



My Design Journey



Iva Mitkova

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Lead-in

This documents incorporates a range of elements on which I built my professional portfolio in Visual Design Studio (MED 6102). Following the tasks we were given every week, I have selected the best ones in order to present a good, contextualized narrative of my work.

I decided to name it “My Design Journey” simply because I will try to engage you with the history behind my design ideas and works from the very first beginning of the process. Starting with a brief retrospective, skills audit and learning plan, followed by some examples of designers and organisations whose works inspire me, I strive to display my start, growth and development as a designer.

Afterwards, there is my manifesto which represents my own design philosophy. It is a very beneficial set of guidance for my future work and I will always strive to accomplish each of the 10 points I have came up with. Moreover, I have tried to reflect on them when creating this portfolio.

In the end, I have put some of my current work for a company rebrand, followed by an appraisal and future plans for my design development.

Retrospective

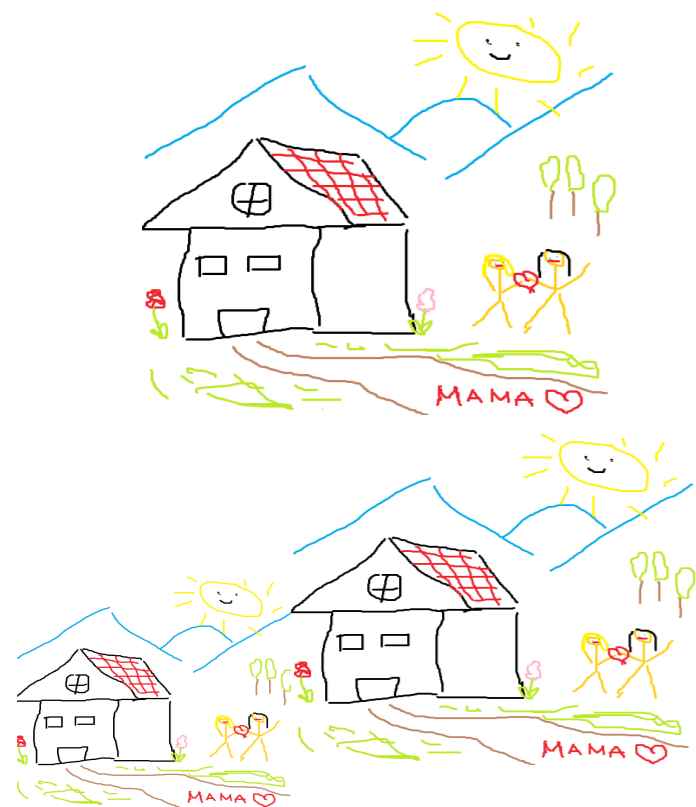
Retrospective is a compilation showing the development of an artist's work over a specific period of time in order to make general conclusions. By looking backwards I was able to track and reflect on my development and improvements of my work from the very first beginning as a child.

What I have learnt is that design is everywhere. Design is everything. But most importantly - design is a *process*. Process of getting better. Process with a balance between monotony and the designer's self-indulgence.



FIRST STEPS

Ever since I was a child I was captivated by the concept of art and design. Similar to other designers, I took my first steps in the field of graphic design in Paint. I started with the simple images of houses and trees, which are the traditional representations of the realm of home. I relished the liberating feeling of expressing my core values, which are the guiding light both in my personal life and my design career. Subsequently, my fascination took me to drawing lessons at the tender age of 10 years old. However soon after that I was forced to quit them because of financial issues. Later afterwards I had to choose whether if I wanted to start afresh with the drawing lessons or to join the volleyball team in school. And since many of my family's members have been professional volleyball players in the past, I decided to leave the drawing behind and follow the family practices and beliefs.



UNIVERSITY

To me, designers should be given the ultimate freedom to express their creative vision. This firm belief in my inner core of aesthetics and perceptions led me to university, where I willy-nilly took the route to visual design. This is the time when I rediscovered my passion in the field. I have never really taken a class similar to Visual design, Magazine Production or even slightly related to it before I came to study here. I chose the Visual Design Module in the first year because I wanted to challenge myself but I have never really known or thought how this class would help me with my specialism in PR as well. I soon came to realise that if I had the chance to go back in time and pick the modules again, I would choose Visual Design unquestionably straightaway again. Honestly, I got a lot more of this class than I really expected. Although the path was very rough at first, soon I realised that I have finally found the long-sought freedom to execute my vision upon the blank sheet documents. I was surrounded by the never-ending whirl of colours, fonts and images, which I had to curate into layouts and templates. Every time when the assignments briefs were explaining to us at class I panicked since I didn't know how to use any of the programs and moreover, I didn't have the experience that the others had. In the first year, we were assigned to come up with ideas for a business card, a CD cover, and other design products (you can see them on the left) and when I look at them now, I can definitely claim that my style has changed dramatically since then. Most of the fonts I have been using do not fit it anymore. I used to be an edgy, pink-lover (still struggling to overpower it), obsessed with details and mixing a lot of bright colours. This was my first real experience in visual design and I gained a good basis of skills in InDesign.



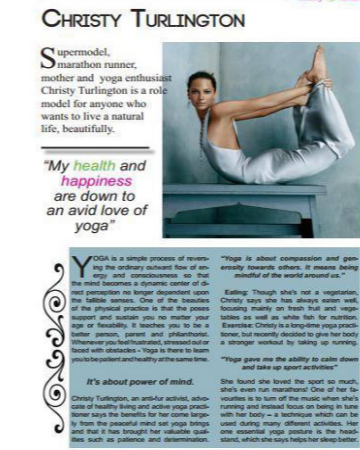
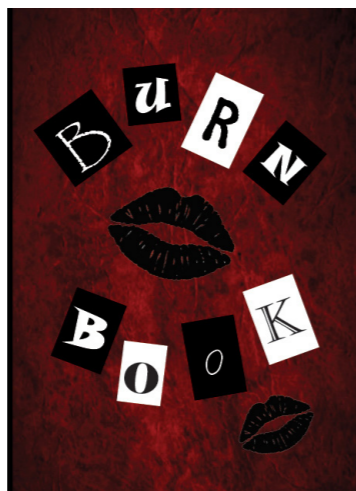
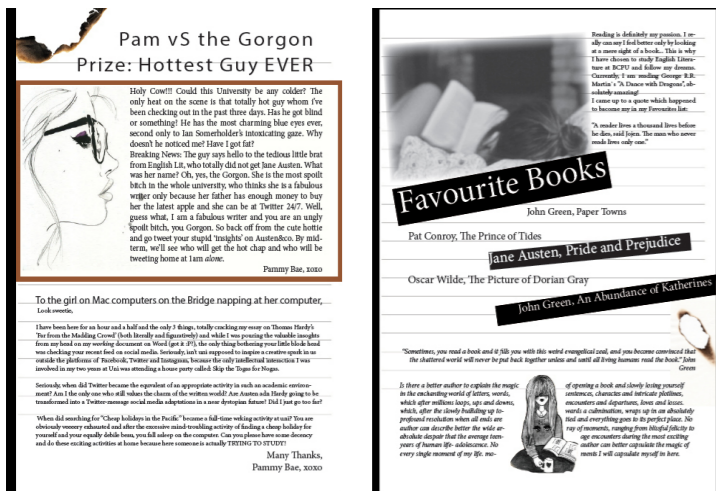
SECOND YEAR

Magazine Production (1st Semester) and New Media, New Narratives (2nd Semester) were the modules I picked up for the second year of my studies. I found myself really enjoying them because again I had the freedom of expressing myself. Whats is most importat - I began to realise that Visual Design is not just about playing with colours, fonts and pictures, but something more. A successful designer is not one who can use all software programmes infallibly, but one who is conscious of how to reach its public by creating a good design with a communication message. During the first year, after designing some covers and magazine spreads, I have developed a certain interest in editorial design and this was the right time to experiment with it. Creating a news article as a cross media piece, poster, and a 'Burn Book' in a format of a diary are some of the works that contributed to that particular areas. In addition, I came up with idea for my own magazine which I had to impement on the blank pages in a way that I could reach out my target audience. In fact, it turned out to be my favourite design piece.



First year

second year



MY FAVOURITE PIECE



The portfolio I have submitted for the Magazine Production assignment is undeniably my favourite design work from the two years of studies at university. It contains a magazine cover and 2 double page spreads and a cross media piece. I had to think of an individual, original concept for a new publication. In the beginning, because of the various market, I was thinking that coming up with the idea is going to be the hardest part of the whole process but it was not. The most challenging part was to use effective and relevant communication information in order to satisfy and reach out the target audience through appropriate layouts and style for the market.

In terms of the skills and knowledge I have gained, it was the the first time I experimented with new techniques in InDesign but still I did not feel confident to start using Photoshop or Illustrator. My enthusiasm has reflected on the design which from my perspective today is a little bit overwhelming.

Overall, by critically reflecting on my work pieces in the past I can spot the differences between my approaches now and then.

Skills Audit

Skills audit is a process which measures the proficiency of individuals and groups with the basic intent to identify their existing set of skills and knowledge in order to examine those that may be needed in future. The results from carrying out the five stage process did not really surprise me but it helped me realise that I am the most negative and sceptic person ever (I need to change that!). Moreover, it provides me with a clear snapshot of my skills base that allows me to put my focus on specific training and development needs. The benefits of conducting a skills audit are numerous and the only downfall I can think of is – not conducting it. It helped me to find out about all the knowledge and skills I have, not just those needed for the current module. Finding and understanding your limitations is the key aspect of doing this exercise. I have recognised and rated my current skills and by doing this I started working on improving the ones with the lowest scores and competency.

Existing Skills and Knowledge Identification

Behavioral skills:

In terms of behavioral skills it appears that I have a high level of competency in: both verbal and on-line communication, problem solving, teamwork, concentration, creative thinking, and research.

Technical skills:

Nowadays, technology is experiencing a constant flow of changes and new innovations which require a flexible, careful and adjustable approach. By looking at both my retrospective and skills audit, I consider myself having many technical skills, particularly on InDesign, and some, but not enough on Photoshop and Illustrator. Other, rated with 4 or 5 points are in the fields of Social Media, Video Editing and Typography. Although there are a lot of technical areas in which I have to improve myself, I strongly believe that I have the basic technical skills needed for either a Visual Designer or a PR specialist.

Future Skills and Knowledge Identification

Behavioral skills:

Time management is the leading skill that I need to improve in future. I tend to be extremely detail-oriented person which slows down my work process and causes an adrenaline rush in the ending. I am planning to start practical trainings in controlling my time. Furthermore, I have to try to become a more confident person with optimistic thinking.

Technical skills:

I always eager to learn more, to learn something useful and to grow. In future I will strive to explore different principles and software applications that all operate with design processes. From the audit I detected a concerning lack of skills and knowledge in Photoshop and Illustrator. In my future plan objectives this technical limitation will be my top priority because a good designer does not stuck in using just one or two mediums but as many as possible in order to offer the most innovative, creative and interesting work. In addition, have set an ambitious goal to expand my knowledge of typography and editorial design.

SKILLS

Inspiration

Inspiration is one of the best feelings a person can have. It opens your mind, makes your eyes wide and motivates you to cultivate your skills. One of the inspirations behind the aesthetic concept behind my portfolio is the cover of one of my favourite novels: “I Capture the Castle” by Dodie Smith. I find motifs of this book reciprocated in every aspect of my life, and I fully relate to the struggles of the main protagonist for self-expression and self-fulfillment in my work and my inter-personal relationships. My portfolio captures the essence and the cover of this book, while giving it a modern and playful spin. The wooden details in the background represent the restricting wall I faced in my previous efforts to express myself, and the floral details depict how I gradually managed to conquer the restrictions by following my core values and vision with imagination and creative flair. The cover represents how I managed to remain true to myself in a world that expects us to conform.

Everything in this world is design and art. From what you do, how you dress, what you believe in to the way you drink your coffee or how you decorate your room. A simple example of extraordinary inspiration that turned into design for me is my new room from September 2015. The minimalistic design of my wall speaks a lot about me and my life.

Over the following four pages I am displaying some of the *inspirations* behind my current design approaches that have had a great influence on me.



Design is
Inspiration

An Object:

"12 Shoes for 12 Lovers"



Sebastian Errazuriz

"Every single thing that I try to do, it's to invite people to get out of their restrictions."



As an inspiring object I have chosen Sebastian Errazuriz's "12 Shoes for 12 Lovers", inspired by former lovers, joining a long line of artists who strive to make sense of their relationships in a unique, creative 3D printed shoe. I find it as an intriguing piece of product design because of its creativity, complexity and originality, as well as the ideas behind it. Sebastian Errazuriz is a prolific Chilean-born, New York-based designer who is constantly wandering around the worlds of design and fine art. It was very difficult for me to choose one of his works because I am obsessed with everything he does. Many of his unique works explores themes of life and death and are definitely worth seeing. ("Porcupine Cabinet", "Gun chairs", "Body of Work" – in collaboration with Ross Bleckner, "Kaleidoscope") He designed 12 shoes for 12 types of former lovers for his MakerBot Replicator 2X Experimental 3D Printer. After sanding, priming and painting them, he brought them to Miami for the international art fair - Art Basel where the shoes generated 35 million hits. Lady Gaga is one example of a celebrity who had a particular interest in the product. Errazuriz's work reflects on the recollection of his personal relationships that influences the creation shoe sculptures. Every shoe has a name and was accompanied with a photo with a story explanation or a muse behind the design idea. I am impressed of how his design incorporates complex, personal relationships ideas that have always existed in a natural, simple and obvious way. The shoes tie together with bigger parts of a narrative, trying to bring light to some inner, human issues. Also, thinking about the market, shoes have potential of vast quantities and women's weaknesses. In conclusion, I am exceptionally touched by "12 Shoes for 12 Lovers" because I believe Errazuriz succeeded in coming up with a creative, unique idea, reaching out the audience and the market by communicating effectively his message and most importantly – he created an inspiring object design. I will endeavour to take inspiration from his approaches and the way he manages to turn something complex into a simple and incredible design.





Alessandro Pautasso

Ever since I caught my first glimpse of Alessandro Pautasso's work, I became a huge admirer of his art. He is also known as Kaneda and is famous for his incredible photography, graphic design and illustrations. Based in Turin, Italy, the artist is specialised in vector art and depicts famous faces such as Marilyn Monroe, Lionel Messi and other football players, Cara Delevigne, Audrey Hepburn, etc.

Originality, fresh insight and colour wheel. Those are the aspects of his works that I appreciate the most. For me, it is always a pleasure to find a work with blends of so many bright colours and details that looks so pure, clear and noticeable. Pautasso strives to colourfully embellish his images and therefore the level of detail that goes into his creations is beyond the scope of every art and design creations I have seen so far.

Kaneda's art has been a great inspiration for me. In terms of techniques and programmes for creating his illustrations, he uses only a graphic tablet (Wacom Intuos3 or Wacom Bamboo) and draws his curls with the pencil tool of Adobe Illustrator. He influenced on me by pushing me to the desire of exploring Illustrator and Photoshop at a higher level. All of his portraits are extraordinary and I find something unique about them. I cannot even express the feeling they give me, it should be somewhere between romance, elegance and freshness. This is an admirable, detailed and striking piece of art that I will strive to learn from in future.



The chase



"We are not designers, or writers, or advertisers, or brand strategists but all of these and more."

An example of organisation that inspires me is 'The Chase'. It is a UK graphic design and branding consultancy with offices in Manchester, London, and Preston. Since its establishment in 1986 by Ben Casey and Lionel Hatch, with a combined staff of 46, the agency has earned an outstanding reputation for excellent understanding of brands, creativity and strategic thinking. I was strongly touched by their simple yet extraordinary philosophy, based on a tale:

There was an old Indian craftsman who carved beautiful little elephants from unpromising blocks of timber. Asked how he did it, he simply replied:
"I just cut away the wood that doesn't look like an elephant."

I was strongly touched by their simple yet extraordinary philosophy, based on a story. The Chase inspires me because of the essence of their work. Everything they do is just as simple and enthralling as their philosophy. And simple does not mean easy. Their talent of great thinkers, full of creative ideas, can be easily noticed in their works. Driven by my passion for typography, I am extremely moved by their posters, calendars, book covers and stationery products which all possess the creative spark and aesthetic appeal which are a must for every designer. As their core principle is "bringing communication to life", I admire their approach to understanding their clients by classifying them as different animals. By exploring their design philosophy, strategies and projects I am becoming more certain in the understanding of the business and the requisite skills I must have if pursuing a design career. Thinking about my future, I strive to become capable of expressing my ideas and concepts in a clear, engaging and controversial way as The Chase does.

Manifesto

Living in a dynamic society with the constant technological changes and media influence, our lives are becoming more and more depended on those movements and sometimes we inadvertently forget or lose our personalities. By creating my own manifesto, I managed to prioritise the issues that matter most to me and I have to bring my attention to. For my project it was important to me not only to come up with some intentions and views but I strove to follow them in order to produce profound work with recognisable, personal and clear style. Having looked at my retrospective and skills audit I was able to clearly identify my set of skills and approaches to my work. Moreover, I distinguished my weaknesses and deficiencies in order to focus on improving them.

1. Less is More

A good designer creates work pieces in an accessible, simple and straightforward style. A good designer does not use a lot, where a little is pretty enough. Do not cram your design, beauty lies in the simplicity.



2. Experiment

A good designer does not settle down for a conventional design, but experiment with different directions, possibilities and techniques. Utilise your skills in Photoshop and Illustrator. Get out of your comfort zone!



3. Open your eyes

A good designer does not start from scratch. They build on what others have created. There is a lot to learn from the others. Open your eyes - look around you, listen, observe, find inspiration and get better.



4. Check the time

A good designer does not spend too much time worrying which font is the right one. Typography is important, but a designer should not sacrifice the rest of the design for discovering the perfect font. Be time efficient!



5. Do not fear change

A good designer is not afraid to erase everything and start all over again. If you are not happy with the design, change it. Strive for the best results.



6. Do not push creativity

A good designer “do not push the river; it flows by itself.” (Chinese proverb) When you feel stuck, go home, rest, refresh and start again.



7. Never fear failure

A good designer always learns from his/her mistakes and knows that failure is a vital ingredient to success.



8. Avoid bright colours

A good designer is not overwhelming his/her design with a lot of different, bright colours. A good designer needs to be conscious when it comes to the colour choice. Make appropriate combinations and let them speak instead of you.



9. Be yourself

A good designer is you. Always believe in yourself and do not let others have an influence on your design if you do not 100% agree it. Write the book you want to read and create the design you love. Do not be afraid to express yourself.



10. Create design

you are proud of

A good designer never lets anyone discourage them from their work. It is special and unique, just as you.

Current Work

Company rebranding

By having critically looked at my retrospective, identifying the skills and knowledge I acquire, focusing on what inspires me and shapes my understanding of good design I was able to come up with an own manifesto that follows a set of essential guidelines for my future development. For this part of the assignment I decided to do a company rebrand. The client I chose is a small US-based flowers shop called “Sunshine and Clover”. It is the first time I am doing a company rebranding which was both challenging and beneficial experience for me. I learnt a lot of essential things from the research I conducted which will be useful for me in the future. In addition, it was the first time I am creating design for an existing client which is why I strove to engage myself a lot with the nature of the company and come up with an appropriate piece of design to suit their philosophy.

What this experience taught me?

With the very first glance at their logo I knew that this is the best company for me to choose to rebrand because it has a huge impact on my personality. The logo represents my design approaches during the beginning of my studies. I used to have the unshakable obsession of using a number of bright colours at one place. When I looked at my previous works, the constant usage of different, overwhelming colour palettes, came to my attention. Consequently, for this project I strove to use clean and consistent design style.

The most valuable aspect out of this experience is that I escaped from my comfort zone in InDesign and developed more skills and knowledge about Adobe Photoshop.

In addition, I have also gained knowledge of how to come up with different design ideas that can reach out the target public by communicating messages in a right, effective way.

Overall, I am pleased with the results and I will definitely enjoy creating more company rebrandings.



Some work I did not include



An Appraisal of my Work

My design journey was one of the most challenging processes I have faced during my studies at Birmingham City University. Going through Visual Design and Magazine Production to Visual Design Studio I have successfully completed a considerable amount of individual and group tasks which enlightened me what the world of a contemporary designer actually is. Not only have I gained practical design skills but also I have become more confident in myself and my opinion. If there was a special award for the most negative, pessimistic or doubtful student during the first and second year, I would have definitely won it. But now, after looking back at my retrospective and both identifying and analysing my strengths, weaknesses and opportunities, I can definitely say that I have grown a lot.

The final year project was a valuable yet challenging experience for me. The document incorporates the features of magazine design that I am really passionate about since the second year of university. I enjoyed putting different pieces together in a big consistent document related to my development. For the biggest project, I decided to do a company rebrand not only because of my huge interest in typography but also because it is strongly related to my specialism- Public Relations as well. Rebranding is a crucial part for maintaining a good image and reputation of a certain company where the nature of PR lies. I realised that it is extremely important to gain strong understanding of the brand identity in order to do an effective rebranding and to create a design that will fit their target audience. As we live in a world where people are far more influenced by what they see rather than what they read or hear, a connection between PR and visual design is where the success lies. The use of digital media is of an extremely huge importance to the PR discipline in a way that the best way of disturbing a message to a target audience is by applying visualisation. I have always been fascinated with the potential power of visual communication and this year I had the great opportunity to expand my experience in it. It was the first time I was creating a design for a real company which is why I conducted a solid amount of research around it. The client I chose is a small US-based flowers shop called 'Sunshine and Clover'. Choosing this particular company had a meaningful impact on me because its logo reminds me of my work approaches during the first year of my studies when I had the unshakeable obsession of using a lot of unsuitable bright colours for my design. By rebranding it and applying my cultivated design skills, I was able to spot my personal and professional development and became more confident in myself.

What helped me achieving this is creating and following my own manifesto:

In a nutshell, looking at the ten principles I have set to myself, I am certain that I adhered to all of them. I strove for simple, loose and elegant work. I got out of my comfort zone and experimented with Photoshop for the whole rebrand. I learned from the others and let my design inspiration lead me. I improved my typography skills, again in Photoshop. I managed my time correctly and I was not afraid to erase everything and start it all over again 3 times. Avoiding bright colours was very difficult task for me but since I was doing a rebranding of a flowers company I believe it was appropriate to create a floral, beautiful, modern, timeless logo with some girly colours. Last but not least, I am pleased to say that I invested so much effort in a work that I am very proud of.

Generally, what I have learned from the module is that if you are ambitious enough and have a flair for the creative, you have everything you need to be a good designer. It is so much more than posters, websites, and magazines. Design is a way of thinking and communicating. I was also able to uncover my potential and I came to realise that I love typography and translating concepts into a visual form.

My inspiration is still evolving.

One of my biggest strengths is the desire to get better. I am trying to soak up new tactics, approaches and ways of thinking from everywhere and everyone.

Even though I always feel the pressure to conform to societal norms, my design has always been first and foremost to stay true to myself and my personal values and beliefs. My manifesto is a celebration of individuality and artistic freedom; it is the ultimate proclamation of keeping my personality intact in an ever-changing world.

I want every single one of my creations to bear my personal stamp and to be an artefact of my professional abilities and my vision. This is a recurrent motive in my design products, which I strive to preserve in my practice in the future. There are so many transferable things from here and so many that need to be improved. I will strive to cultivate my skills in InDesign, Illustrator and Photoshop and take them into a professional context. Also I am eager to engage myself more with polyart and graphic design as well as to continue experimenting with typography. So where am I? I am a lot of steps further than the beginning but there is so much more to learn and run through. I will focus to practice and polish my qualities and to overcome my weaknesses, in order to continue to execute products that adhere to my personal vision.

To sum up, I found what I am passionate about and what I love to do so from now on I will strive to be more persistent, to stay curious and to challenge myself. And of course to have fun!

Brand Me

Building a distinctive, recognizable and unique personal brand is essential for every individual in the business sphere. Not only it opens professional opportunities but it also separates you from the others by giving you special meaning and value.

To be honest, after gaining experience in rebranding an existing company for my project, I thought branding me will be quite an easy and straightforward task but it did not seem to be like that. I wanted to show and say so many things but this is not what my manifesto suggested me. Implementing the 'Less is more' concept I strove for a simple and concise, still meaningful, personal branding.

My logo shows the strong appreciation and passion I have for typography. By playing with it and putting an impact on the first initials of my name, the result was IM, which questioned me "Who am I really"? or at least who I wanted to be in the eyes of the public. I chose to be a designer and strove to communicate this through my logo design. For this purpose, colour was an important consideration and I feel it was the best choice to create the main features - "I, M and Designer" (+adding a single quotation mark) in a different colour in order to stand out and attract the attention. I have set three colour swatches which can be used on different applications. Not only have I added both circular and hexagonal shapes around it for becoming more visually pleasing but also because I believe in their symbols meaning - protection and unity as well as equality, balance, integration respectively.

Although the concept of my branding is quite simple, I believe it speaks the message I wanted to manifest. It is neither my first nor my last logo design, but what I can say without a feeling of doubt is that I have improved my skills from my first attempt and I will continue to challenge my personal and professional development after graduating university.



Iva' Mitkova
Designer



Iva' M



