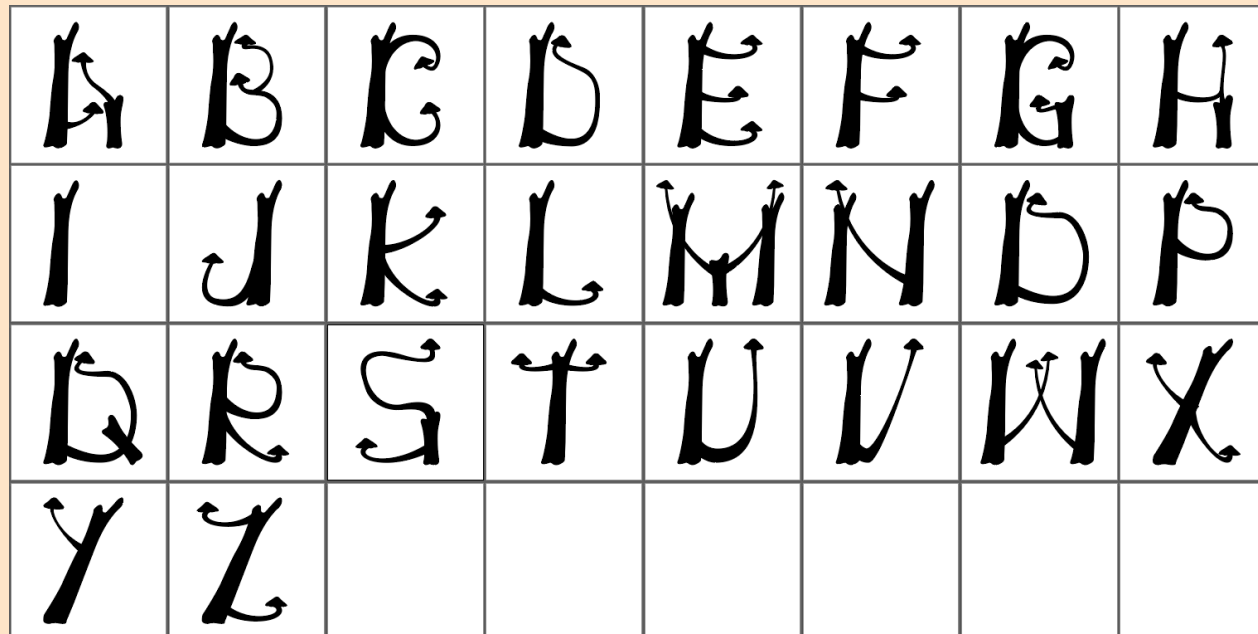


Figure 7. First draft

THE RESPONSE

DESIGN STATEMENT

The second draft of the typeface seemed more promising, yet some characters lacked a bit of dimension. To address this, I adjusted the positioning of the mushrooms to make it appear as if it were wrapping itself around the tree stump, and angling the tree stumps to make it seem more natural and preserve legibility (figure 8). After these additions, the design of the typeface seemed to pop more whilst maintaining the cartoonish look I originally desired.

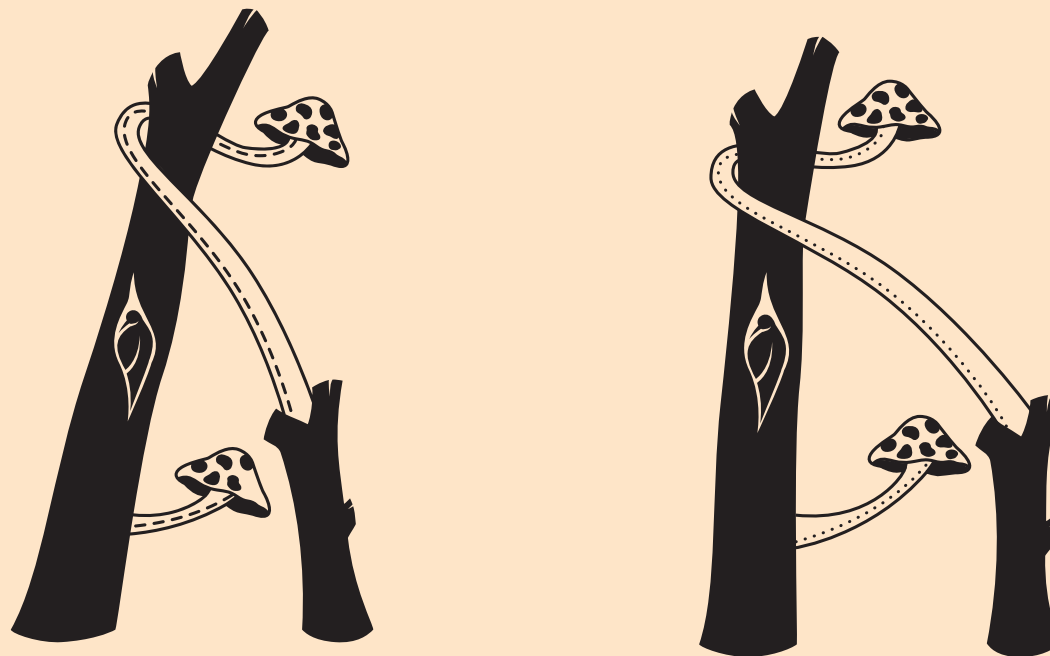


Figure 8. Example of changing angle and details

THE RESPONSE

DIGITALISATION

DESIGN STATEMENT

Once the designs were complete, I imported each character into FontForge, the font authoring program. Within this program I manipulated the spacing of each individual character tested the typeface's readability across various words and sentences. Though minor sizing spacing issues would emerge, but they were quickly resolved within FontForge.



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TYPOGRAPHIC DESIGN
DVB201

THE RESPONSE

DIGITALISATION

DESIGN STATEMENT

The inclusion of a nested bird within the hollowed tree stump (figure 9) shows the mutualistic relationship between trees and birds as they provide shelter and protection for each other. The tree offers a safe haven for the bird to nest and raise its young, while the bird would help disperse seeds and control insect populations, benefiting the tree's growth and health (Desai, 2024).



Figure 9. Nested bird in tree stump

Mushrooms and trees (figure 10) engage in a symbiotic relationship known as mycorrhizal association (Hughes, n.d.). In this relationship, fungi forms networks with the tree's roots which aids in nutrient intake, water absorption, and protects from pathogens. In return, the tree supplies the fungi with carbohydrates produced through photosynthesis (Hughes, n.d.).



Figure 10. Mushroom growing from stump

THE RESPONSE

REFLECTION

DESIGN STATEMENT

Reflecting on the design process, the challenges I encountered included transitioning from hand-drawn to digital illustration, as creating the fonts digitally caused a loss in detail in the shape of the font. However, by embracing a minimalist aesthetic and incorporating subtle details, I was able to achieve a balance between the complexity and simplicity whilst creating a visually engaging typeface.

The project underscored the importance of adaptability and creativity in design, especially when confronted with limited resources, as I did not have access to tools to properly scan images to create details unachievable by illustrator. Moreover, it reaffirmed the significance of thinking innovatively when tackling challenging themes such as 'symbiosis, drawing inspiration from fellow designers to achieve creative solutions.

REFERENCES

DESIGN STATEMENT

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