

NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF ART, DESIGN & MEDIA



**VISUAL IDENTITY FOR THE ARTS AND CULTURE SECTOR:  
THE SINGAPORE BIENNALE FROM 2006 TO 2016 AS A CASE STUDY**

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## Statement of Originality

I certify that all work submitted for this thesis is my original work. I declare that no other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement. Except where it is clearly stated that I have used some of this material elsewhere, this work has not been presented by me for assessment in any other institution or University. I certify that the data collected for this project are authentic and the investigations were conducted in accordance with the ethics policies and integrity standards of Nanyang Technological University and that the research data are presented honestly and without prejudice.

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## Summary

This thesis builds upon recent speculative discussions around the theoretical and practical frameworks for agencies that design for the arts and culture sector. Specifically, I focus on the approaches to Visual Identity for Art Biennales through a case study of the first five editions of the Singapore Biennale from 2006 to 2016.

The research is structured through the review of historical, procedural and semantic notions to Visual Identity and considering the conception of the Singapore Biennale in relation to other local and international examples. This context sets the backdrop to hone in on the developmental process and theoretical positions to Visual Identity and Art Biennales to elucidate and elaborate on the capabilities and responsibilities of designers.

The critical examination of visual identities unfolds by first establishing typologies in Visual Identity based upon factors such as duration and overall cohesiveness of its applications. After-which, I utilised Steven Skagg's design-centric semiotic analysis as a method of substantiating on the various types of visual identities. Lastly, I conducted in-depth interviews with design agencies involved with the editions of Singapore Biennale. Their first-hand accounts not only helps to demystify the procedures but also allow for affinities and divergent opinions to be mapped and documented in the study.

By the comparison of visual attributes and values, I reflect on the findings from my methods in order to have demonstrative grounds to distinguish a specialisation through Cultural Identity. Additionally, I would assess the development process between the curatorial team and design agency to the scope of audiences and the State. Lastly, I address the long-term concerns of visual identities for Art Biennales and broadly discuss its model as a situated-research of the Singapore Biennale in relation to Art Biennales at large.

In summary, I would establish what my research findings will mean to design agencies and organising committees working on the identity for Art Biennales and exhibitions

alike. I would also cover limitations of my angle and propose further explorations and areas for future developments that would forward what has been established.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The Phenomena: Visual Identity Design in Art

Visual Identity is a perceptual form of design. Through strategy and creative use of visible elements such as typography, colour, images and form are often used to influence how we respond to things. Visual identities are prevalent across interfaces in cities around the world and are often encountered through designed applications across spatial, web, digital and print media.

Within arts and cultural contexts, design agencies are employed by institutions to develop unique Visual Identities for exhibitions and other cultural projects. For exhibitions and other cultural projects, the Visual Identity also serves as ways of informing, consolidating and reifying the very context and thematic that are specific to the project. The design of it operates through distinct visual cues that the designer interprets from the creative brief. As designed outcomes, Visual Identity broadly serves to compel feelings, identify information or distinguish things apart for its consumers and viewers. For example, an ornate and expressive visual on an exhibition sign may inform the provenance of the cultural artefacts on display or the geometric shapes on a museum poster may recall key tenets of the exhibition's premise.

With regards to the specificity and even novelty of a designer's approach towards visual identities for arts and cultural contexts. In *The Steamroller of Branding* in Eye Magazine, design critic Nick Bell also raises the possibility of a need for specialisation:

“Why don't graphic designers, as part of their armoury of approaches, have something called 'cultural identity'? Whereas corporate identity can be re-invented, cultural identity is the way you are, whether you like it or not. And the challenge to the communication managers of the art galleries, and graphic designers with whom they consult, is how to build identities while telling the stories of their collections (including what might initially appear 'unnerving'), instead of proffering arbitrary atmospheres.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nick Bell is an exhibition designer and design critic, who penned the referenced *The Steamroller of Branding*, in Eye international graphic design review journal. [www.eyemagazine.com/feature/article/the-steamroller-of-branding-text-in-full](http://www.eyemagazine.com/feature/article/the-steamroller-of-branding-text-in-full)

Bell's writing argues for the possibility of distinguishing the design work done for cultural institutions as a separate field of "cultural identity". In doing so, he also suggests that the approaches and processes underlying "cultural identity" work are notably different from "corporate identity" because they require sensitivity to "build identities while telling the stories of their collections." In other words, cultural identity requires specific attention and finesse to accommodate both the designer's creative vision and the curatorial vision and narratives. In Bell's opinion, this complexity is unconventionally what distinguishes the visual identities for arts and cultural contexts.

The nuanced approach demanded of cultural identity is also something that this paper tangentially demystifies through the context of the Singapore Biennale. It is also an evaluation of the visual identities alongside interviews with various design practitioners who have developed them. Bell is also not alone in his sentiment that "cultural identity" should be distinguished as its own field of specialisation. Other design critics and practitioners that I will introduce later in my literature review have also similarly endorsed and called for a dedicated way to examine visual identities designed for the Arts and Culture sector<sup>2</sup> and its varied approaches.

I define my focus on design agencies as businesses focused on Visual Communication. It usually comprises of a team of graphic designers that is led by an expertise in implementing a combination of values, strategy and design tailored to their clients' needs.

I contextualise the Arts and Culture sector in Singapore as a branch of the nation's economy that the Singapore government generally frameworks and funds. The sector is aspirational in nature, where exhibitions such as the Singapore Biennale is puts Singapore on the global map as a cultural hub that express who we are as a people<sup>3</sup>. To Singaporeans, the same vibrancy of arts and culture seeks to foster rootedness in its shared multicultural legacy.

Visual Identity and its value in the presentation of arts and culture context have become a topic for debate. I would be centring the investigation on Art

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<sup>2</sup>I refer to the arts and culture sector as a distinct branch of a nation's economy. For the Arts aspect, it is defined as the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power. Some common art endeavors include painting, sculpture, installation, film and dance. On the Cultural aspect of the sector, it refers to the ideas, customs, material objects and social behaviour of a particular society in the course of generations.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Culture, Community, and Youth, Arts & Culture: An expression of our nation. How this intersects the Singapore Biennale's positioning and its design can be found in page 42. [www.mccy.gov.sg/sector/arts-and-heritage](http://www.mccy.gov.sg/sector/arts-and-heritage)

Biennales—large-scale contemporary art exhibitions that are exemplary to the discourse since each edition is unique. This thesis builds upon Singapore’s context in relation to recent discussions around the theoretical and practical frameworks for agencies that design in the Arts and Culture sector today, using the Singapore Biennale as the most notable example.

## 1.2 Situating Research in the context of the Singapore Biennale

Art Biennales<sup>4</sup> are the oldest and most widely-modelled large-scale format of exhibiting art. It is an art exhibition that is presented bi-annually to reflect on contemporaneity through artistic forms (Lee 2012). The scale of the exhibition is city-wide. Often, “alternative” spaces beyond gallery and museum spaces are utilised for durational art or site-specific intervention thus allowing for the art event to be situated within diverse pockets of the host city and for the biennale to better respond and represent the host city (Block, R. 2006). Each edition of an Art Biennale is usually distinguished by its thematic curatorial messaging. Often broad and perennial, these themes are designed to prompt speculative reimagining and critical viewpoints through artistic expression (Neuendorf 2016). These themes would also come to inform the creative brief<sup>5</sup> delivered to the designer and the approach taken to conceptualise a Visual Identity.

Art Biennales have become a “trend” in major cities around the world in the 21st century, particularly in Asia (Lee 2012, Bauer and Hou, 2013). The popularity of Art Biennales among major cities around the world can also be attributed to the interest of international relations. It seeks to cater and usher transnational audiences and to coningle different art communities. The intention is to achieve the appeal of soft power through cultural currency and repute to its host city.

For a paper that examines Visual Identity for arts and cultural contexts, an Art Biennale’s thematic and cyclical change across different editions provides a compelling point for the discussion about diverse approaches employed by different

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<sup>4</sup> I would be further elaborating on the unique characteristics of Art Biennales in chapter 2.3 Positions and characteristics of Art Biennales.

<sup>5</sup> The creative brief often contains a cover letter, requirement specifications, the curatorial premise or theme and the conditions of contract. These documents instruct what is required for the job determined by the organising committee, outlining the edition’s objectives, as well as the responsibilities and targets of the agency engaged.

designers. The Singapore Biennale was selected as the focused case study because it is a demonstrative and recent example of the growing popularity of Art Biennales by major Asian cities around the world.

In the case of the first Singapore Biennale, the exhibition event is also strategically scheduled to coincide with the International Monetary Fund and Formula One Grand Prix Events in 2006. On a policy level, the inaugural Singapore Biennale follows the nation's capital strategy under the *Renaissance City Plan* spearheaded by the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts. The ministry sought to enliven the city's image with an art exhibition that affixes "a more appealing dimension to its reputation" particularly through the implementation of a world-class arts and culture" that met international standards (Tang 2007). This exhibition series is distinctly part of the state-wide initiative and aim to invest in the arts for the purposes of designing Singapore as a vibrant cultural capital and the Renaissance City Plan's citation of other lively arts cities such as Italy, Paris, Hong Kong and New York further accounts for the state's efforts in funding and developing the Singapore Biennale consistently. Since its first edition, Singapore Biennale is held in Singapore once every two years.

We can observe in fig. 1 below, many components that differ across the five editions of the Singapore Biennale.

Fig. 1 General Data & Characteristics of the Singapore Biennale 2006 to 2016					
Edition Titles	Singapore Biennale 2006: <i>Belief</i>	Singapore Biennale 2008: <i>Wonder</i>	Singapore Biennale 2011: <i>Open House</i>	Singapore Biennale 2013: <i>If the World Changed</i>	Singapore Biennale 2016: <i>An Atlas of Mirrors</i>
Masthead or Theme Logo					
Curatorial Director*	Fumio Nanjo (JP)	Fumio Nanjo (JP)	Matthew Ngui (SG/AU)	Tan Boon Hui (SG)	Susie Lingham (SG)
Curators*	Roger McDonald (JP) Sharmini Pereira (LK/UK) Eugene Tan (SG)	Josefina Cruz (PH/SG) Matthew Ngui (SG)	Russell Storer (AU) Trevor Smith (AU)	27 curators. "Collaborative curatorial structure"	Suman Gopinath (IN) Nur Hanim Khairuddin (MY) Michael Lee, (SG) Xiang Liping (CN)

Artists/ Collectives	95	68	63	82	63
Design Agency	WORK Pte Ltd (SG)	UP BrandBuzz (SG)	GOTO DESIGN (NY)	FFurious (SG)	Couple (SG)
Organiser	National Arts Council National Heritage Board	National Arts Council National Heritage Board	Singapore Art Museum	Singapore Art Museum	Singapore Art Museum(Independ ent)
Commissio ning Agency			National Arts Council	National Arts Council	National Arts Council
Footfall Reception	883,000 visitors	505,200 visitors	912,897 visitors	560,349 visitors	614,000 visitors

Fig 1 General Data & Characteristics of the Singapore Biennale 2006 to 2016. Footfall data taken from NLB Infopedia. Siew Kim, L., & Lee Kim, G. (2017). Singapore Biennale. Singapore infopedia.

From the get-go, the different titles are telling of the concerns that each edition adopted. The curatorial messagings, as suggested through the titles, often directly correspond to the core themes and subject matters. For instance, the SB2006: *Belief* looked at examining and reflecting the associations between art and beliefs. Following in the same succinct articulation of a theme, the SB2008: *Wonder* sought to reexamine conventions and perceptions. The visually worded SB2016: *An Atlas of Mirrors* references tools of knowledge suggesting a curatorial focus on complexities, new directions and discoveries of the region. Its ambiguous wording is also arguably the most indirect of all the editions and requires further contextualisation. Curatorial messagings are not always thematised. An example would be SB2013: *If the World Changed*, where the title speculate on alternative realities and possibilities, looking into the now and the future that we hope to live in. Similarly, the SB2011: *Open House*, like its name suggests, is an opening of conversations about the confines of host and guest, public and private.

Every edition outside of the first two led by Fumio Nanjo were directed by different lead curators that formed different organising committees which vary in headcount. SB2013: *If the World Changed* had almost ten times the amount of curators involved. Looking into the situation of the organiser and commissioning agency, the Singapore Biennale has also exchanged a few institutional hands. It started from a fully government-operated project organised and commissioned by the National Arts

Council and the National Heritage Board for the first two editions. In the last three editions, it is organised by the Singapore Art Museum and commissioned by the National Arts Council. The 2016 edition, still under the mandate of Singapore Art Museum, is organised by a privatised independent Art Museum.

Looking into the visual identities across editions in fig. 1, there are some visual commonalities in the 2006 and 2008 render of the word “Singapore Biennale”. However the key visuals and footfall count have been vastly different across all editions with no clear trend or pattern. Additionally, we can also assess the unique masthead for each edition of the Singapore Biennale differs just as the team and theme changes across every edition. This also suggests that every edition of the Singapore Biennale has been developed uniquely with difference and isolation from the preceding version. No two editions have been organised, structured and designed similarly in a similar way so far.

As a multi-million dollar, large-scale and international contemporary art exhibition, Singapore Biennale has consistently undergone organisational and perceptual changes. The project also have to contend with high stakes from the investment and visibility on a global level, and not only on a local and regional platform<sup>6</sup>.

The thesis would provide insights to intentions and outcomes that will be useful to reflect on, as well as to the institutional structures and collaborative processes of the different teams. The plurality of visual approaches undertaken by different designers across the editions of the Singapore Biennale also makes it a rich and apt case studies source. As such, I would use Singapore Biennale as a demonstrative study to analyse different local and international notions of Visual Identity in close consideration with organisational structures and the history behind this specific format of cultural production and exhibition.

### 1.3 Research Questions, Aims & Objectives

This thesis seeks to elucidate and elaborate onto the design agency’s capabilities and responsibilities for the objectives of the Singapore Biennale. This is done with reference to certain theoretical notions and terminologies that have prevailed in the

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<sup>6</sup> This would be further described in the topic of Creative Briefs in chapter 2.2.

production and evaluation of visual identities. In doing so, it also has to discern a functional and nuanced framework to critically assess and account for the efficacy or import of visual identities today. The articulation of such a framework would also prove useful in future efforts and discussions which involve the objective, interpretation and design outcomes of biennales. This eventually helps substantiate the role and significance of design.

Coming from a design background and also working within the greater arts and cultural sector, my research objectives also align with my own interests as a designer who values coherence and excellence in design. Hence, my research angle also proposes and investigates theoretical frameworks that help to categorise and measure design in a productive way. The familiarity of the Singapore Biennale, as a local exhibition event, also allows access into the Visual Identity material for various editions.

My research looks at both art exhibitions and design as one topic of study — a holistic undertaking where I equate its developmental process together with the designed outcomes. It's primary research attempts to clarify aspects of contemporary design practice and processes in the 21st century, making a case for the role of design in large-scale arts projects like biennales. Establishing whether there are theoretical and practical frameworks to approach and analyse visual identities for Art Biennales, my line of enquiry opens the topic to further questions across three broad categories:

Contextual and procedural insights:

- Who are the people involved in the development of Visual Identity of the Singapore Biennale?
- How are they responsible for the outcome of the first five editions of the Singapore Biennale?
- What encompasses the Singapore Biennale and what entails the scope of its design?
- How is Singapore Biennale's Visual Identity different from more commonplace definitions of Visual Identity?
- How do we structure and measure different designs?
- Are there types of approaches, and is there a way to describe and compare design in a useful manner?

Developing the long-term framework to Visual Identity:

- Does every edition start from scratch?
- How do design approaches affect the Singapore Biennale as a single edition and as a series? Is there an attempt at visually branding the Biennale as a “series”?
- Should there be a long-term angle to the Visual Identity design of the Singapore Biennale?
- What are the implications of doing so?

Addressing the situated-research for the Singapore Biennale in relation to Art Biennales at large:

- How can my research on the Singapore Biennale be used?
- How do we contextualise approaches of other Art Biennales around the world?

This contextualised study would bring to light design’s role, re-equip the designer-stakeholder dynamic, provide useful vocabulary in developing and evaluating appropriate strategies for designing similar projects.

#### 1.4 Overview and Structure of this Research

My research begins with reviewing literature. This chapter is structured through the assessment of historical, procedural and semantic notions to Visual Identity and conception of the Singapore Biennale in relation to other local and international examples. This is employed through the comparison, characterisation and classification of capabilities and responsibilities of designers.

For Visual Identity, my review is a comparison of definitions by academics and critics who write about designing identities. I would review the general procedures in developing Visual Identity, covering a design practitioner’s developmental phase and procedures. This allows me to identify the structural procedures and where design is developed to influence the outcome. I will be investigating how we can contextualise descriptors in art and cultural contexts. I would also review the general procedure in developing Visual Identity. I would establish a key focus of the study that covers a design practitioner’s developmental phase and procedures. The focus allow me to

identify the structural procedures and where design is developed to influence the outcome.

For Art Biennales, I would address what it fundamentally is for, as well as reflecting on how this affects the procedures and approach of a large scale international art exhibition. I would also look at concerns in looking at Art Biennales as a single edition and multi-edition recurring exhibition. I would be investigating the history of large art exhibitions in Singapore and how Visual Identity is utilised for them. I would look into Singapore's historical and contextual case. The research looks into the large international art exhibitions predating the Singapore Biennale. This expands on how they are run and how they evolved through the years, contributing to the cultural and organisational climate for Singapore's Art Biennale.

Following the framework, the research investigates using methods that consider the developmental process of Visual Identity as well as its outcomes. It begins with the proposition of Visual Identity Types by sorting Visual Identity applications archived from the five Singapore Biennale editions. My three methods do not coalesce but they are to be cross-referenced, substantiating the relationship between process and outcomes.

My first set of research methods are the Typological Analysis Methods. The first will be discussing the phases of Visual Identity across different durational parts of the Singapore Biennale. The second method would be discussing is the Types of Visual Identity by cohesiveness.

My next set of methods introduces two methods. This is based on Steven Skaggs' semiotic analysis for design developed to interpret qualities of visual identities across the first five editions of the Singapore Biennale from 2006 – 2016. The first method is the Semantic Profiling of Visual Identity. The second method is the Functional Matrix for assessing Visual Identity.

My last method is the conducting of in-depth type of interviews. My third method of qualitative interviews helps link all my methods together. These in-depth type of

interviews with designers are done by hearing about how design agencies conceptualise visual identity and its role in the structural and procedural differentiation for art exhibitions. In typologizing and profiling design applications via semiotic study, the three methods help me to make comparisons between process and outcomes. Along with addressing the criticisms, theoretical frameworks and contexts established in my review, my methods serve to draw perspectives on how the premise determines how an identity plays out and the collaborative process for the Singapore Biennale from 2006 to 2016.

My conclusion summarises the findings and insights achieved from the methods used in the study. Specifically, I round up what these methods have accomplished in learning about visual identity for the Singapore Biennale. With that, I would establish what the research findings will mean to designers, curators and organisers working on the identity for Art Biennales and exhibitions alike. This chapter also covers limitations of my angle into the study. In doing so, I would propose my further explorations as well as areas for future developments into Visual Identity research that would forward what has been learnt. I would also provide an informed commentary of issues that inspired the paper, and make conclusive remarks on what is better known.

## 2 Review of Literature

Overall, my review is structured in providing a more detailed backdrop to the focus of this research. This covers the definitions and issues around practice of Visual Identity and conception of the Singapore Biennale.

This chapter covers relevant literature on Visual Identity by first assessing the theoretical positions and definitions of Visual Identity design, identifying practice-based procedures and current approaches. These would establish my theoretical framework as well as reveal the current conditions of Visual Identity practice.

Following that, I would be investigating the theoretical positions and characteristics of Art Biennales that define its popularity and influence in the presentation of Art

today. I would then look into the historical survey of Art Biennales from its early conception to what we know of today. The history would then be considered in the specificity of Singapore, starting with the earliest Art Festivals from the 1960s to the five case studies of the Singapore Biennale from 2006 to 2016. These would establish the unique conditions for the Singapore Biennale and provides comparative material to juxtapose in my discussion.

## 2.1 Theoretical Positions and Definitions of Visual Identity

This chapter is a collation of definitions to establish the interpretation of Visual Identity design by synthesising the backdrop to how it is understood.

Herbert Simon, an American Psychologist who founded design thinking, describes design as one that “[devises] courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones” across different areas (Simon 1996). This process of design acts on the needs of different human needs to build the environment they need. Specifically for Visual Identity, design is a perceptual form of design. Graphic designers manipulate visible elements such as its typography, colour, images and form on the interface of a business. Through strategy and creative use of these visible elements, the outcome would include applications such as the logo mark, spatial design, stationery, web and print design, marketing and other visual communication.

In the corporate commercial field, Visual Identity is defined as a perceptual form of design developed to compel consumers “by building familiarity and recognition” (Williams 2009, Humberstone 2015). Design Consultant, Alina Wheeler<sup>7</sup> characterises Visual Identity with an “authoritative presence”, taking on a direct role in attracting and coercing. It is a visual manifestation translated for broader consumer interests to “fuel recognition, amplify differentiation and make big ideas and meanings accessible”(Wheeler 2009).

Eliciting recognition and attention is a crucial function of Visual Identity. Influencing consumer’s perception through design is critical in engendering certain impressions

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<sup>7</sup> Alina Wheeler is a Design consultant and author of the referenced comprehensive identity guide, *Designing Brand Identity*.

or establishing a relationship with the consumer. Roland Barthes provides an interesting counterpoint, by describing this manipulation of perception as “myth-making”, an artificial system perceived as a natural component to its receivers (Barthes and Lavers 1993).

Designer Kelvin Lo empathises design as a deceitful interface that “softens the edges of capitalism”. Identity design “operates on both sides of the production and consumption cycle” taking a mediatory responsibility that serves an essential and primary function of communication to consumers (Lo 2016). As the consumer makes sense of identity, the identity has to make cents as well. The objective of designing Visual Identity would align to the organising intentions that often require the “improvement of the fortunes” of a business (Hughes 2015, Hyland 2016). Hence, the general definition of Visual Identity would still fundamentally cater to familiarity, considering its commercial<sup>8</sup> roots — which are to build acquaintance and recognition to compel the audience to buy tickets first. In relation to economic interests of the Arts and Culture Sector, the lack of consistency in its presentation across the editions of the Singapore Biennale in presentation opposes brand-making commercial strategies that would lend weight to qualities of commitment and investment.

This opposes to the more critical notion that suggests a Biennale should be presented to challenge audiences. In the case of the Singapore Biennale, this is visible in the ways the National Art Council and the National Heritage Board of Singapore<sup>9</sup> strongly “promote and boost” Singapore visual arts internationally (Siew Kim and Lee Kim 2017).

Resolving the conundrum in calling it “Visual Identity” when the design changes ever so often, Agnus Hyland<sup>10</sup> describes the role of Visual Identity to disassociate commercial viability with the longevity of its presentation. Instead, he sees identities “working like a mirror to what something is and does, in order to establish how its

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<sup>8</sup> By commercial, the study refers to a project that is created for economic value and success in the consumer market rather than artistic or other value as a primary aim.

<sup>9</sup> Expanded in Chapter 3.5, these intentions are consistent with the development of Visual Identity for Singapore Biennale.

<sup>10</sup> Agnus Hyland is a designer at the design studio, PENTAGRAM and Emily King of Angus Hyland of *c/id: Visual Identity and branding for the arts*.

users can engage it”. Moreover, commercial strategies have been identified as adverse to the unique and intellectual quality of the arts (King and Hyland 2006).

This engagement of content indelibly brings across the fact that Visual Identity is not just a designer’s work, but a collaborative process with the curatorial committee.

Daniel Flint, Paola Signori and Susan Golicic<sup>11</sup> approached this from a marketing and management angle. They observed that constructed identities and multiple meanings may not work cohesively if the organisation itself “cannot carry the positions perceived” in the design. The idea here is that design starts from within, an “internal alignment within the management organisation” allows for a better cohesion of its messages and design (Flint, Signori et al. 2018).

Wolff Olins<sup>12</sup>, a brand design consultant, proposes a similar holistic approach where identities are seen to be built internally and driven by values<sup>13</sup> from within the organisation (Wolff 1995, Hollamby 2018). Pursuing a similar line of thought, Tandi Camilla Agrell<sup>14</sup> re-contextualises this process for the exhibition experience, where design translates as a kind of “sensual material that mediates between the exhibition and the needs of the consumer”. With design adopting such roles, the call for deeper collaboration and cross-disciplinary processes between the process of designers and messaging from the curatorial contingents (Agrell 2005, Trocchianesi and Pirola 2017). Overall, these definitions describe the role of Visual Identity as a component used as a tool to coerce interpretation. With that, it adds a conceptual layer alongside the art that can reflect or even further articulates the curatorial concept. (Whitehead 2012, Hughes 2015).

Jona Piehl<sup>15</sup>, a researcher in the field of graphic communication, speaks of the role of graphics in art exhibitions as an “overlooked and under-researched” topic. Her view is pertinent especially in recent times when graphic design can be observed to play a

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel Flint, Paola Signori and Susan Golicic are professors of marketing and management, who take a different view to establish identity in the Journal of Business Research’s article *Corporate Identity Congruence: A meaning-based analysis*.

<sup>12</sup> Wolff Olins is a brand design consultant and author of the referenced speculative publication, *The New Guide to Identity*.

<sup>13</sup> Business values here describes the determinants of the health and well-being of the firm in the long run. Thiry, M. (2013). A framework for value management practice, second edition. [electronic resource], Newtown Square, Pa. : Project Management Institute, c2013. 2nd ed.

<sup>14</sup> Tandi Camilla Agrell is an exhibition designer who wrote the referenced article, *A metaphor approach to exhibition design* in Nordes Journal

<sup>15</sup> Designer and researcher in graphic and communication design, *Where do you want the label? The roles and possibilities of exhibition graphics*

growingly significant part in content development. In her article, she plots different roles for graphic design in exhibition spaces, from story-telling to co-authoring, as well as to facilitate content (Piehl 2012).

Nick Bell<sup>16</sup>, a design critic, expressed the lack of alternative interpretations of Visual Identity in the cultural context. Visual Identity in this perspective do not center on ‘branded-ness’<sup>17</sup> and logocentric notions, but rather places emphasis on adaptive visual strategies that correspond to the nature of art and culture (Bell 2006). Bell proposes the term “cultural identities”, which is characterised by an adaptive nature and distinctive approaches, acknowledging that identities follow the shifts and changes in narratives and ideas. Hyland aligns with this view. He states that the “post-logo” identity is not limited to cultural institutions and it is most compatible with projects in the arts and cultural fields as opposed to other industries (Hyland 2016).

Defining an Art Biennale as a unified design system would be a simplification. Art Biennales are large-scale international contemporary art exhibitions. Their Visual Identity design would require to be diverse and adaptable across its different design applications and phases. Observably, Art Biennales and how it is perceived has been a prevalent topic of discussion as more cities adopt its own version (Lee and Felipe 2006, Block 2012, Bauer and Hou 2013). As a critique, the development of Art Biennales, which would naturally includes Visual Identity to carry the curatorial, is best designed to articulate “what [the Art Biennale] demands from audiences instead of what [the organisers] demand from the exhibition event”, as noted by Lee Weng Choy<sup>18</sup> in relation to Art Biennales (Lee and Felipe 2006).

Given the diverse views and hypotheses on the topic of Visual Identity, my research premise finds its pertinence in establishing a theoretical basis for making a case for the role of design. Specifically for design in the arts and culture sector, I would discuss

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<sup>16</sup> Nick Bell is an exhibition designer and design critic, who penned the referenced *The Steamroller of Branding*, in *Eye international graphic design review journal*.

<sup>17</sup> Brandedness: the identifiability of one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers (American Marketing Association). Branding is endowing design applications with the power of a brand. (Keller, K. L., Kotler, P., 2016)

<sup>18</sup> Lee Weng Choy is an art curator, who wrote the referenced article, *Global Art Biennials, the International Art World, and the Shanghai Biennale*.

notions on a possible specialisation for approaching visual identities through the case of the Singapore Biennale.

## 2.2 Practice-based procedures for Visual Identity Design

Regardless of style or inspiration, Angus Hyland emphasises the importance of a clear creative process of design illustrated in Fig. 2. Hyland defined the process with the demarcation of phases which builds trust, ensure confidence, clarify time and resources and set “expectations for a complex process”. This scheme looks into the developmental process between organising committee and design agency who works closely to develop visual identities. (King and Hyland 2006).

Fig. 2 Steps of Creative Process

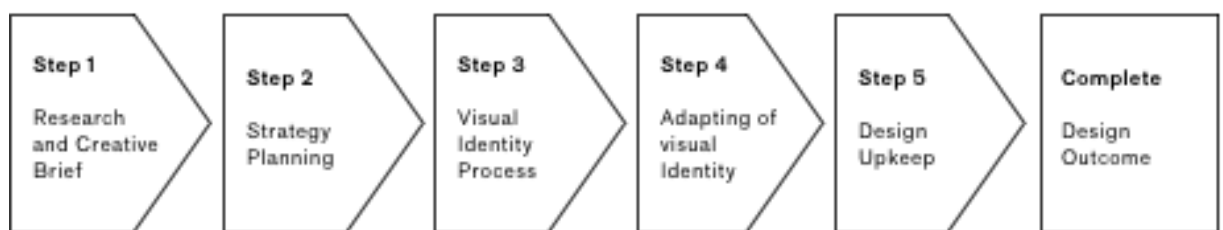


Fig. 2 This process chart adapted from the brand identity process by King & Hyland in publication, *c/id: Visual Identity and branding for the arts*: London: Laurence King, 2006.

Most often, the targets and needs for a Visual Identity design are defined from Step 1 by the commissioning organisation, culminated in a creative brief. This is followed by ideation and refinement of the design in the strategy and design process in step 2 to 3. This would eventually lead to applying and building the design outcomes after.

For the Singapore Biennale, Step 2 is accelerated in Step 1 via an invitation to bid competitively<sup>19</sup> via proposal. The development of Visual Identity begins with inviting designers to quote for the provision of Visual Identity and key deliverables for the edition. This invitation is executed in the form of an invitation-based tender<sup>20</sup>, selected by a panel composed of the organisers often made up of the marketing, curatorial and

<sup>19</sup> Competitive bidding is a transparent procurement method in which proposals from competing contractors, suppliers, or vendors are invited by openly advertising the scope, specifications, and terms and conditions of the proposed contract as well as the criteria by which the bids will be evaluated. (Taken from Online Business Dictionary)

<sup>20</sup> Invitation to tender is the initiating step of a competitive tendering process in which qualified suppliers or contractors are invited to submit sealed bids for construction or for supply of specific and clearly defined goods or services during a specified timeframe. (Taken from Invitation To Tender For The Provision Of Branding, Design And Web Services For Singapore Biennale 2019)

management staff of the organising committee. The design proposal showcases the concepts from the design agency alongside a quotation and portfolio. This process usually happens without the organising committee actively involved in the strategy and ideation process.

The creative brief often contains a cover letter, requirement specifications, the curatorial premise or theme and the conditions of the contract. These documents instruct what is required for the job determined by the organising committee, outlining the edition's objectives, as well as the responsibilities and targets of the agency engaged.

The premise defining the edition's requirements are often tied to the objectives of the organising and commissioning institutions that execute the edition of the Singapore Biennale. These roles in the first five editions had some shifts although the state agencies involved have been relatively consistent. This can be observed from the National Arts Council and National Heritage Board organising and commissioning in the first two years in 2006 and 2008, to the newly independent Singapore Art Museum organising for the most recent 2016 edition<sup>21</sup>. Designers would typically begin step 1 by using a creative brief to get an overview of the organiser's targets and curatorial messaging and develop the best concept to Visual Identity.

Upon the assessment of the proposal, the selected design agencies would be shortlisted and would go through a round of presentation and inquiry with organisers and key stakeholders. The contract of appointment would be made through a closed-door process. From there, the awarded design agency would be engaged to design the Visual Identity of the Singapore Biennale. Step 2 to Step 3 of the creative process usually involves the organising committee more actively to refine early ideation and approaches into the final version of the Visual Identity.

Step 4 and 5 of the process is the adaptation of Visual Identity across different deliverables. How direct is this step for the design agency would be based on the contracted list of key deliverables and guidelines. This procedure means that the

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<sup>21</sup> Refer to Fig. 1.2 General Data & Characteristics of the Singapore Biennale 2006 to 2016

Visual Identity is established by a document that holds the guidelines to the execution of different design applications. In-house design teams or other creative agencies may be engaged to complete specific niche collaterals for the Biennale.

### 2.2.1 Ways to Consider Visual Identity Design

This section uncovers the stances in the design of Visual Identity by gathering different ways to understand what we conceive how we can discuss design “approaches”. These are the values that substantiate the outcomes that are determined by the ideation and conceptualisation process between the organising committees and design agencies. I would weigh and identify my areas of focus in the context of the Singapore Biennale as well as establish the methods that inform the design concept.

Designer and researcher, Anna Calvera characterise the complexity of referring to targeted audiences as “hypothetical figure of the audience” by describing the difficulty to relate people to the value of designed outcomes. How different audiences use or interpret design is an important area that should be questioned when assessing design’s role (Calvera 2017).

Authors and founders of the Co-creation movement, Stefanie Jansen and Maarten Pieters proposed a reconfiguration of organising how we see audiences and key players of projects. They described the process of team players as “co-creation”. Instead of seeing the audience as an objective to reach out, co-creation proposes to understand their role as less ambiguous but rather as collaborators. There is an equal collaboration between the organising stakeholders, key players and the ‘participation’<sup>22</sup> of end-users spanning between direct and indirect developments.

The co-creation way describes a more distributed responsibility in the developmental process of projects as well as a more empowering position for key partners such as designers. This way of perception allows us to reorganise how the weight of design’s responsibilities dictate the participation of designers as key and direct collaborators.

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<sup>22</sup> Participation here refers to techniques of involvement by end-users described by Stefanie and Maarten. These span across a combination of tools and techniques. Examples span from traditional quantitative market research, to qualitative market research crowdsourcing, control groups, and brainstorming sessions.

At the same time, is a sustainable and practical framework to involve end-users in the process to achieve the project's objectives together (Jansen and Pieters 2018).

Beyond the field of art exhibitions, the formation of “identity” has always been historically practised. During the Industrial Revolution around the 1750s, visual motifs started to evolve into trademark symbols or logos that we know today. As businesses scale and expand with the onset of urbanisation and modern globalisation in the late 19th century, motifs also feature more elaborate design systems across applications that communicate messages in a strategically unifying way. (Jubert 2006).

Principally, a design agency's stylistic approach has often been based on existing schools of thought profoundly influenced by the applied arts field in German schools during the 1920s to 1950s. The industrialised field of graphic design was conceived to be ‘Visual Communication’. It was taught alongside other design fields like ‘Architectural Construction’ and ‘Product Design’, all of which were deemed to be important fields to be beneficial for society, as well as across different ideological orientations to align. Particularly in the Bauhaus, Jugendstil and Ulm schools of thought (Meggs and Purvis 2011, van den Boom 2015). The way we normalise seeing ‘Graphic Design’ as a business of creative discipline all over the world, stem from close to a century of having ‘Visual Communication’ as a distinguished field in the applied arts.

In these Singapore-based case studies, the western focused pedagogy in graphic design is appropriate, based on the way we generally discuss and perceive as the qualities of design. These principles and sensibilities today are embedded into contemporary approaches to modern practice (Koch 1990). Designer and Semiotics Researcher Mihai Nadin described this as a “post-modern” schools of thought. Designers develop or contextualise their design approach by “(re)modelling what has been done before them, adapting or combining these approaches according to personal inclinations and stylistic leanings”(Zakia and Nadin 1987). This condition led to design styles that we learn, align and practice by contextualising to different purposes and messages<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Examples of design styles and movements include Art Nouveau, Modernism, Art Deco, Swiss Style, Resonance of Advertising and Digital Era. (Meggs and Purvis 2011)

Given the liberty to adopt different principles and sensibilities, how do we bridge it to purposes and messages?

Semiotician Steven Skaggs describes the contemporary condition of design to be a practice without a fundamental theoretical framework. Its schools of thought and corresponding design movements defined the “habitual style” or “folk practice” for designers. Regardless of objectives, the designed outcomes seem to stem from imitation and repetition of forms passed down from designer to designer, where they deconstruct older visual outcomes to formulate ‘new’ design (Skaggs 2017). After-all, design hinges on familiarity and identification to communicate. Writer and Critic Nick Bell speaks about seeing design as styles on a similar tangent. He finds “[t]he arbitrary adoption of styles breaks the specificities between content and its representation. In fact increasingly so, representation claims to be content.”

Design agencies come in as a crucial, pivotal moment with the creative brief and are involved in ideation and development process to achieve the outcome. Despite the multiple uses to what Visual Identity is established in the previous chapter, the design process lacks a clear theoretical framework to assess and discuss. This aspect is mainly contingent on the early steps of the co-creative process. My research questions hinge on ways to investigate and propose a clear framework to discuss this as a critical area of focus.

### 2.3 Positions and characteristics of Art Biennales

This section addresses what an Art Biennale is and what it is for, as well as reflecting on how this affects the development of Visual Identity. Fundamentally, an Art Biennale is a platform that exhibits art. The format of exhibitions plays a discursive, intellectual and cultural role. In the Euro-American context, Art historian Debora J.Meijers<sup>24</sup> described the 1980s as a “museum revolution”, which led to a compelling method of presenting art that subverts traditional chronology, allowing for non-linear affinities. Interpreting of the artworks are no longer made in isolation and can be seen relationally in aspects beyond mere chronology (J.Meijers 1996). Building upon this

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<sup>24</sup> Debora J.Meijers is an art historian and professor of museum studies who wrote the referenced journal article, *The Museum & the Ahistorical Exhibition* in the publication *Thinking About Exhibitions*.

point, another historian Jean-Marc Poinot<sup>25</sup> adds that an arrangement of art at a certain largeness in scale, can reflect complexity and layers and add up to critical responses and connections. To her, this would be more compelling than one work (Poinot 1996).

As an event, the large-scale format of Art Biennales usually occurs in rhythms of a two-year cycle with each lasting four to six months. This frequency serves as an anticipatory cycle of reflecting on contemporaneity (Lee 2012). Terry Smith<sup>26</sup> describes this as a distinctive “exhibitionary event” that reflects a time-tabled cultural exchange between nations (Smith 2016). Curator and museum director René Block furthers the observation of Art Biennales by stating how this short-term cycle of the exhibition event enables it to situate across multiple locations across the city. This moves art out of the usual white cube of museums and temporarily take over alternative spaces for durational art or site-specific interventions. This thereby allows art to literally situate and represent the host city (Block, R. 2006).

A differentiated identity with a consistent system across applications would be especially pertinent in connecting these various exhibition sites and their works into a cohesive whole. Curator and critic Yongwoo Lee<sup>27</sup> describes this city-level of exhibition-making as “global-sized” in the sense of what it geographically represents as physical sites and coverage of meaning-making of its art as an exhibition. Smith similarly purports this as a popular format around the world<sup>28</sup> because of its placemaking effect. It indelibly decentralises our understanding of the world away from historically established western-centric narratives, bringing art audiences together and to different parts of the world for a cultural dialogue through the presentation of contemporary art (Lee 2012, Smith 2016).

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<sup>25</sup> Jean-Marc Poinot is an Academic professor and art critic and historian who wrote the referenced journal article, *Large Exhibitions: a sketch of a typology* in the publication *Thinking About Exhibitions*.

<sup>26</sup> Terry Smith is a Professor of Contemporary Art History and Theory who presented the *History and Theory in Biennials: Four Fundamentals, Many Variations* in a keynote lecture for *Busan Biennale Symposium 2013*, published by the Biennial Foundation

<sup>27</sup> Yongwoo Lee is an Art historian, critic and curator, who wrote the referenced preface, *The Crisis and Opportunity of Biennals* in the publication, *Shifting Gravity*.

<sup>28</sup> There is a longer history of large exhibitions some of which influenced the Biennale format such as the Royal Academy's summer exhibition(1769), *Magiciens de la terre* (1989) or the Crystal Palace Exhibition (1851). However, these exhibitions are not centred on art but anthropological and cultural expos.

Because of its city-level scale, Art Biennales are often referred to as “Global-Scale Exhibitions” (Bauer and Hou 2013) or just “Large Exhibitions” (Poinsot 1996). Art Biennales are usually characterised by the presentation of art in a more significant, national or city level. This definition which we adopt across this report also sees the role of the curator shift from a purveyor of an absolute singular premise to premises that are reflective of an increasingly diverse, democratic and inclusive stance (Byrne 2006, Antoinette and Turner 2014). At the same time, every edition of the exhibition event is usually independently conceptualised with little to no correspondence between the various versions. Every edition is premised on a central discourse that draws upon the practices of the respective curatorial teams, with intentions of inspiring “critical viewpoints and speculative reimagining” (Bauer and Hou 2013).

Alternatively, John Byrne<sup>29</sup> observes how the Biennale is also symptomatic of globalisation, resulting in the sharp rise in international Art Biennales across the world. A globalised way to look at art produces a kind of “homogeneity to the way art is exhibited and presented” (Byrne, J. 2005). Considering the re-imagination and different perspectives expected in visual identities, this type is less distinct for the format of the Biennale through how it is conveyed to the masses. Perhaps with this trend, Visual Identity may perpetuate the problem or if designed not to, can counteract this sameness.

Our discussion of an Art Biennale’s purpose had centred on its presentation of meaning with a significance on a global stage. However, looking at the origins of Singapore’s series, its economic and commercial interests are often why Art Biennales are established for the host city in the first place. The characterisation of these exhibitions as a commercialised entity is determined by the degree of influence from the public sector, private sector, civil society organisations or individuals respectively. Curator and critic Yongwoo Lee describes this commercialised angle as an inevitable side effect of the “entertainmentisation” of Biennales. As a spectacle, it’s proliferation is becoming increasingly “mediatised” and “commodified” (Lee 2012, Bauer and Hou 2013) to expand the scope of their appeal to tourists (Whyte, Hood, & White, 2012).

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<sup>29</sup> John Byrne is a Senior Lecturer and author of the referenced, *Contemporary Art and Globalisation: Biennials and the Emergence of the De-Centred Artist* published in *The International Journal of the Humanities*.

Simon Sheikh<sup>30</sup> discusses the role of the biennales beyond the generation of capital for the host city as an opportunity. Instead of seeing the spectacle as a problem, he proposes to take advantage of such a typology and influence new perspectives and meanings (Simon 2016).

Corporate finance and strategy professor and author Gabriel Hawawini described how the Singaporean government has come to utilise the economic value of the arts, as ‘cultural capital’ and how it can be manipulated towards the long-term objective of helping transform the country into a ‘creative economy’, a vocabulary of aesthetics adorning the country’s purportedly dependable yet flexible economic apparatus” (Hawawini and Hawawini, 2004). In the golden cage of capital where the economy triumphs, art is shoe-horned into performing an aestheticizing function for the state (Tang 2007). This is described in the first Singapore Biennale’s press release, quoting that of the tourism board, Singapore seeks to be “a dynamic, well-connected and entrepreneurial economy... a cosmopolitan society where arts and culture thrive”. Such images, production and presentation reflect the state’s emotive and positive side. This positioning can be seen in the organisational objectives<sup>31</sup> targeted for the Singapore Biennale taken from its tender document for 2019, in the appendix fig. 8.1.

The spectacle of commercialisation had always been a part of contemporary art in the first place. These have been widely explored by artists and art movements. Author of “Artist and the Brand”, Jonathan Schroeder does not segregate artistic and commercial contexts. He normalises the “cross-fertilisation” of art and identities where historically, “brand culture” and “culture as brand” are often inter-connected (Schroeder 2005). Historically, he refers to artists such as Andy Warhol and Cindy Sherman, who draw “interconnections between art, branding, and consumption”. The Art Biennale should not be entirely critical around commercialised tactics and branding<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Simon Sheikh is a curator and writer who researches practices of exhibition-making and political imaginaries, who wrote the referenced essay, *Marks of Distinction, Vectors of Possibility: Questions for the Biennial in Open 16*.

<sup>31</sup> Note that these objectives are for an edition of the Singapore Biennale that is undertaken by the newly independent Singapore Art Museum. From an organiser’s perspective, these objectives are likely to be similar or lean even more so to cater to audiences and interests at a global-scale when it was run by the National Arts Council and the National Heritage Board.

<sup>32</sup> Brand here, means the identifiability of one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers (American Marketing Association). Branding is endowing design applications with the power of a brand.(Keller, K. L., Kotler, P., 2016)

As addressed in chapter 3.1, Art Biennales are characteristic in that they contextualise to the context of its host city<sup>33</sup>. When we decide on different ways to represent in the design, it also responds to cultural factors of its social and political context. In the case for Singapore, would design for art exhibitions be part of the same exchange by basis that its objectives are tied to state-commissioned and institutional interests? The contingency of supervision in the design's messaging may be practised in contexts such as Singapore's Arts and Culture sector, given Singapore's measure of cultural conservatism and censorship, where design is almost always conditioned by its commissions that follows specific requirements. Design practice is compromised as a result of this "supervision" by default. It also develops in agreement to specific demands from its stakeholders.

This can be seen as a result of art's history with the commissioning state, during a period of artistic provocations and experimental flair in the 90s. A pivotal point can be found in the self-expression by artist Josef Ng<sup>34</sup> at the Artists General Assembly (AGA), had brought negative tabloid attention which by ripple effect caused the Government to stop funding performance art for a decade (Yap 2016). Local playwright Haresh Sharma described that "Artists are not criminals". He reminds the press and audiences that "if you can watch something and see the context of why certain decisions were made, then you won't be in the position of making this complaint. This again goes back to: think a bit, have some kind of critical view" (Jagdish 2017).

This liability on messaging would curb the range of approaches on subject matters and its entailing Visual Identity approach. Design serves a more conservative role as a communicative tool to nationalist ideals for the 'creative economy'. This intent fosters a more instructive responsibility to be optimistic and stakes-focused, as well as steers away from explicitly politically divisive methods or overtly critical, considering how dependent the exhibition is to the commissioning state (Schroeder 2005). This fear of a funding drought in a largely government-funded arts industry would be a mirror to

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<sup>33</sup> I described how designs were influenced by war posters (page 36) as well as social ideologies. Specifically, Documenta reflected a Bauhaus influence, which was meant to challenge postwar West Germany's ideology against the Nazi's denigration of the Avant-Garde (page 38). The proliferation of Biennales into Asia-Pacific (page 37) can also be seen as design methods to signal postcolonial representation.

<sup>34</sup> Josef Ng is a performance artist who in 1994, performed a work that involved the cutting of pubic hair. He was eventually fined and prohibited from performing for committing what was framed as an obscene act. The organiser and performance group was also fined and barred from grants and the state forbade performance art that didn't come with a script (Government Acts, 1994).

why design often find briefs. Art critic Pauline Yao had found the Singapore Biennale 2011: *Open House* to be overtly “organised” and conservative as compared to most biennales, alluding to the prominence or closeness of locations (Yao 2011).

This condition is apparent for state-commissioned visual identities, such as the Singapore Biennale, where the art platform would represent the State’s purview of the city on an international stage. The purpose of the Art Biennales fundamentally centres on its presentation of art in relation to the idea of the city it is hosted in. Amidst multiple targets for the exhibition, the objectives of the Singapore Biennale illustrates the disproportionate weight of what the design is used for, in relation to what it is meant to represent.

## 2.4 Survey of Visual Identity in Art Biennales

This section investigates the historical backdrop of Visual Identity and how the field of practice intersects the development of Art Biennales. Visual identities for large-scale international exhibitions pre-date modern design schools.

United Kingdom’s Crystal Palace or Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations was an influential exhibition that attempted to encapsulate a global representation. This is established through the format of a large-scale international exhibition during 1851. “Visual Identity” then, was not established and design was less integrated and not holistically strategize for different communication channels as it is like today. Editors of MIT Press’ *Design Thinking Design Theory*, Ken Friedman and Eric Stolterman described how “past environments were simpler”. This referred to simpler demands as compared to today’s more ambiguous and complicated contexts (Friedman, K., Stolterman, E. 2017). Specifically, the attention ecology was more decentralised and communicative applications like posters and signs depict different aspects of the exhibition. One such example is the 1851 leaflet designed for the Great Exhibition in Fig 2.2, where we observe a mascot-like circus ringmaster with a head shaped like a globe, announcing the exhibition mixed with neo-classic elaborations.

The model of the Great Exhibition would influence the oldest running and most prestigious example of a large-scale international contemporary art exhibition, namely la Biennale di Venezia (hereinafter referred to as the Venice Biennale) in 1895. Over the years of its development, the visual identities for the thematic or movement premised series in Venice grew to visually encompass the roles and stakes premised in Chapter 2.3. This development parallels the growing cultural significance that the exhibition event projects on a global scale. We observe in Fig 2.1, Biennales leaned more toward the idea of an art commission in the early 1890s used Renaissance revival style inspired renders of Venice by painter and decorator Augusto Sezanne. This was largely because of the revival in classical values of ancient Greece and Rome. Commissioned by the Italian Royalty, the art served as what we consider as design today for the Biennale, —an expression of classical Greco-Roman traditions that through representation, captured beauty and mystery of the world — was likely was done to emulate the classical learning and values of ancient Greece and Rome.

Later editions reflected the international pavilion model in the 1920s to 50s. This echoes a global scale that is likened to the Olympic Games<sup>35</sup> or the Great Exhibition with key visuals that featured flags from all over the world. Modelled after Venice Biennale, the Brazilian São Paulo Biennial was initiated slightly later in 1951. This Biennale was the second of such model and used modernist abstraction to articulate its position.

Fig 2.1 survey of Visual identities of Venice biennale and documenta				
Venice Biennale Editions	1st Venice International Art Exhibition 1895	la Biennale di Venezia, 1932	la Biennale di Venezia, 1974 Libertà per il Cile	la Biennale di Venezia, 2016 Viva Arte Viva
Designer (If available)	Augusto Sezanne	Franz Joseph Lenhart	Unimark International	deValence

<sup>35</sup> Olympic Posters within the same period, such as Olympics 1912 (Stockholm) to Olympics 1920 (Belgium) had utilised the representation of country flags to identify the international nature of the large-scale sporting event.



Fig. 2.1 Images taken from various print and online sources. Visual Identity is compared representationally by posters as a common key visual across the different exhibitions.

From the 1960s, the format matured into the global phenomenon of today, Venice Biennale began utilising a rounded typographic logo that also signals and identifies the Venice Biennale separately from thematic graphics. The logo mark conceived by the design agency Unimark International served to solve a unique format of exhibition that requires differentiation of the participating nations from non-official ones happening around Venice.

Venice Biennale embraced a thematic response alongside a logo mark that also signals and identifies the Venice Biennale separately from thematic graphics. Exhibition themes were the kernels of Art Biennale's political nature. 1975's *Libertà per il Cile* (Freedom for Chile) borrowed graphical influence from war posters, addressing a major cultural protest against the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in fig 2.1. This is one of the first instances the Biennale embraces a thematic response alongside a rounded typographic logo mark for the Venice Biennale.

The evolution of the Venice Biennale over the decades also comes alongside a proliferation of Biennales across the world that conceive this approach towards art exhibition with geopolitical and economic stakes that implicate design in its representation. Harald Szeemann directed two editions in a row (48th & 49th) bringing in a larger representation of artists from Asia and Eastern Europe and more young artists than usual and expanded the show into several newly restored spaces of the Arsenale. This global approach saw to themes and designs that leaned toward the aspirational and harmonious messaging similar to the olympic games series. This logo mark used for the exhibition series eventually evolved into a less overbearing red logo

mark bearing the lion symbol of Venice that we recognise till today. It is still used in the celebratory poster design for la Biennale di Venezia 2016: Viva Arte Viva (Long Live Art) applied across location finding to the framing of thematic key visuals that identify the edition.


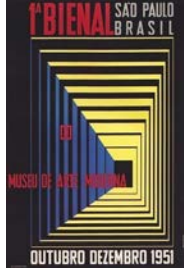

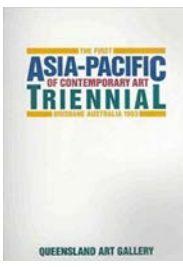
Fig. 2.2 survey of early large scale exhibitions				
Large-scale International Art Exhibition	Great Exhibition, 1851	São Paulo Biennial, 1951	Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, 1979	Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, 1993
Masthead or Theme Logo				

Fig. 2.2 Images taken from various print and online sources. Visual Identity is compared representationally by posters as a common key visual across the different exhibitions.

Since Venice’s evolution, we see a proliferation of Biennales across the world, bringing the format out across Asia-Pacific. We begin to observe examples of the biennale format such as the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennial (Fukuoka, Japan) which started in 1979 and The Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (Brisbane, Australia) in 1993 focused on Asian cultures. These sparked the ongoing decentralisation from the Western narrative (Block 2012, Green and Gardner 2016). These cities hosting such exhibitions take a socio-politically significant and culturally inclusive role on art. Both Visual Identities of the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennial and the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art started with a minimalist and functional approach with the use of its typographic masthead and keywords to communicate the purpose of the project. The early editions went against the grain of thematic designs in its collaterals which is largely uncommonality in biennales. The rationale may be embodied in the triennale’s modernist idealism that utilized a serialised technique which considers identity as brand-making and favors establishing consistency as opposed to thematic adaptations, grounding the foundations of post-colonial representation. The Triennial’s later editions developed more unique identities for each edition. This was achieved while

retaining the same approach in maintaining a cohesive typographic masthead and artworks on their printed applications (Gardner and Green 2013).

In this section, we observe a placemaking effect. The recurring use of consistent masthead is a serialised technique that leans toward a modernistic idealism: one that sees identity as brand-making and establishing consistency instead of thematic adaptation.


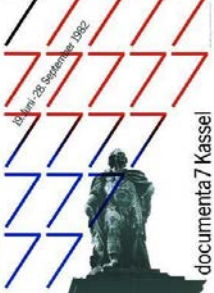
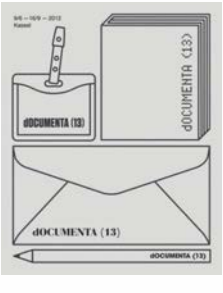

Fig. 2.3 survey of Visual identities of Venice Biennale and documenta				
Documenta editions	<i>documenta 1</i> Year: 1955	documenta7 Kassel Year: 1982	DOCUMENTA (13) Year: 2012	documenta 14 Year: 2017
Designer (if available)	Arnold Bode, Heinz Nickel, Ernst Schuh	Walter Nikkels	Leftloft	Vier5, Ludovic Balland, Laurenz Brunner & Julia Born, and Mevis & van Deursen
Masthead or Theme Logo				

Fig. 2.3 Images are taken from various print and online sources. Visual Identity is compared representationally by posters as a common key visual across the different exhibitions.

It is inappropriate to discuss large scale international contemporary art exhibitions without the context of documenta. This large art exhibition that occurs every five years in Germany, the same place where the schools of thought discussed earlier are rooted. The Asian examples, Fukuoka Asian Art Triennial and The Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art discussed earlier, parallel the earlier typographic and serialised technique of documenta.

Its diverse of typography and iconography were core methods used to express different reflections of personal and institutional idealism. Through this, documenta has a heritage of a diverse range of conceptual messaging through design. Art historian

Kathryn Floyd<sup>36</sup> describes how the first Visual Identity of documenta in 1955 took on the form of typographic abstraction. Its approach reflected a Bauhaus influence, which was meant to challenge postwar West Germany's ideology against the Nazi's denigration of the Avant-Garde. In fig. 2.3, early documenta applications can be identified with the use of large, clean lower-case and sans-serif "D"—a modernist system was developed by designers Arnold Bode, Heinz Nickel and Ernst Schuh for the first edition. It was perceived as a radical democratic gesture through typography, where a capital letter implicated the weight of unwarranted distinction (Grasskamp 1996, Floyd 2017). When spelt in full across print and space, the use of Latin letterforms and language signified a more international connection of the exhibition's positioning. Evident in the concept of documenta's first Visual Identity, the role of design across different editions of the exhibition exemplified itself as tools of political and even artistic messaging.

The visual identity of other editions of documenta furthers the potentialities of design by challenging the standardisation of a key visual. In the posters representing the editions discussed in fig 2.3, Italian design studio Leftloft's Visual Identity for DOCUMENTA (13) complicated the interface of the exhibition by not having a singular authorial brand image through the use of multiple fonts and colours across different design applications. *documenta 14* takes this idea one step further by appointing multiple designers to simultaneously developing the Visual Identity independently from one another. This refutes (and in turn questions) the needs of a recurring identity that postures the image of corporate branding (Morley 2017). The result is four different interpretations of the edition's premise, two of which resembled only but coincidentally, with each other typographically. As a large-scale international contemporary art exhibition, documenta is a pioneering example of exhibition-making. The exhibition utilises Visual Identity for a critical and conceptual role, used as artistic gestures similar to how Bell articulates what design can do.

Through documenta, Venice Biennale and other biennales in Asia Pacific, I distinguished how different Visual Identity for these exhibitions around the world evolved. This frames how we present the editions through thematic approaches. Much

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<sup>36</sup> Kathryn Floyd is an Associate Professor of Art History at Auburn University in Auburn who wrote *d is for documenta: institutional identity for a periodic exhibition. documenta: Curating the History of the Present*.

of the development stems from the maturity and the professionalisation of visual communication as a field of design. Design agencies gave rise to a crucial, pivotal moment with the creative brief and are involved in ideation and development process to achieve the outcome. As the Singapore Biennale is fairly recent, we would look into how the post-modern flexibility to conceiving Visual Identity, utilises the roles of design in new and experimental ways, as pointed out by design academics and critics like Piehl and Bell.

## 2.5 Survey of Large-scale Arts Exhibitions in Singapore

### 2.5.1 1960s – 1970s

This chapter brings focus on Singapore's historical and contextual point of view on large international art exhibitions and festivals leading up to the Singapore Biennale. I would expand on how large cultural events ran and how they evolved through the years, contributing to the cultural and organisational climate for Singapore's Art Biennale. The Singapore Biennale was not the first bi-annual arts event in Singapore. The one-off Singapore Festival of Arts (SFA) in 1959 was the first arts festival in Singapore. Its focus on performing and visual arts would eventually put Singapore on the map as a nation regionally and internationally. Funded by the Singapore Arts Council and featured performing and visual arts societies, it was declared by a reporter in Straits Times that "the festival will mark the biggest concentration of the Arts Singapore has ever known. It will be a people's festival in the broadest sense of the word" (Morgan, 1959) Following that, the Southeast Asia Cultural Festival in August 1963 was government organised and the first of its kind in the history of Southeast Asia. It was the first time that many regional nations participated in one cultural event and was the official opening of Singapore's National Theatre. Michael Sullivan, chairman of the Singapore Arts Council described how festivals like such allow for "culture-making" (The Straits Times, 1959), this regional focus through art resurfaced much later in 2013 for the Singapore Biennale.

Fig. 2.4 Survey of Visual Identities for SEACF, SFA & SIFA 1963 to 2017					
Edition	Southeast Asia Cultural Festival (SEACF), 1963	Singapore Festival of Arts (SFA), 1982	Singapore Festival of Arts (SFA), 1984	Singapore Festival of Arts (SFA), 1986	Singapore Festival of Arts (SFA), 1990
Masthead or Theme Logo					

Fig 2.4 Survey of Visual Identities for SEACF, SFA & SIFA 1963 to 2017. Images are taken from promotional materials presented in the National Museum of Singapore as well as promotional materials sharing about these events on the web.

Daniel Teo, research and documentation executive of Centre 42's essay 'Our National Arts Festival: An Origins Story', echoes chapter 2.3's positioning of Art Biennales. He suggested that corporate and public support as well as audience attendance "ensures a continuity of culture" in Singapore (Teo 2018). As a state-commissioned investment, Singapore Festival of Arts was re-established in 1977 as a biannual event that would challenge the perception of modern Singapore as a "Cultural Desert" (Wee 2003). The Singapore Biennale, thirty years after that, worked on that legacy by concretising Singapore's 'brand value' in its version of an Art Biennale. The Singapore Biennale positions Singapore as the arts hub of Southeast Asia and brands it as a tourism destination (Siew Kim and Lee Kim 2017).

The early editions of Singapore Festival of Arts, between the late 1960s to 1970s, took a representational approach. It used illustrations of the festival location and traditional dance giving the audience an idea of what one would expect from the festival. Specifically, we can observe the use of the then newly-built National Theatre building, where the festival launch was held. Applications in 1963, found from digital archives, range from first-day cover stamps and posters to pre-event application. Here applications were not conceptually integrated across the different parts of the event, like we perceive design applications of Visual Identity today. However, one can note the leverage on a shared identity for Singapore's first arts festival Singapore's arts and culture sector. The use of the facade of the first and largest national theatre for the arts can be seen as a commemoration of Singapore's post independence self-governance

and what it represented to galvanise the people of Singapore to view themselves as citizens of a new and independent nation.

### 2.5.2 1970s – 2010s

The festival in the late 1970s to 1990s went through many rounds of organisational teething, primarily from issues concerning exclusivity from local acts as well as a lack of footfall. At the same time highly urbanized cities like Singapore face greater competition from other cities that have caught onto festivalization to develop and broaden the scope of their appeal to tourists (Whyte, Hood, & White, 2012). Hence, the reintroduction of arts festivals in 1977 saw a focus shift to represent Singapore on an international scale. Singapore Festival of Arts was established as a bi-annual event organised by the Ministry of Education and subsequently, the Ministry of Culture, the emphasis on international blockbuster programmes. This shift led to criticism of the festival “marginalising local and Asian artistic practices”. In view of this, the National Arts Council developed the Festival of Asian Performing Arts (FAPA), on the alternate years to “counterbalance the Festival of Arts’ Western-centric programming”. This implementation was once again, short-lived due to poor spectatorship and terminated three editions in 1997. A review move in 1999, to combine the Festival of Arts with the Festival of Asian Performing Arts, to Singapore Arts Festival as one event to consolidate resources and audience-ship (Purushothaman 2007). The designs for the Singapore Festival of Arts during the period of the 80s to early 90s took an expressive consistency using folds or painterly shapes and lines in red, blue and green brand colours to establish different edition. These abstract graphics draw allusions to the beauty or emotional power of arts such as painting and dance motions, encapsulating the aspiration of skill and imagination in arts and culture.

Because of the multiple organisational reviews of the festival leading to organisational shuffles and festival positioning shifts, design would not have a linear track to work within its cycles of editions. This resulted in subsequent inconsistent visual communication towards the late 90s. This issue is something Wolff’s definition of Visual Identity would have expected from the lack of a holistic approach (Wolff 1995). Each identity corresponded less to each, logos and identity systems frequently changed

<sup>37</sup>. This included campaigns such as the figurative logo for Singapore Arts Festival by Batey Ads in 1999. It was designed as part of the solution which came with a commercial directed by local filmmaker Eric Khoo, helping to keep the festival identifiable across time. Despite the efforts to establish the festival afresh through design, identity was revised once more after ten years. The designs that came and went are shown below in 2011 to an expressive hand-written style that made the festival feel more personalised and approachable across its key visuals observed below in fig. 2.5.

Fig. 2.5 Logo Marks for <i>Singapore Arts Festival</i> in 1999 and 2011		
Edition	Singapore Arts Festival 1999 onwards	Singapore Arts Festival 2011
Masthead or Theme Logo		

Fig. 2.5 Logo Marks for Singapore Arts Festival in 1999 and 2011. Logos are taken from Images taken from promotional material associated to the Singapore Arts Festival from the web.

Low spectatorship caused the government-funded festival to be reviewed in 2012 again. Among the resolutions, was noting that the festival lacked “a clear focus and identity”(National Arts Council 2012). The change was mainly an organisational one, but also entailed a design change, as seen in fig. 2.5. The festival developed into an independent organisation operated separately from the Arts Council as Arts Festival Limited, which eventually became the Arts House Limited in 2014. Renamed the Singapore International Festival of Arts (SIFA), the festival returned in 2014 with a tighter production, shift in direction and identity seen in fig. 2.6.

<sup>37</sup> The most consistent use of colour systems and logo marks lasted for an average of three or four editions, most markedly in the 1980s to 90s.



Fig. 2.6 Survey of visual identities from 1963 to 2017					
Edition	Singapore Festival of Arts (SFA), 1992	Singapore Festival of Arts (SFA), 2000	Singapore Festival of Arts (SFA), 2004	Singapore Festival of Arts (SFA), 2011	Singapore International Festival of the Arts (SIFA), 2017
Masthead or Theme Logo					

Fig. 2.6 Survey of visual identities from 1963 to 2017. Images are taken from promotional materials and social media sources that share about these events on the web.

### 2.5.3 Present

It would be in 2006 where the Singapore Biennale came into fruition. At the time, Art Biennales around the world were common in major cities, and Visual Identity for Art Biennales has been developed across many variants and interpretations. Singapore's own is a late contribution to the growing fad of Biennales in cities, particularly in Asia (Tang 2007, Lee 2012). By typology, the Singapore Biennale takes on the common state funded model and takes on different curatorial directions. By the influence of economic value within the Singapore's Arts and Culture Sector, Professor and critic Pamela Lee (2006) made an observation on ArtForum that 'the rhetoric of nation building drummed up in support of each new (biennale) is inseparable from the not-so-subtle requirements of that nation's capital interests'. This reflects the relationship of Singapore's festivalization and cultural capital to develop and broaden the scope of nationalist ideals among locals as well as appeal to tourists, described in chapter 2.3.

In addition, curator and critic, Lee Weng Choy (2006) described how in the case for the large scale international art exhibition that is the Art Biennale becomes 'burdened by a self-conscious concern with the correct presentation of cultures and nations'. This Biennale as aestheticizing function as state apparatus to reflect the state's interests can be seen in the Biennale's visual identities<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> I would be breaking down in detail in Chapter 3.

For the footfall of the Singapore Biennale, the numbers were uneven<sup>39</sup>. This is largely due to the Singapore Biennale model that meant to organise each edition in isolation from another, unlike Singapore International Festival of Arts's organisational structure which based the festival's freshness of perspectives from the change of festival director every five years across three editions (National Arts Council 2012). As much as the shifts for the forty-year-old festival stemmed from observing weak footfall, the Arts Festival Review Committee report from 2012 emphasised that it should not be a core concern. Instead, one should reflect on how the festival stands in "international reviews, media coverage, and how the festival has developed talent in the long run." (National Arts Council 2012)

In the case of the Singapore Biennale, we see the exhibition event strategically positioned to coincide with the International Monetary Fund and Formula One Grand Prix Events in 2006. On a policy level, the inaugural Singapore Biennale follows the nation's capital strategy under the 'Renaissance City Project' spearheaded by the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts. The government body planned to enliven the city's image with an art exhibition that affixes "a more appealing dimension to its reputation: world-class arts and culture" on an international scale (Tang 2007). This strategy was something the Ministry of Information and the Arts called Singapore Arts Festival had pioneered as an "instrumental component". Looking into the organisational structure for the Singapore Biennale, the evolution between its editions follow a similar shifting and consolidation of organisational structures with SFA. Singapore's governing body's National Arts Council (NAC) first took on that role as the main organiser since the first edition in 2006. After which, the South-east Asian contemporary art-focused, Singapore Art Museum (SAM) assumed that position of the organiser in 2011. Eventually in 2016, Singapore Biennale was organised as a venture by the newly independent SAM, centring on the museum as the main exhibiting site and adopting a more regional focus. From the start of the 2000s, Singapore International Festival of Arts also took on a more international outlook by providing

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<sup>39</sup> In fig. 1 we read that the *Singapore Biennale 2011: Open House* edition was the most well attended edition with 912, 897 visitors, with the inaugural 2016 edition behind it by almost 30, 000 visitors. In comparison, this footfall matched the inaugural SFA in 1959 Times, T. S. (9 April 1959). At least 30000 saw the Festival Shows. The Straits Times. Singapore: . The least attended biennale, *Singapore Biennale 2008: Wonder*, registered 505, 200 visitors (Siew Kim & Lee Kim, 2017). In contrast, the Consumer Report by economic professors, Sharon Chang and Renuka Mahadevan, developed for the edition with the lowest performing footfall, *Singapore Biennale 2008: Wonder* mentioned the need of improving the interpretive aspect for its audiences (Chang and Mahadevan 2017) which was an observation within the roles of its Visual Identity.

“cutting-edge, contemporary intercultural and interdisciplinary works.” (Ooi, C. S., 2008).

This celebration and forwarding of culture, also lead to an audience centred positioning that most visual identities have been defined by authors and practitioners to regularly engage with as discussed in chapter 3.1 (Hughes 2015, Lo 2016). Singapore’s technologically-savvy local audience would be attracted by the augmented experiences through technological applications of its identity.

For SB2016: An Atlas of Mirrors saw to the media and marketing coverage communicates the Biennale to be more visually captivating as a ‘Instagram playground’ (Ashikin 2016, National Arts Council 2016/2017, Yeo February 8, 2017), the measure by audience footfall relates favourably to its commissioning stakeholders, but it means less on what it shows but how it coerced photo opportunities using structures and installations designed for photo taking. Singapore’s affluent society and attention economy centres on their digital device which they receive as well as share their lives. For SB2006: Belief, we observe the use of cute mascots “Adventures of MocMoc and MerMer” that offer photo opportunities as they visited different locations of the Biennale. Another example is SB2016: An Atlas of Mirrors, that a reflective installation that stem from the visual identity, fronting the Singapore Art Museum. The designs encouraged audiences to photograph themselves with it, where sharing photos also doubled as advertising for the event.

As social media and tech-savvy audiences find new ways to manoeuvre experiences, the digital personal targeted realm and the physical public communication through design merges, indicating the trends of more flexible adaptation of visual identities that serve the needs of its audiences.

### 3 Research Methodology

My research starts to lay a semantic infrastructure by categorising Visual Identity applications archived from the five Singapore Biennale editions. This typological analysis method looks into sorting phases of design outcomes as well as cohesiveness.

Subsequently, I introduce Skagg's design-centric semiotic analysis as useful substantiation tool to expand on the Types. This is achieved through Semantic Profiling as well as a Functional Matrix. These methods are used to assess and compare the different concepts of Visual Identity for each edition of the Singapore Biennale.

Lastly, I conduct in-depth interviews with some of the graphic designers who dealt with Visual Identity of the Singapore Biennale. Their first hand accounts provide elaboration on the process as well as convergent and divergent opinions on the topic.

### 3.1 Collection and Organization of Visual Identity Applications: Typological Analysis Methods

In chapter 2.1, I identified that a key issue in the design practice is the lack of definitions and theoretical framework . The semantic difficulty of describing approaches in Visual Identity for Art, is a critical research problem which requires synthesis and clarity. This is particular in a phenomenon that has multiple objectives and the liberty of a wide range of design possibilities.

To address this argument, my procedure is the development of distinct categories in relation to the focused case-study. Based on Creswell's 'mixed methods research' (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), I collected Visual Identity applications for descriptive qualitative data analysis. The 'Typological Analysis Method' is commonly used in research, particularly in complex fields such as healthcare, ethnographic and anthropological studies. In this thesis, I use this method to consider different visual identities across a wide spectrum of applications.

Creswell describes how classification can be utilised to "inform the content of the subsequent survey as a data integration tool that compares and analyses material collected". It also facilitates complicated concepts of practice for in-depth interviews by providing vocabulary and structure to the discourse (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

My first research method intends to analyse the five editions of the Singapore Biennale by Phases and Types of applications. The materials are sorted by Types that assess durational and perceptual components.

To determine what should be taken into consideration, my criteria of collection evaluates representational design applications that cohere to a perceptual form developed to compel consumers “by building familiarity and recognition” (Williams 2009, Humberstone 2015). Beyond audience’s familiarity and recognition , my thesis’ premise encompasses other aspects that broaden the way Visual Identity is discussed, like identifying a unified design system, the ways applications adapt to distinguish the title and express the organising intentions. Through the collation, we can observe consistencies and differences across the different phases of the exhibition, which leads to suggest alternative roles of Visual Identity design.

### 3.1.1 Phases of Visual Identity

The first Typological Analysis Method I would be discussing is related to the phases of Visual Identity. My collation of Visual Identity applications is categorised in the diagrams sorted across three key phases of the Singapore Biennale. These phases are divided based on the applications that I collated from physical copies of books and brochures, as well as image documentation and web based image research.

For fig. 3.1 Pre-event Visual Identity Phase, we observe that the early applications serve as marketing and promotional materials. They often take the form of ads, posters and brochures that are used to communicate the title and theme of the exhibition, as well as make an impression of the organising intentions . These applications are often established in the creative brief at the start of the design process.

The visual communication in this pre-event phase is key in launching an impression of the Singapore Biennale to local and international audiences. This marketing-centric intent is based on objectives driven by the commissioning and organising establishments.

Fig. 3.1 Pre-event Visual Identity Phase					
	Singapore Biennale 2006: <i>Belief</i>	Singapore Biennale 2008: <i>Wonder</i>	Singapore Biennale 2011: <i>Open House</i>	Singapore Biennale 2013: <i>If the World Changed</i>	Singapore Biennale 2016: <i>An Atlas of Mirrors</i>
Masthead or Theme Logo					
Marketing Brochure, Ads, Posters					
Periodicals, EDMs, Social media content					
Website, app, event listing					

Fig 3.1 Images are taken from printed form and web sources that share information about these editions of the Singapore Biennale on the web.

During the exhibition period, audiences who visit the locations of the Singapore Biennale would encounter on-site Visual Identity applications. Collated in fig 3.2 On-site Visual Identity Phase, our measure of representational applications are structures and visuals used in close vicinity to the art exhibition as communication interface. Design is utilised for functional or conceptual purposes. Applications take the form of the “day book” to navigate the schedules to locations, to large banners on facades that point you in the direction of the exhibition locations. These applications tend to lean toward a more utilitarian and informational approach. In addition, these applications tend to employ eye-catching elements to attract the interest of potential audiences walking by the site.


























Fig. 3.2 On-site Visual Identity Phase					
Banners, Masthead, Art, Wall texts					
Exhibition Design					
Brand Structures					
Maps, Wayfinding & Location Markers					
Day-book, Exhibition Guide					

Fig 3.2. Images are taken from printed form and web sources that share information about these editions of the Singapore Biennale on the web.

For fig 3.3 Post-Event Visual Identity Phase, our criteria for this phase are applications that cater to representational, cumulation or reflective purposes. Designs such as the exhibition catalogue and the merchandise are post-exhibition takeaways that use Visual Identity as a keepsake brand object or a representation of the whole exhibition in the form of a ‘memento’ or publication.











Fig 3.3 Post-Event Visual Identity Phase					
Exhibition catalogue					
Programme specific guides					



Fig 3.3 Images are taken from printed form and web sources that share information about these editions of the Singapore Biennale on the web.

In fig. 3.1 – 3.3, we can observe visual identities taking very different ranges of cohesiveness and adaptability across the exhibition’s lifespan. The visual assessment according to the phases would be further elaborated in the discussion in chapter 4.1.

### 3.1.2 Types of Visual Identity Cohesiveness

The second Typological Analysis Method I would be discussing is the Types of Visual Identity by cohesiveness. In chapter 2.1, I described the peculiarity of the cycle of changing visual identities for biennales. As a result of this, while design serves to compel consumers, the durational considerations of Visual Identity embrace a more contextual approach. Design critics such as Angus Hyland and Nick Bell<sup>40</sup> expressed the possibilities of adaptive visual strategies that correspond to the nature of art and culture (Bell 2006). This type of strategy is not limited to cultural institutions, and it is most compatible with projects in the arts and cultural fields as opposed to other industries (Hyland 2016).

Different editions have a lot of variables in their applications, . This lack of categories makes it hard to define and compare different design approaches. My methods of collation of Visual Identity applications is categorised into the flowchart below in fig 3.4. I sorted the different editions of the Singapore Biennale into three Types of cohesive distinction, namely Type 1: Branded Variety, Type 2: Flexible Variety and Type 3: Unsystematic Variety of identities. Across three actions of “yes or no” questions, our preliminary perceptual assessment narrows down to a specific decision of coherence that ends with distinct Visual Identity Types across the phases of each edition.

<sup>40</sup> Nick Bell is an exhibition designer and design critic, who penned the referenced *The Steamroller of Branding*, in *Eye international graphic design review journal*.

Coherence here is defined to be within a from conceptual consistency by means of recurring or corresponding visual elements. Intentional incoherence on the other hand, could be a sensibility meant to oppose a particular sensibility.

Distinctiveness here is defined to be the characteristic of the Visual Identity across different applications as a whole, whether or not some phases or adaptations are developed to be distinguished from others.

Fig. 3.4 Visual Identity Cohesive Types

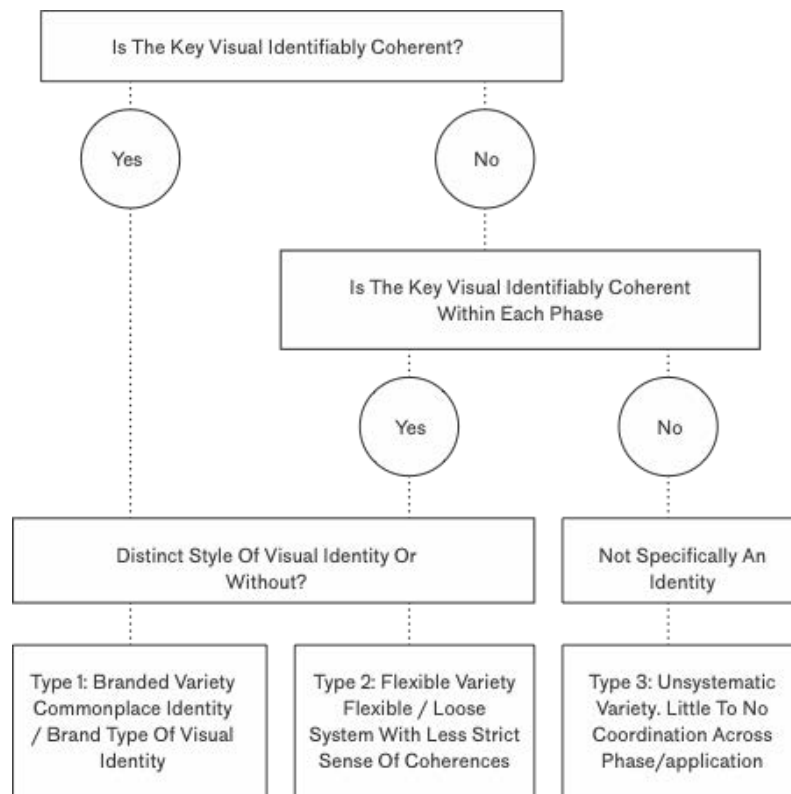


Fig. 3.4 Visual Identity cohesive Types Flowchart

“Type 1: Branded Variety” is sorted to be generally coherent across all phases and applications, with observable recurring or corresponding visual elements. It is also distinctively cohesive, making it aligned to definitions of visual identities that incorporate commercial characteristics which have an “authoritative presence” (Wheeler 2009). These types take on a direct role in attracting and coercing consumers “by building familiarity and recognition” (Williams 2009, Humberstone 2015). Such

visual identities tend to take on a more logocentric approach with its branded<sup>41</sup> take on developing Visual Identity.

“Type 2: Flexible Variety” identities have observable differences in its phases and applications. However, they are still distinctly cohesive to cater to familiarity and recognition. This approach parallels definitions of visual identities that humanises it through flexible and looser systems of graphic design in exhibition spaces, from story-telling to co-authoring, as well as to facilitating content (Piehl 2012). This type also places emphasis on adaptive visual strategies that correspond to the nature of art and culture (Bell 2006).

“Type 3: Unsystematic Variety” can be described to function like the other Types, but the difference lies on how different applications do not have a coherent approach across phases and applications. The design acts on different human needs to build the environment, but there is no system designed to establish a relationship with the consumer. Hence, Type 3 tends to take on distinctive approaches with no coordinated use of its visible elements across its phases and applications.

In chapter 4.1, to consolidate each identity into comparable means, I will be using the Visual Identity Cohesive Types Flowchart in Fig. 3.4 across the first five editions of the Singapore Biennale 2006 – 2016 by basis of how each Visual Identity reflect each categorical type.

Creating categories may simplify how we perceive the diverse approaches to visual identities, a possible limitation to the method of typologies I devised. However, establishing preliminary broad categories as part of an integrated research is vital. This is because topics such as Visual Identity needs a coherent ‘common language’ for fields that rely on meaning-making and content strategy. What becomes highly beneficial is having clear definitions and consistent nomenclature towards different range of visual descriptions.

## 3.2 Application of Semiotic Methods of Interpretation

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<sup>41</sup> Branded here refers to the identifiability of one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers (American Marketing Association). Branding is endowing design applications with the power of a brand. (Keller, K. L., Kotler, P., 2016)

In this chapter, I will be introducing my two methods of semiotic analysis, namely the Semantic Profiling of Visual Identity and the Functional Matrix for Visual Identity. The purpose of this semiotic approach is to distinguish and compare visual identities between editions. Additionally, it discusses Singapore Biennale as a whole series using a connected web of formal concepts and terms.

The Semantic Profiles of identities measures the complex aesthetic interpretations of graphic design in order to reveal its inherent strategies. Each analysis chart would be used to sort and compare how design relates to consumer interpretation. The lived experience of a visual strategy is contingent to the moment of encounter with the audience, such as time spent, mood, as well as prior knowledge of the perceiving audience to the exhibition event (Whitehead 2012). Design applications may be interpreted differently from one person to another. As an internal consideration, budgets and time to develop the design may affect the outcomes and influence the extents of the scope and explorations. With these conditions in mind, my study seeks to find a method to mitigate the inevitable plurality and instability of meanings which may be due to one's socio-cultural understanding and personal taste.

My study is based specifically on Steven Skaggs' semiotic profiling to identify visual attributes. This method is done by comparing the design outcomes across the five different editions<sup>42</sup>. I also interviewed the designers of each edition to elaborate on why they approached and interpreted the edition's theme this way and why the biennale team felt it worked.

### 3.2.1 Semantic Profiling of Visual Identity

The first chart characterise interpretations of design by the degree of affective or conceptual registers for each edition's Visual Identity. These are categorised by different registers below in fig. 3.5.

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<sup>42</sup> Without forgetting Thomas' point on design as an organic process, the study is not attempting to create a fixed formula for interpretation or to denature the ideation process. Instead, the clarifications I would expand on in this paper would mainly serve as a frame of reference for the context of the focused case study of the Singapore Biennale that which involves the designer and organising team.

Fig. 3.5 Affective & Conceptual Semantic profile types			
Affective Registers		Conceptual Registers	
1. Presence	2. Expression	3. Denotation	4. Connotation
Prominence / Gains attention	Emotion due to form. Engages feelings.	Direct and explicit relation to referenced material	Strong associations connections dependent on context

Fig. 3.5 Chart of Affective & Conceptual Semantic profile types.

This profiling components span across an affective and conceptual spectrums that can be further specified by its corresponding characteristics. The affective register employs the voice of communication through visually arresting forms to create presence or expressive techniques to engage emotion. The conceptual register<sup>43</sup> relates closely to the project’s messaging as a register that more explicitly denotes or refers to meanings using connotative associations. Based on Skagg’s study, he categorised four approaches of types of identity profiles. They are based on all possible permutations between affective and conceptual subset of registers, giving visual identities different qualities that define the approach with descriptive detail. This is shown in the table of Semantic Profile Types below:

Fig. 3.6 Semantic Profile Types																
Permutations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Affective Register: Presence (Prominence / attention)	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Affective Register: Expression (Emotion evoking form)	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Conceptual Register: Denotation (Direct meaning of reference to)	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Conceptual Register: Connotation (Associative connections & dependent)	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Approach	"Projective Soufuls"				"Projective Apathetics"				"Recessive Soufuls"				"Recessive Apathetics"			

<sup>43</sup> Conceptualism in Contemporary Art is the technique of communication where the concept or idea involved in the work take precedence over traditional aesthetic, technical, and material concerns.

Description of approach	High in presence and contrasts with environment enough, while being also highly effective in an expressive sense.	High in presence and attractive, but devoid of feeling: low expressivity.	Low presence and less noticeable, but once noticed, feelings can be evoked.	Low in presence and devoid of feeling.
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Fig. 3.6 Table of Semantic Profile Types based on Steven Skaggs's definitions.

Across the spectrum of approaches for Semantic Profiles, the conceptual register communicates the brief with a range of associative relations across denotative and connotative subsets. The chart in fig 3.6 shows how the character of approach in the Semantic Profiling is dependent on the affective registers of the referenced material. The conceptual register differentiates in how people may understand the design, where a more direct or associative direction is expressed. However, how a design conceptually performs is as strong as how it is affectively relayed.

Highly affective registers in fig. 3.6 that are both prominent and expressive fall under “projective soulfuls” where the chart describes such designs to have a high presence, which stands out from the environment. The design is not just prominence but also highly effective in drawing emotions.

Design concepts that gains more attention than engages emotion in their affective registers are “projective apathetics”. This design procedure is eye-catching but it does not persuade through the eliciting of feelings or sentiment.

Identities in this approach are less reliant on attention grabbing strategies and instead, toward expressive modes of design that may take the form of integrated or unconventional ways. Categorised in fig. 3.6, approaches that take a more expressive register would be perceived as “recessive soulfuls”. Such methods are slow-burners, they do not have a loud presence but once noticed, emotions are engaged and feelings can be evoked. The openness to this type of identities relay on a more languid spectrum of approach, when the design strategy is neither expressive nor affective are characterised to be “recessive apathetics”. Such identities are described to have a quiet presence and are devoid of feeling.

Every edition of the Singapore Biennale is designed differently. This can be interpreted as evaluating the permutations based on the Semantic Profile types. This is elaborated in the Findings in chapter 4.2.

### 3.2.2 Functional Matrix for Visual Identity

The Functional Matrix delves deeper into conceptual associations introduced in Semantic Profile types. This matrix can be used to strategise or assess design. As a method, it can assess how definite or associative a design approach is in communicating meaning across the two key attributes.

Functionality is an important facet of design because with it, we are able to explain how design outcomes may inform the behaviours of end users, thereby giving interpretive characteristics to the process. This is summarised in fig. 3.7 below.

Fig. 3.7 Functional Matrix: Hard & Soft semiotic attributes			
Hard semiotic attributes Precise & Definite		Soft semiotic attributes Contingent & Suggestive	
Concrete Node	Praxis Node	Tonal Node	Form Node
Recognisability Representation, Legibility	In-situ externalities, conditions, contextual	Mood & Feel, Associations & Sensibilities connoting.	Arrangement, Composition, Unity

Figure 3.7, Table of Functional Matrix adapted from Steven Skaggs, S. (2017). *FireSigns: a semiotic theory for graphic design*: Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, [2017].

Skaggs defined both “soft” and “hard” registers as a spectrum which any design can be sorted by the node defining each attribute. “Hard” semiotic attributes are made up of the concrete node definitive approaches through legible and clear means, or of the praxis node contextualised to influence interpretation. On the other hand, “Soft” semiotic attributes use approaches such as the tonal node, that plays into moods and feelings, or the form node, that deals with composition in the interpretive register. Crossing the syntactic and semantic levels with the hard and soft axes, we arrive to four nodes that read visual and verbal as well as environmental and psychological distinctions, as shown in fig. 3.9 below.

Fig. 3.9 Intersecting nodes of Functional Matrix

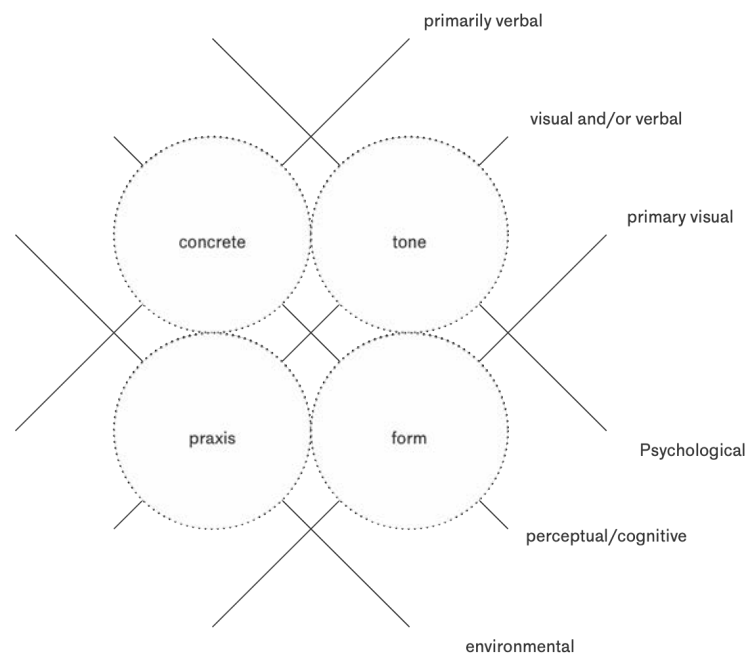


Fig. 3.9 Intersecting nodes of Functional Matrix adapted from FireSigns: a semiotic theory for graphic design: Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, (2017). Leborg, C. (2006).

Skaggs demonstrate how designs can rely on visual and verbal as well as environmental and psychological distinctions and correspondences. Concepts with hard semiotic attributes, tend to be precise and rely on copy over visual, as well as context over tone.

- For verbal-centric approaches, it is primarily concrete node which relies heavily on legibility. Designers utilise this when there is an interest to make the Visual Identity more recognisable.
- For context-centric approaches, it is primarily praxis node which relies heavily on its ability to adapt to different functions. Designers utilise this when there is an interest to make the Visual Identity more versatile.

Concepts with soft semiotic attributes, tend to favour tone over context and rely on visuals over text.

- For visual approaches, it is primarily form node which relies heavily on composition and a well formed sense of structure. Designers utilise this when there is an interest to make the outcome more memorable.

- For psychological approach, primarily tonal node which relies heavily on how the design connotes through the use of mood and feelings. Designers utilise this when there is an interest to make it more appropriate to intentions.

When two antagonist nodes are Foregrounded, the other two are overshadowed and tend to be backgrounded.

- For approaches that are visual and verbal driven, the design contain both praxis and tonal nodes that relies on both connotative and contextual strategies. These outcomes tend to be both versatile and appropriate.
- For approaches that are perceptual and cognitively driven, it is a mix of form and concrete nodes that relies on both recognisability and composition as strategies. These outcomes tend to be both memorable and recognisable.

Both Semantic Profiling and Functional Matrix provide a theoretical framework to assess design by its characteristics, distinctiveness and function. This would be useful for my case studies in order to assess the liberties of flexibility in encompassing meanings through Visual Identity types and how these types translate curatorial messagings and organiser targets.

As a topic of research that lacks theoretical framework with limited vocabulary, the proposition to establish a command in the values and categories of interpretation is essential. Semiotics can be utilised by designers during ideation or review, through what is readily available to analyse. Between the organisers and designers, the semiotic method to interpretation offers structured considerations for the otherwise abstract discussion. The framework provides a vocabulary to configure and compare ideas and adaptations that can reconcile the targets and messagings.

The study of interpretation is a relevant field of research. The procedure here introduces a scheme to interpret and a vocabulary to describe Visual Identity's relevance in the context of the Singapore Biennale instead of imprecise or abstract terms. These values are instrumental in interpreting the uses of Visual Identity in measurable and comparable components, creating a case that validates and

rationalises the hypothesis of different types of design approaches in relation to the conceptualisation of different editions of the Singapore Biennale.

In chapter 4.2, I will be charting and comparing both semiotic methods of interpretation across the five editions of the Singapore Biennale.

### 3.3 Interviews with Graphic Designers of the Singapore Biennale

This chapter investigates the conditions and intentions of the designers — key players in the ideation and construction of the project. Interviews here provided personal accounts to learn more about how the design agencies conceptualise their design and their role in the structure and procedure for art exhibitions. Additionally, we also consider how the premise determines the ways an identity is developed in the collaborative process.

I enquired designers with questions that reveal the working process and procedures. The research intends to gather unheard insights, using conversations with graphic designers who were pivotal and responsible for the realisation of the visual identities of the Singapore Biennale. This method would be based on an in-depth type of interview, drawn from the methods described in the Handbook of interview research: Context and method (Gubrium 2012).

This research tool is a popular method, as it provides a more personal, reflective and emotional insight through observing and listening. This method is useful to explore the otherwise unconsidered design process that happens behind the scenes.

The procedure goes deep into gathering knowledge by engaging with people who are valuable and involved in the subject of interest, subjecting myself to the environment and social environment of the subject. Having multiple designers interviewed would gain insight into the different conditions and environments of developing Visual Identity. (S and Scandroglio 2007).

My sampling of interviews largely depended on their availability, I managed to meet two studios at their place of work for the interview. I conducted my interviews following my findings on different Visual Identity Type ranges. I would be discussing the topic of Visual Identity development with Little Ong of Ffurious, for the SB2003: If the World Changed, in relation to Type 1 identities. For Type 2 identities, I would be talking to Kelvin Lok of Couple Design, who worked on the Singapore Biennale 2016 and the 2019 edition as well. Both studios have consistent and continuous work for such scale of projects in the arts. Their point of views would be essential for this research.

My procedure of interview includes audio recording of the full conversation as well as sending my set of questions to the designers weeks before the actual meeting to prepare accordingly. The interview procedure with designers would make up of myself fielding the same set of questions across the board, as well as questions contextualised to the design agency's experience.

Some ethical concerns of the in-depth interview method of interviewing comes from how the conversations include personal emotions and reflections that may have consequences for other lives and reputations. These are mitigated by my interviewing procedure of letting the designers suggest any changes to these answers by annotating or writing areas to amend to my transcript. I have used the final edited answers for the study. This allowed interviewees to edit their transcript to present the version of their words they are comfortable with.

### 3.3.1 Interview Questions

In my literature review, I discussed the design process of Visual Identity to distinguish the pivotal steps taken by curatorial committees and design agencies. This led to uncovering questions arising from the unique construct of the Singapore Biennale.

Because every edition is made up of different conditions and intentions, I would first be focusing on how the agencies were engaged as designers as well as personal interests in the arts and culture field.

## Approaching the Singapore Biennale

- Why did you decide to work on developing the Singapore Biennale?
- When and how was the design utilised in the development of the Singapore Biennale?
- Elaborate on the considerations of the design and why the organising committee felt it worked.

Next, I discuss the development process of Visual Identity design. This is diving into the design process of the Singapore Biennale and how the outcomes of visual identities may be informed by how the process is set up. I also discuss with the designers their intentions and collaborative traits with the organisers of the exhibition.

## Development Process of Visual Identity

- Are there differences in the development of Visual Identity for the Singapore Biennale as compared to visual identities outside the field of the Arts?
- Who are the teams involved in the design and how collaborative was its development?
- Who ultimately decides and approves decisions across the phases?

The method of in-depth interviews will be a useful account to discuss the experimental, diverse and collaborative process and the teams involvement on hindsight.

## Hindsight perspective

- How productive is Singapore's open bid / public tender system / creative brief (if any) and how did it inform the Visual Identity?
- Is there anything that can improve the developmental process of Visual Identity for an Art Biennale?
- What do you think about the Visual Identity did for a single Singapore Biennale edition as compared to a series?

The hindsight perspectives would also highlight challenges embedded in the process that may indicate room for change. Specifically to find connotations that present

limitations in the central design process. What would be achieved is a reflexive study that bridges how the process is evaluated against how it is originally conceived.

Additionally, I asked questions contextually to the interviewee's experience. The first design studio, Couple would offer insight into how their design can contain a more long term notion of identity. Couple is the first studio invited to work on the Singapore Biennale more than once. For Ffurious, which has extensive experience working in the arts, I discuss developing design for the Singapore Biennale as experts within the art and cultural niche.

The full interview transcripts can be found in Chapter 8 Appendix.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Findings on Cohesive and Application Typologies

In chapter 3.1, I introduced the 'Typological Analysis Method' based on Creswell's 'mixed methods research' (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Having amassed and organised the primary archival material of the design applications from the different editions of the Singapore Biennale, this chapter focuses on discussing the findings of these methods and presents a qualitative data analysis. This would serve to identify visual patterns and conceptual narratives which provide a spectrum of how it functions and is used.

My intention for developing cohesive and application typologies is to define the five editions of the Singapore Biennale from 2006 to 2016 in greater detail. This specifies by phase of the exhibition event and by its coherence across its applications.

#### 4.1.1 Phases of Visual Identity

The first Typological Analysis Method I would be discussing is the phases of Visual Identity. My methods of collation of Visual Identity applications is categorised into the diagrams found in chapter 3.1.1, across different phases of the Singapore Biennale

from Pre-event fig. 3.1, On-site fig. 3.2 and Post-event fig 3.3 Visual Identity applications.

Across the three phases, particularly for identities such as SB2011: Open House and SB2013: If The World Changed, applications take on an anchor colour scheme and recurring motifs from the day-book on-site application in fig 3.2 to exhibition catalogue in the post-event application in fig. 3.3.

For SB2011: Open House, the geometric logo of an arrow or inverted house shape draws focus to the locale while at the same time. It also explicitly identifies each specific site of the exhibition around the city as way-finding. The orange fluorescent colour along with the rotated house logo mark sets the tone for the brochure design and cleverly function as arrows as wayfinding during the exhibition.

The next edition, SB2013: If the World Changed, uses a unifying ocean blue colour along with wind vanes and lines to metaphorically represent current global shifts and the movements in the Southeast Asian region. The exhibition features a greater regional focus, subtly alluded in the witty tails in the typography that resemble Asian religious architecture from the region. The use of blue and lines, that represent weather patterns, is a common visual devise that structures the identity across various applications. As described in the interview with Little, these identities center on curatorial interpretations. Therefore, we also observe the recurring use of key visuals and metaphoric symbols to articulate the themes.

With other editions, we observe a more integrated use of Visual Identity that varies in use across different phases. Identities such as SB2006: Belief and SB2016: An Atlas of Mirrors has graphics and key visuals that utilise expressive identity components or dynamic elements which are adapted for different uses.

For SB2016: An Atlas of Mirrors, the key visual is responsive to different formats. Yet, it is also distinctly contained within images of the Biennale's artworks that serve as a backdrop instead of an identity which directly relates and interacts with the art. The use of dynamic graphics and variations of logos that establishes the same graphic but

different or changing forms and use. The adaptive use of the key visual can be observed in its different configurations, where it covered walls in the exhibition design in fig. 3.2 as well as framing the print and marketing applications in portrait and landscape configurations in the brochure and facebook event header in fig. 3.1.

This variance is more disparate for SB2006: Belief, which was the inaugural edition, and featured a non-logo centric identity. Its effect is a surprisingly lo-fi treatment, inspired by the imperfections that arise from processes such as silkscreen and photocopy. The design also utilises everyday photographic images of different beliefs, paired with a lively scribble of the exhibition premise of beliefs that is woven across different spaces of its applications.

Specifically, with the printed pre-event visuals, the Visual Identity takes an image-driven and monotone collage style of graphic that captured with local notions of the theme belief. These are apparent in its pre-event marketing collaterals as well as the exhibition catalogue. The encounter with different textures and patterns across various applications and also seen across all three Phases is precisely what challenges what we may perceive as coherent altogether. As exemplified in fig. 3.1, we see the applications utilise a red coloured lo-fi collage of visuals on print applications like the exhibition catalogue in fig. 3.3 and the brochure in fig. 3.1 and in a colourful and painterly manner for the early promotional banners in fig. 3.1 as well as for the exhibition location signages in fig. 3.2.

Similar in its approach away from an easy coherence, SB2008: Wonder was also systematically less designed with its theme blending across textures and different forms. While the connection to the Singapore Biennale and the theme Wonder is not specific visually, it resembles a tourism advertisement with different renderings of the city skyline alongside an illuminated masthead. The Central Business District cityscape presents in this edition as the key visual. The visual language changes between an energetic and colourful visual treatment that is duotone-based to a more grunge visual that is graphically and loosely tied together. Applications of the design treat the key visuals with filters applied differently across different applications. Beyond that instance of logo use across different editions, there was also no continuity

in the structure of the series established, even in the way the Singapore Biennale is placed.

Interestingly, all the approaches across the various editions served its singular course of application and functioned uniquely and independently. In chapter 2.4, we established today's post-modern<sup>44</sup> condition where design practices have fundamentally different approaches that has to account for the dynamics between the curatorial committee and the design agency. The lack of fixity in creative context and conditions has posed a research problem which called for an articulation or expression in practice and theory for the conception of a Visual Identity framework across applications. These multiple objectives also contains the liberty of a wide range of design possibilities. In this section, we observe visual identities taking on vastly different ranges of cohesiveness and adaptability across different aspects of the large-scale exhibition event across its lifespan.

My assessment of the Biennale editions design through studying it by phases provides the study with a clarity in its components. This is achieved through the observation of how visual identity is adapted across applications in the three key Phases.

We can observe how identities such as SB2011 Open House and SB2013: If the World Changed hinge on the application of marketing-centric phases through its key-visual or interpretive focus which leans toward particular targets and objectives. Other examples such as SB2006: Belief seems to embrace a diverse sensibility in its design adaptations, creating an evolving visual experience that supplements how we may understand the exhibition across the phases.

The Phases of Visual Identity allow to identify patterns or dissonances in the approaches. Through this, we are able to pinpoint specific aspects in the biennale's durational experience that probe into the extent of what the design entails. This would be useful in practice to consider the important perceptual moments of the lifespan of Visual Identity by deliberating on observable ways applications adapt the design across the different phases of the exhibition event.

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<sup>44</sup> Post-modern here refers to the previously described era of industrialisation of visual communication as proper applied arts.

#### 4.1.2 Types of Visual Identity Cohesiveness

The second Typological Analysis Method I would be discussing is the Types of Visual Identity by cohesiveness<sup>45</sup>. My methods of collation of Visual Identity applications are categorised through the elimination chart I developed in chapter 3.1.2. I would be sorting different editions of the Singapore Biennale across three Types, namely Type 1: Branded variety, Type 2: Flexible variety and Type 3: Unsystematic variety of identities.

I introduced this method to analyse the five different editions of the Singapore Biennale shown in fig. 3.4 Visual Identity Cohesive Types. My observations develop following the establishment of Types through the elimination chart fig. 3.4, where across three rounds of questions, the perceptual assessment would be specified into distinct<sup>46</sup> Visual Identity Types across the phases of each edition.

As seen in the description of the Visual Identity for the various editions, each edition showcases different communicative strategies. Every iteration cyclically re-addresses what the Singapore Biennale encompasses for that edition and are done very independently and uniquely from prior editions. The changes to the design approaches over the years also reflects how Art Biennales are engaging with the challenge of representing an event that is similarly styled around the presentation of art, another visual form.

For “Type 1: Branded Variety”, visual identities are distinctively cohesive and generally coherent across all phases and applications, with observable recurring or corresponding visual elements. Across the five editions of the Singapore Biennale, SB2011: *Open House* and SB2013: *If the World Changed* can be described to be of this category. SB2011: *Open House*’s logocentric identity hinges on a house and arrow shape — a universally identifiable reference to spatial planning and new homes. Its use of an arrow as a directional device that literally points downwards and conceptually suggests

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<sup>45</sup> Coherence of Visual Identity here is defined as a form of conceptual consistency by means of recurring or corresponding visual elements. Intentional incoherence on the other hand could be a strategy meant to oppose a consistent sensibility. An example is documenta 14’s refuting (and in turn questioning) the needs of a recurring identity that postures the image of corporate branding (Morley 2017), elaborated in chapter 2.4, fig. 2.3.

<sup>46</sup> Distinctiveness of Visual Identity here is defined to be the characteristic of the Visual Identity across different applications as a whole, whether some phases or adaptations are developed to be distinguished from others.

the notion of a home (turned over on its roof) to reflect the curatorial premise that discusses the confines of public versus private. Across the different applications, it's neon orange icon takes central focus in an almost corporate style, expanding into an instructional manual-inspired identity that pulls back on graphical representation and prioritizes a minimal kind of functionality.

The pattern of using key motifs is also evident with SB2013: *If the World Changed*. The identity uses a unifying ocean blue colour alongside wind vanes and lines to metaphorically represent current global shifts and the movements in the Southeast Asian region. The regional focus is subtly alluded in the witty tails in the typography that resemble Asian religious architecture from the region. This key visual is distinctive and dominant across most interfaces. Its recurrences build familiarity across different phases and applications in a more commonplace branded approach.

In the classification of “Type 2: Flexible Variety” identities are sorted to have observable differences in its phases and applications, but still maintain a sense of cohesion from individual elements and approaches that enable familiarity and recognition. Across the five editions of the Singapore Biennale, SB2006: *Belief* and SB2016: *An Atlas of Mirrors* can be described to that take on this approach that maintains both familiarity and dynamism through variations that correspond to the focuses of phase and application.

The Visual Identity for the first edition of the Biennale, SB2006: *Belief*, also sets a significant tone for the Singapore Biennale with an unconventional non-logo centric identity. The approach is a looser system that introduces human touches and elements to identity design by using different patterns and graphic treatments. The design is inspired by textures and imperfections from collage, painting, handwriting and photocopying. Specifically, the printed collaterals in Fig. 3.1 Pre-event Visual Identity Phase, Visual Identity takes on a image-driven monotone collage-style graphic that presents localised interpretations of the theme of “belief” in its pre-event marketing collaterals as well as exhibition catalogue. The design also utilises everyday vernacular of different beliefs such as gods and money to tease out ideas of belief based on the curatorial messaging. These visuals suggest ways in which the public can interpret or

relate to its assertion. The art exhibition's Fig. 3.2 On-site Visual Identity Phase applications employ a vibrant and abstract painterly graphic that is seen across main wall panels and key visuals in different spaces of the exhibition. This diverse experience of the exhibition culminates in the Post-event Phase where the approach is a collation of the different textures on applications such as merchandise items like commemorative badges to its exhibition catalogue.

Through a slightly different approach, SB2016: *An Atlas of Mirrors* uses a flexible framework through its dynamic key visual and use of artworks. Its design uses a distinctive masthead that is centred on abstract reflective lines, that echo the ping-ponging of viewpoints. It closely relates to the curatorial premise which sought to trace the intertwining and reflective relationships within the region. The key visual is also responsive to different shapes, but it is often contained within different images of the Biennale's that function as a backdrop in the masthead. The use of dynamic graphics and variations of logos helps to build familiarity by reiterating the same graphic while still provoking curiosity in its different forms and applications.

In the classification of "Type 3: Unsystematic" the identities function much like the other Types, but the difference lies in how different applications do not have a coherent approach across phases and applications. SB2006: *Belief* and SB2008: *Wonder* both echo such a type in their distinct lack of visual consistency. Elements such as fonts, colours and graphic elements are not coherent across different phases of the exhibition. The visual language changes between a vibrant colourful visual treatment that is duotone-based to a more grunge-like visual that is graphically, loosely tied together with extents that treat the key visuals like filters applied differently across different applications. The connection to the *Singapore Biennale* and its theme *Wonder* is also not specific visually. It resembles a tourism advertisement with different renderings of the city skyline alongside an illuminated masthead. Although an attempt was made to focus on the Central Business District cityscape as a key visual, the other applications differ in terms of approach and design with no concrete relation of similarity. In that way, the Visual Identity for SB2008: *Wonder* would be considered as a more "unsystematic" than coherent. This edition seems to take on distinctive

approaches across its phases and applications with no coordinated use of its manipulated visible elements.

For the “Type 1: Branded Variety” of SB2011: *Open House* and SB2013: *If the World Changed*, the visual identities align to the conventional definitions of visual identities through its more logocentric approach and its corresponding set of visual elements. It is with “Type 2: Flexible Variety” evidenced in SB2006: *Belief* and SB2016: *An Atlas of Mirrors*, that we find the intentionality of loosening systems as a valid strategy. The design appear less recurring. Its content-driven concept also conveys a shared belief of audiences that are mature and visually literate enough to appreciate the nuances and cultural complexities of its respective themes. The difference across applications can be quite extensive even though there is always a recurring suite of elements that help to relate things. Arguably, for the “Type 3: Unsystematic” identities, it functions very much like any other Type and also closely with how older large-scale international contemporary art exhibitions were initially designed. However, what “Type 3: Unsystematic” identities lack is the benefits of Visual Identity’s intentionality of structure and organisational consistencies. The system it lacks are persuasive and authoritative structures catered to key objectives and stakes such as the building of familiarity and recognition. (Williams 2009, Humberstone 2015).

This labelling of Types across a spectrum of coherences are done in order to group the formal qualities of these adaptations. They also make values more comparable. Overall, all five editions of the Singapore Biennale identify with different Types with no explicit thread of continuity across each subsequent edition. Two editions were classified as Type 1 and 2 each, while one edition fits the range of Type 3. This categorisation also allows for my research to clarify in detail how the identities differ across the editions of the Singapore Biennale.

Considering the format of the Biennale as well as how it is conveyed to the masses, the approach that underlies “Type 1: Branded Variety” is not particularly unique to the Arts and Culture sector. For the most part, this direction is practical in lieu of economic and commercial interests with an “authoritative presence”, taking on a direct role in attracting and coercing. As described in my review, it is a translation for

broader consumer interests in order to “fuel recognition, amplify differentiation and make big ideas and meanings accessible”(Wheeler 2009). However, by this “softens the edges of capitalism” of its stakes, design takes on a mediatory responsibility (Lo 2016). Visual Identity may perpetuate the problem constraints for arts and culture through its resemblance of corporate branding (Morley 2017), thereby refuting the needs of changing visual identities across different editions.

For the identities that fall under “Type 2: Flexible Variety” and “Type 3: Unsystematic”, flexibility and adaptability mirrors the same fluid nature associated with contemporary art. However, it also poses a disadvantage to the overall messaging and direction by presenting a disjointed form of communication that buries the message rather than reinforce it. In that way, such an approach that considers how applications are adapted differently. It may run the risk of diluting the Visual Identity and the information it is meant to convey.

This relates closely to Kelvin’s account of how the design of applications often usually requires having to produce a set of guidelines. This would detail the system and parameters of the Visual Identity for designers in other capacities or aspects to work through. For instance in *SB2016: An Atlas of Mirrors*, Kelvin shares that Couple “were not involved in the exhibition aspect as they had an in-house exhibition designer.” The actual development of certain components were developed outside of the design agency’s direct purview. In that way, the differences across application may not always be envisioned or intended by the designer. It may have resulted from practical circumstances. The translation and development process in such cases may transpire differently. This introduces the danger of misdirecting or confusing audiences who may misinterpret intentions and visuals which have offshoot from what was intended.

Misinterpretation or miscommunication with regards to design have also happened before locally. There are instances where the design and its represented information have disconnected between different phases and tainted or skewed the central curatorial messaging. One example is the case of the naming and dress code of the *Empire Ball* gala in conjunction with an ong-going exhibition, *Artist and Empire: (En)countering Colonial Legacies* at the National Gallery of Singapore. In light of that

faux pas, Museum Director Eugene Tan admits that the ball and its flippant referencing of the exhibition had taken “ the exhibition and its curatorial intent a step back”.

Similarly, on the account of a different exhibition, Ng Yi-Sheng’s critique in The Straits Times forum section about the exhibition *Raffles In Southeast Asia: Revisiting The Scholar And The Statesman* at the Asian Civilisations Museum makes a mention about the marketing visuals of the exhibition. He remarked how the pre-event design featured catchphrases that advertised the figure of Raffles as "ruthless or righteous", "scholar or scoundrel", "botanist or brute" where none of such tensions were presented or addressed on-site in the exhibition design. These examples are likely to be negative example cases where components can become fragmented in the process and application. The process of slipping away is not just attributed or solely borne by the designer. However, it goes to show not only the significance of design and “cultural identities” as an interface for art exhibition, it also details the complex processes that design work is inevitably embroiled in. For the cases above, design and communication is entangled with the Visual Identity framework and its rigor of adaptation across the pre-event applications with the curatorial and content.

Overall, the Typological Analysis Method through the Types of Visual Identity by cohesiveness also help designers consider and distribute different needs from a Visual Identity perspective. Curatorial committees and design agencies can also achieve a more open and tangible view of what is possible. Without a more specific way of assessing and reading Visual Identity and what it can do, conversations about expectations and responsibilities assigned to design might become reliant and even handicapped by broader commercial objectives. These categories help to break down the otherwise oversimplification of reading Visual Identity through just the logomark or single deliverable or phase. Design in this study is also discussed in descriptive terms of how cohesive or recurring are certain aspects of the design elements and whether the design adapts to different contexts.

In view of the unique conditions that oversee the process of developing Visual Identity for Art Biennales that also undergoes cyclical change, the findings have also

demonstrated that there is a spectrum of how we can engage with design. It also paves the way for a discussion of how visual identities for thematic large-scale international contemporary art exhibitions can be considered and developed a specialisation.

## 4.2 Findings on the application of Semiotic Methods of Interpretation of Visual Identity for the Singapore Biennale

This section contains the findings of my two semiotic methods to interpret qualities of visual identities across the first five editions of the Singapore Biennale from 2006 – 2016. In chapter 3.2, this refers to the Semantic Profiling of Visual Identity and the Functional Matrix for Visual Identity, based on Steven Skaggs' semiotic profiling to identify visual attributes.

### 4.2.1 Semantic Profiling of Visual Identity

The first method of semiotic analysis is the Semantic Profiling of Visual Identity. This method is a tabulation of meaning behaviours that span by the degree of affective or conceptual registers for the Visual Identities for each edition of the Singapore Biennale from 2006 – 2015. When categorised<sup>47</sup>, the different permutations of these registers can be sorted into four approaches of Semantic Profile types. This method reveals the inherent strategies in visual identities with descriptive detail across figures 3.5 to 3.6.

In my findings in fig 4.1 below, I charted the Singapore Biennale's five visual identities into categories of descriptive registers with their perceivable degree identified and defined. For visualisation, my descriptions of profiles are surmised by squares that demarcate that degree of each register's quality or in semiotics terms, "valency". The degrees of valency can be easily discerned, with smaller marks referring to a less noticeable lower valency, while larger markings suggest a very noticeable higher valency. Additionally, no markings demarcate that the semiotic profile was not registered by interpretation. Below is the overview of the behavioural profiles for the Singapore Biennale tabulated across different semantic types. Each descriptive register

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<sup>47</sup> Refer to 3.2.1 for procedure of categorisation.

contains the aesthetic interpretations of the Visual Identity design behind the evaluation of its inherent strategies.

Fig 4.1 Semantic Profiling of Singapore Biennale 2006–2016					
Edition	Singapore Biennale 2006: <i>Belief</i>	Singapore Biennale 2008: <i>Wonder</i>	Singapore Biennale 2011: <i>Open House</i>	Singapore Biennale 2013: <i>If the World Changed</i>	Singapore Biennale 2016: <i>An Atlas of Mirrors</i>
Affective Register: Presence	■	.	■	■	■
	Dispersed use of colours and graphics. "Singapore Biennale" is set separately from the theme at a few key deliverables.	Dispersed use of colours and graphics. Familiar Cityscapes. An attempt to keep some formats similar to the past edition.	Fluorescent and bold key colour. Highly legible messaging resembling forms of instructional manual or wayfinding	Bright key colour and patterns. Logo and graphic is a legible dynamic key visual that adapts to its application.	Key use of monotone gradients. Key visual is legible and dynamic across different adaptations.
Affective Register: Expression	■	■	.	.	■
	Multiple textures, illustration and typography blending functional content with objects, mood and words.	Some textures and illustration used across applications. Key visual mood led using Singapore's cityscape.	Logo/Symbol centric and functional modern approach. Devoid of graphics and representational imagery.	Key wind-vane graphic used across all key applications along with heavy colour and tone to establish mood.	Use of actual artwork alongside dynamic shapes to create a sense of the sublime and establish the mood for interpretation.
Conceptual Register: Denotation	■	■	■	■	■
	The textures, illustration and graphic use literal vernacular like money and idols to denote <i>Belief</i> .	Key visual of cityscape refers to one's fascination with the urban cityscape. Communicates the location of the edition.	Key details denote the utilitarian approach of inquiry with vernacular referencing urbanity. Freight and industrial visuals and forms.	Key visuals refer to the theme of change with arrows on directional lines and way-finding forms.	Some details denote suggestions of the theme, with the inverted R and the gradient mirror planes that give the idea of reflection.
Conceptual Register: Connotation	■	.	■	■	■

	The symbolic forms such as the Bible as day book and joss paper style colours connote interpretations of the theme of <i>Belief</i> .	The key visual is quite direct in the idea of Singapore's appeal as a colourful and wonderful city.	A shape that is an inverted house making an arrow. It functions as a literal symbol that refers to the theme of location and home.	The use of wind vanes and weather patterns to suggest themes of change. Moving storylines that rely on symbology of these forms.	The use of maps and landscapes of the artworks featured further point to the title and its associated ideas of migration and geographies.
Approach	"Projective Soufuls"	"Recessive Apathetics"	"Projective Apathetics"	"Projective Apathetics"	"Projective Soufuls"

Fig. 4.1 Preliminary Table of Semantic profiling of visual identities and its strategies.

From fig 4.1, we can observe that SB2011: *Open House* as well as SB2013: *If the World Changed* reflect the "Projective Apathetics" approach for its visual identities. These identities are eye-catching. Observably, we see this in the reflective in the bold neon type and logo-centric approach for SB2011: *Open House* as well as the use of bright colours and key wind-vane graphic applied systematically across different deliverables in SB2013: *If the World Changed*.

Additionally, these are not designs that persuade through the eliciting of feelings or sentiment, but instead are quite utilitarian. For SB2011: *Open House*, it makes explicit reference to the premise of *Open House*. This is established through the use of vernacular that is associated with urbanity, freight and industrial visuals and forms as well as a universal shape that is an inverted house making an arrow which in turn functions as a literal symbol referring to the topic of location and home. On the other hand in SB2013: *If the World Changed*, the use of wind vanes and weather patterns point to ideas of the theme of change with arrows on directional lines and wayfinding forms. The use of wind vanes and weather patterns connote change and moving storylines describe the theme of change and history of the region with map lines applied on collaterals and way-finding forms.

The "Projective Soufuls" approach for its visual identities correspond to the two Singapore Biennale editions that are categorised under the "Type 1: Branded Variety". These types are distinctively cohesive, generally coherent across all phases and applications, with observable recurring or corresponding visual elements. They identify with broader commercial contexts defined in the literary review.

In fig 4.1, we can observe that SB2006: *Belief* as well as SB2016: *An Atlas of Mirrors* reflect the “Projective Soulfuls” approach for its visual identities. These identities are characterised to have a high presence which stand out from the environment. The design is not just prominent and spectacular but are also highly effective in drawing emotions. This sensibility is observable in the expressive presence of SB2006: *Belief* with its unmistakably colourful graphic textures, illustration and typography blending functional content with objects, mood and words. These elements take the connotative and denotative forms pertaining to the vernacular context of the theme of *Belief*. Alternatively, SB2016: *An Atlas of Mirrors* presents a highly legible and adaptive key visual. The design is made up of selected actual artworks that also feature maps and landscapes and strongly point to ideas about migration and geographies, alongside the masthead’s dynamic shape which creates a sense of the sublime and establish the mood for interpretation.

This “Projective Soulfuls” approach for visual identities also correspond to the two Singapore Biennale editions that are categorised under the “Type 2: Flexible Variety”. They are sorted to be less unifying with observable differences in its phases and applications, but still distinctly cohesive from certain elements and approaches that cater to familiarity and recognition via unconventional meaning profiles. These identities, unlike Type 1, may identify with commercial approaches in areas of application, but based on their high affective registers, they tend to articulate meaning through presence and emotive techniques as well. For the Singapore Biennale, this category of Visual Identity manoeuvres with graphical flexibility and adaptive visual systems that describe a kind of elasticity and a looser take on design framework in its identity, aligning to Nick Bell’s call for redefinition and the speculative sub-genre of cultural identities as well as Hyland’s “post-logo” conjecture.

From fig 4.1, we lastly observe that SB2008: *Wonder* reflects the “Recessive Soulful” approach. These identities tend to be described to have a quiet presence and devoid of feeling. The design can be described to function like the other visual identity cohesive Types, but the difference lies in how different applications do not have a coherent approach across phases and applications. I described the edition to have used some

textures and illustrations used across applications, but the inspiration for *Wonder* is quite direct in referencing Singapore's appeal as a colourful wonderful city. In terms of cohesion, the fonts colours and graphics are also not consistent in a meaningful way.

This "Recessive Soulful" approach for its visual identities are categorised under the "Type 3: Unsystematic variety". These types are generally low in presence and less noticeable, due to a loosely tied design system that illicit recognition by engendering certain impressions or establishing a relationship with the consumer.

Between affective and conceptual registers, the conceptual aspect tends to take form as a response to the theme as interpretation of its content. From creating dynamic logos and graphic systems that modulate across different applications to collaborating with artists to create graphics that correspond with the curatorial statement, we observe how the diversity in approach normalises Jona Piehl's description of design for arts as one that is not closed to contributions from artistic collaboration and for this thesis and its case studies, it visualises curatorial gestures within the Singapore Biennale experience.

With formal description of distinct registers in each of the five editions of the Singapore Biennale, the analysis develops a semiotic basis to profile Visual Identity Types. These findings allow us to evaluate complex aesthetic interpretations of graphic design using distinct semantic profiles. This method describes non-conforming identities which otherwise would appear "un-designed" or adverse to theoretical notions of visual identity. By profiling different editions, my findings reveal the inherent strategies of these identities to be discerningly adaptable and content-focused, a condition that is critical to the discourse of the themes and objectives of the Art Biennale.

#### 4.2.2 Functional Matrix for Visual Identity

The second and final method of semiotic analysis is the Functional Matrix for assessing Visual Identity. This is a method of analysing the immediacy or definitivity of its perceptual cues in relation to the exhibition's premise or production.

Skaggs defined both “soft” and “hard” registers as intersecting values that render different designs to be more immediate or definitive in its perceptual cues than others. Two opposing attributes create four nodes that define the focus of the aesthetic strategy. On fig 3.9 in chapter 3.2.2, I elaborated on these intersecting nodes and how designs can rely on visual and verbal as well as environmental and psychological distinctions and correspondences. These values allow us to make a valued judgement if the design takes on an appropriate attitude to the exhibition’s premise or production.

I charted the Singapore Biennale’s five visual identities in my findings in fig 4.2 below. This is done by defining its soft and hard semiotic attributes that intersect semantics and syntax levels of perception. Each attribute contains a description of aesthetic evaluation of the Visual Identity design that substantiates its particularity and valency.

For visualisation, the intensity of its attributes are surmised by squares that demarcate the degree of each register’s quality. Its “valency” is demarcated with smaller marks referring to a less noticeable, lower valency, while larger markings suggesting a very noticeable higher valency. Additionally, no markings demarcate that the semiotic profile was not registered by interpretation.

Fig. 4.2 Preliminary Functional Matrix analysis for the Singapore biennale					
	Singapore Biennale 2006: <i>Belief</i>	Singapore Biennale 2008: <i>Wonder</i>	Singapore Biennale 2011: <i>Open House</i>	Singapore Biennale 2013: <i>If the World Changed</i>	Singapore Biennale 2016: <i>An Atlas of Mirrors</i>
Hard: Concrete Node		■	■	■	
	Legible and functional in type and colour use, but loosely connected and expanded in a variety of graphic application.	A recurring cityscape that corresponds to the brand of <i>Wonder</i> . Present across all deliverables, despite different styles.	“Iconic”, typography-led and gridded in an almost corporate and systematic manner.	Largely legible typography angled on a pivot, resembling a directional sign. The curved corners on glyphs correspond to an asian stylistic sensibility.	Centrally type-driven, arranged to reflect across each other. Gradients correspond to shiny mirror-like surfaces.
Hard: Praxis Node	■				

	Appropriate: Localised references and overall, familiar vernacular to local receivers.	Graphics are vaguely identifiable by commonplace connection of wonderment and the city.	Appropriate: Its symbolism and typographic choices are universal with no particular conditional element.	Abstract: Its symbology and typographic choices are universal and modern with no particular conditional element.	Abstract: Its symbology and typographic choices are universal and modern with no particular conditional element.
Soft: Tonal Node	■				■
	Captures a sense of reality and time through familiar vernacular, material and lo-fi photocopy effect.	Differs across applications, appearing in different spectrums of glitziness and dazzle.	Plainly applied: neutral and minimalist. Sleek industrial and functional style.	The blues and greys projects a sense of depth, the expressive lines are confident and coherent between all deliverables.	Darker mood, sublime glow, representation of metallic and reflective effect through gradients.
Soft: Form			■	■	
	Applications are conceptual and loosely tied across each other, but has a complex unity.	Not cohesive: There is no strict unifying application, and visually disjointed.	Orderly: The designs hinge on a clear systematic grid and even proportions.	Orderly: Clear, systematic and proportionate, and repetitive.	Versatile: Reflection across different planes, monotone dynamic logo that can be unfolded.
Description	Attitude-Praxis Antagonists: Visual and copy driven appropriately conceptual.	Primarily Text and content reliant	Attitudinal Cluster: Perceptual / Cognitive primarily copy driven	Attitudinal Cluster: Perceptual / Cognitive primarily copy driven	Psychological

Fig. 4.2. Preliminary Table of Functional Matrix analysis for the *Singapore Biennale*

From fig 4.2, SB2011: *Open House* and SB2013: *If the World Changed* are positioned at the intersection of the Concrete and Form nodes. These are antagonist nodes that are part of the Perceptual and Cognitive reading cluster<sup>48</sup>, which relies on both recognisability and composition as strategies. The Visual Identity for each edition is more consolidated into a key visual-led Visual Identity with focus on legibility and clarity as described in fig. 4.2. For SB2011: *Open House*, the design uses concrete qualities that are iconic, typography-led and gridded in an almost corporate and systematic manner. Similarly, SB2013: *If the World Changed* utilise largely legible type angled on a pivot, resembling a directional sign. These outcomes tend to be both memorable and recognisable. Hence, in terms of function, this is possibly something that focuses on a more consumer-centred marketing side of the exhibition objectives.

<sup>48</sup> This profile is described in Fig. 3.9 Intersecting nodes of Functional Matrix.

These hard attributes are critical to the success of footfall and to also better position of the exhibition on an international stage.

Based on Skaggs' permutation of the Functional Matrix, when Concrete and Form nodes are foregrounded, the other two nodes of Praxis and Tone are overshadowed and tend to be made peripheral in most considerations of design. What both editions of the Singapore Biennale lacks and excludes in their key strategy is both connotative and contextual strategies which makes the design versatile and appropriate. These designs can work on any city, as they rely on a minimalistic approach, with no particular conditional element that connote context.

From fig 4.2, we observe "Type 2: Flexible Variety" Visual Identities, namely SB2006: *Belief* and SB2016: *An Atlas of Mirrors* that take on diverse approaches to functionality and employ different strategies across the intersecting nodes of the Functional Matrix. Looking at SB2006: *Belief* first, its identity features a combination of Tonal and Praxis nodes. These antagonist nodes are a visual and verbal cluster that uses connotative and contextual strategies in response to the curatorial statement. This inaugural edition is the only edition that utilised contextual and localised references of religions, money and other vices that are familiar vernacular to local audiences. The stylistic treatment is also an edition that captures a sense of reality and time through familiar vernacular that is made even more humane through the craft in material use and the lo-fi photocopy effect. With the varying use of these visuals across different applications, the outcomes also tend to be both versatile and relatable to audiences.

For SB2006: *Belief*, when Tonal and Praxis nodes are foregrounded, the other two Concrete and Form nodes are overlooked. These nodes are characterised by a shared clarity in textual and compositional attributes. In that way, the disregard for the Concrete and Form nodes also make the outcomes more recognisable. However, the applications are observably less coherent across its Visual Identity Phases. However, these soft attributes such as expressive lines or an emotive use of colour are often what characterises the edition. By describing Theseus' use of tone being unconventional and straying away from the norm which favours a certain orderliness, Justin Zhuang also makes reference to a local condition whereby,

“In a country built on rational order, literacy is often mistakenly equated as being literal. The result is a bland and blatant visual culture, built on a prevailing belief that graphic design is a calculated formula to be executed.”

As a series, the Singapore Biennale shifted away from something more contextually reliant from SB2008: *Wonder* onwards. There is an observable lack of contextual strategies used. Perhaps this could be due to Praxis’ strategy as an uneconomical approach to representing ideas. Justin Zhuang describes this in the expressive quality in Theseus’ practice:

“The refusal to submit to the logic of efficiency is what makes Chan and his WORK agency unique in Singapore’s graphic design scene... In his print designs, words behave like images, and images are to be read like words. Letters amass to give texture or stand out to flaunt their forms. Pictures sit side by side in conversation or are cropped to offer questions. We are confronted with a straightforward line of communication.” (Zhuang, J. 2016)

The second and final “Type 2: Flexible variety” SB2016: *An Atlas of Mirrors* is primarily dependent on the Tonal node. As a soft semiotic attribute, the use of mood and feel as key approach to design is described to be a psychological strategy. This type means that it relies heavily on how the design relates to intentions through its connoted sensibilities. Through the use of landscapes and other artworks paired with the representation of metallic and reflective effect through gradients, the designers establish a breathtaking and sublime key visual. This approach inspires interest to see the works, resulting in a more related and appropriate solution to intentions through the design.

For concepts with soft semiotic attributes, the visual identities tend to favour tone over context and visuals over text. This is apparent in SB2016: *An Atlas of Mirrors* complex approach to the key visual design. Often layered with artworks, the key visual and information together, the type is also versatile in its use of reflection through the different gradient planes. This type system also echoes the reflective metaphor that is

present in the theme's reference to "Mirrors." Beyond the suggestive forms that help to give a more recognisable form to the abstract theme, the graphic and typographic choices are similar to SB2011: *Open House*. This is observable through a shared universal and modern design with no particular conditional elements that suggest notions on the exhibition's geography or focus.

From fig 4.2, we also observe "Type 3: Unsystematic Variety" of visual identity SB2016: *An Atlas of Mirrors* is primarily dependent on the Verbal node. This type of approach falls primarily in the Concrete node which relies mainly on the key visual and wordings to illicit meaning. This is evident in the design where we see a simplification of SB2006: *Belief* Visual Identity type system for the "Singapore Biennale" logomark, by adding a cityscape that corresponds to the thematic title *Wonder* in the reflection of the water as a central key visual. Despite the different styles, the render of the key visual is present across all deliverables.

As a hard semiotic attribute, concepts tend to be precise and rely on copy over visual. Despite a recurring visual used for SB2008: *Wonder*, the cityscape is vaguely identifiable for consumers to consider wonderment in relation to the city. However, it is also possible to consider how the explicit representation of the urbanscape as acting in the interest of reinforcing Singapore as a location of the Art Biennale. The priority for this edition was founded on an interest to make the Visual Identity recognisable by introducing a familiar vernacular in the key visual.

Overall, from the observation of the comparative chart of the five editions in Fig. 4.2, the harder semiotic attributes tend to lean toward the more Concrete node by function in the later four editions of the Biennale. Perceptually, it demonstrates a Singaporean convention that leans toward more pronounced messagings. This means that most of the Singapore Biennale visual identities fall into "Type 1: Branded Variety" conventional and facilitatory roles, reflecting a more conceptually-driven approach.

In terms of the valency of its nodes in the Functional Matrix, all identities except SB2006: *Belief* fall within a low to middle ground value of its visual attributes. This trend makes clear the pattern of a conservative convention in the conceptualisation for

Singapore Biennale. While it may point towards or subconsciously embody the cultural condition of design in Singapore, it does not also make the design any less appropriate or arguably effective. For instance, with SB2011: *Open House*, the approach of using a simple play on symbolism of a down-facing arrow or house overturned symbol is a recurring symbol that defined the edition's premise and functioned clearly.

These approaches are useful to identify and be aware of in the ideation process, especially when considering the perpetual renewal of conditions in the cyclical practice of Biennales. It is important to decide what is appropriate and the designer also has to discern that through techniques of their own. This consideration extends beyond design and into the management of processes and communication channels with the curatorial committee. By having an overview of different nodes in its Functional Matrix and registers in its Semantic Profile, we also open ways to consider strategies to visual identity outside of "Type 1: Branded Variety". That also enables organisers and designers to define and compare visual identities through characteristics and factors that matter to the Singapore Biennale. The overview would be useful in practice to calibrate directions for Visual Identity either by negotiating nodes or registers or through plotting the options in the chart and finding the suitable option. This would be elaborated further in the next chapter.

Visual Identity for the past five editions, had set the tone in a useful and surprising manner, keeping the series diverse and consistently unique that is in tandem to the experience. The semiotic methods also help recognise and assess the performance of visual identities. Considering the many factors that rely on its Visual Identity design for Art Biennales and how it shapes and represent the exhibition, this visualisation of semiotics can assist as a crucial diagnostic tool. For example, it can help with identifying patterns, categorising interpretations and solving problems that are often convoluted by vague terms and multiple factors to interpretation.

Criticisms of using semiotics as an analytical method to structure design has been mainly about its theoretical bearings that are not applicable outside of it in practice. Critics had found the theoretical framework to be "a crushing of the aesthetic response through the weight of the theoretical framework" (Hayward 1996), relying on

descriptive structures, omitting process and “favouring the key group of interpretants instead of a wider context” (Gardiner 1992). Additionally, external factors also affects the assessment. Some examples are conditions such as different design budgets and time taken to develop the designs, limiting the choices of approaches to more economical ones.

However, teams working on the Singapore Biennale would find that the use of Steven Skagg’s utilisation of semiotics functions as language to address the issue designers face when having to propose and communicate design through a conversational process. This would be a systematic and procedural way to discuss interpretive values to the decision-makers of the design. Demonstratively, the study is an introduction of structure and vocabulary within techniques of discussion that consolidate formats of exhibition-making of Biennales amidst limited definitions of Visual Identity.

Across time, we would be able to recalibrate thematic adaptations across phases, identify nodes and registers that works and what doesn’t in context, in order to make calculated shifts to harness the appropriate approach for the current edition and improve conditions of future editions.

It is an essential facet of my study to reintroduce structural relations and uncover the nature of design practice which cannot be read in limited definitions. Hence, my research seeks to investigate the inevitable plurality and instability of meanings in how speculative practice such as design, deal with clarity and rigour in the design process.

We can also reconsider the brief to consider the uses of hard and soft in the creative brief. To curators and designers, my paper is useful in that the Semantic Profiles and Functional Matrix established common phases, language and types. These are used to measure and contrast different aspects or components of visual identities between different editions. In the lens of my research, the spectrum of Visual Identity provides a measurable means to typologise and read such approaches through functional and Semantic Profiles.

## 5 Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings and insights from typological assessments, semiotic analysis in relation to in-depth interviews with designers for the Singapore Biennale. This is done to address the criticisms, verify theoretical frameworks and contexts established in my review, on approaches to visual identities for the Singapore Biennale from 2006 to 2016.

I will establish what the research findings mean to designers, curators and organisers working on the identity for Art Biennales and exhibitions alike. On the roles and responsibilities in design development, I begin with cross referencing my literature reviews and interviews that brought new knowledge into how designers, curators and audiences were part of the development of Visual Identity for the Singapore Biennale. This would resolve my research questions on who were the people involved in the development of Visual Identity of the Singapore Biennale, as well as how they are responsible for the outcome of the first five editions of the Singapore Biennale.

On topic of specialisation in cultural identity, I will be looking into the different types of Visual Identity that are present throughout the five editions of the Singapore Biennale to distinguish various types of approaches. This would allow me to establish the validity of the term and compare the way Singapore Biennale's visual identities differ from more commonplace definitions of Visual Identity.

With regards to the objectives that characterise Visual Identity, I elaborate on the complex scope of developing the Visual Identity for the Singapore Biennale through theoretical and first-hand accounts that also allows for the Biennale's and the various administration or conditions to be captured and considered.

On a macro view on Art, Culture and Art Biennales, I address the extent of the Singapore Biennale as a series with a cyclical refresh of Visual Identity. Additionally, I will also assess the possibility of a long-term Visual Identity framework for the Singapore Biennale and through what was discussed in related examples as well as the

interviews with designers for the Singapore Biennale, I will consider the limitations and implications of considering a long-term approach to Visual Identity.

Lastly, I will discuss the topic of Visual Identity and its resonances to other similar exhibitions and eventually, within larger contexts of the arts and cultural fields. This segment would also address the practical functions of the paper and how the research can be used by future organising committees of the Singapore Biennale to better develop the visual identities of future editions.

## 5.1 Contextual and Procedural Insights of the Five Editions of the Singapore Biennale

### 5.1.1 Curatorial Committees and their Engagement of Designers

In my review, *Visual Identity for Singapore Biennale* begins with the establishment of the curatorial committee for every edition. It is this team that steers the composition of the creative brief and directs the work of the design agencies.

The creative brief consolidated for the design agency comprises of key details such as the title, curatorial messaging and objectives for the edition of the Singapore Biennale. For SB2013: *If the World Changed*, the design lead, Little Ong from Ffurious shared in his interview that the brief is the key starting point of reference to how designers pitch their ideas at an early pre-design phase. It is where “the intention for what we were tasked to do is clear. In the Gebiz<sup>49</sup> documents there was already a list (of design applications) to quote for.”

The brief is also introduced during the initial pitching process that invites various design agencies to propose their options of design interpretations of the brief. The core discussion during this process would be spearheaded by the curatorial committee and the marketing team from the organiser. They would be inquiring with the agencies about their proposals and arranging meetings. Each edition’s curatorial director would

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<sup>49</sup> Gebiz refers to the Singapore Government's one-stop online procurement portal. All the public sector's invitations for quotations and tenders are posted on through that portail and suppliers can search for government procurement opportunities, download tender documents, and submit their bids online.

finally make a decision based on which design proposal and cost work best for them. Little Ong finds that the by-invite bidding process is less speculative than a more open call but necessary. In my interview with him, he said “For the Singapore Biennale, its by invite, you know client is already interested in work you do, there is a bit of respect knowledge and connection built into it. You know they kind of like your style, it’s no longer just shooting in the dark anymore, you do stand a chance and that changes the creative process a bit more, I think its a system that needs to be in place, where there is a lot more businesses here.”

To Kelvin Lok from the design agency Couple who worked on SB2016: *An Atlas of Mirrors* as well as the yet to launch SB2019: *Every Step in the Right Direction*, the core design development only happened after the initial bidding stage. He said “For the Atlas of Mirrors, we submitted visual things but it wasn’t a full logo, it was a rough sketch and idea that shows the potential of a key visual. When we started the project we were willing to start from scratch and [the design] has changed a lot. Even for the one we are working now [SB2019: *Every Step in the Right Direction*], we submitted the potential of the visual and now we are working with the curators to see how we can develop it”.

The brief formulated by the committee or organiser informs the way that the designer proposes and approaches the project of Visual Identity and its eventual development. Between the first proposal to the finalisation of design corresponds to the critical area of design development defined as my area of focus in my review.

With regards to the pre-design phase, the interviewees have also related the demerits of the tender system of bidding and call for proposals. To them, this is not the most conducive for the design ideation process. In hindsight, Little reflects that the speculative nature of pitching and relying on an early brief makes the process very tentative. To him, this is like guesswork which feels trivialising despite its supposed scale and importance. In my interview with him, he states that “You don’t get the facetime and discussions open up a lot more. There is a lack of in-depth discussion that take place earlier, which does affect the process. You are in [a] situation where you

are doing more guesswork than actually being very clear about what the intention could be.”

On a similar thread, Kelvin Lok finds that starting the design with the cost for deliverables first prevents the possibility of having a more encompassing process. This is so as the expectations of work is disproportionate to the current process. He shares that “(Generally) we don’t agree with coming up with visual proposals in to bid. Submit your track record, portfolio and write up works, but if you come up with a visual, that doesn’t work as designers have to work in silo and come up with a proposal they think it works and submit, (which becomes more or less just) guess work. It's wrong to choose design based on two weeks worth of work to represent the Biennale for next two years.”

Extending from the role that design occupies in the Biennale and its significance, Kelvin also questions why the process of hiring designers differs from hiring the curatorial director. He says that “The way they hire a designer should be the same way: You should be hired based on your portfolio, awards, the work you did and how effective it is, instead of talking about scope and cost at the beginning which [inevitably] sets the tone for the rest of the [process].”

As key organisers, my interviews with the various designers have also identified that the curatorial director would mainly be the key figure who would work closely with the design agency to develop the overall curatorial direction and the selection and presentation of artworks for the Singapore Biennale that year. The very decision to have the designers directly report to and liaise with the curatorial director also suggests the significance and urgency that is assigned to design as the main and most public-facing interface of the biennale.

In conclusion, we gain insight into the current engagement of design agencies begins at the pitching phase, which also comes to frame and directs the subsequent design processes. It is through this that we find the limitations of working through a tender or pitching system. This forecloses a collaborative approach that draws on the

designer's expertise to develop Visual Identity and propose its appropriate applications.

Recognising the various purposes of something as wide-reaching as Visual Identity, the engagement of designers should be integrated into the same creative process as how other creatives are engaged for the Singapore Biennale. In my conversation about the developmental process of Visual Identity with Kelvin, he favours a more collaborative or similarly measured mode of operating. It is less efficient than the bidding system, but to him, this will result in a more effective process. He states "For government organisations whether they are buying computers or buying design services, they use the same kind of workflow to procure services: what you can deliver and for how much. The level of collaboration (between the designer and the client) depends on the theme, if it (is premised around) partnership, then the approach could work." However, Kelvin also elaborates that this may entail a long-term process that some designers are not keen to engage in. He says that ultimately, "The process of hiring a designer to work on a project is a two way thing, whether the designers would also be willing to work on a project if the scope and money is not determined until mid-way through. It depends on how much a designer is willing to put their time into something indeterminate at the start, should also be considered."

The designers' sharing of their experience of the Singapore Biennale puts into perspective a consensus of how certain procedures and structures could be improved or further discussed. Key processes such as the pitching and bidding process does not only rely on a designers initial ideation, cost and guesswork. A crucial phase is the process shared between the curatorial committee and designers after clinching the tender process. The outcomes are more rigorously developed later, which raises the question of a need to even foreground ideation so heavily early on in the process before any confirmation.

### 5.1.2 Development process between the Curatorial Committee and Design Agency

Visual Identity for the Singapore Biennale begins from the pitching process where design concepts are presented to and eventually selected and approved by the

curatorial director and committee. Little believes that Visual Identity should be curatorially centred, with the theme or curatorial statement expressed through the design. He felt the design worked for his edition was because of how his team “interpreted the theme well and maybe also, how different it was from the previous Singapore Biennale [edition].”

On the other hand, Kelvin figured that interpretation of the curatorial statement was not the primary intention, but instead, it is the appeal to the ticket buyers of the biennale. In his interview, he said that “It is curatorial-driven (in the sense that) you need to communicate the curatorial statement, but the key objective is marketing-driven, (in that the main intention) is to drive people to see the various artworks.”

It is the focus on its appeal to consumers through art that made their approach resonant and compelling. Kelvin shared more on their functional and expressive approach and elaborated that, “For Visual Identity, design acts like a canvas in the presentation of art. We try not to brand the Singapore Biennale in such a way that it visually competes with the art or says too much. To us, nothing speaks about the Biennale better and more directly than showing the artworks, even a small preview of it. We selected the artworks that responds to or echoes the curatorial statement emotively. By featuring works with the right tone, the overall design will feel that way... For Visual Identity, design acts like a canvas in the presentation of art. We try not to brand the Singapore Biennale in such a way that visually competes with the art or says too much.”

As every agency and committee is refreshed for all editions, the process also consistently entails handover and reconfiguration as the parties make sense of expectations and timelines. Little describes how it was particularly tough during his time as it was the year where the biennale engaged with 27 curators in total. This circumstance and its unique process hence required getting used to. To Little, what is perhaps more significant is how this process was also being defined just as it was going on. He said “[i]nternally, they had to get used to that process and while it was being defined that had to get that process working with an agency. So there were two

struggles going on... For the Singapore Biennale team, at certain moments, it got a bit frustrating. Later on in the process, everyone got quite busy and when we just talked with the lead curator, things got slightly better. ”

Through the designer interviews, I was able to justify how their processes reflect such diverse outcomes. This is achieved by recognising fundamental differences across the directions and team dynamics between each edition’s organising team and design agency. These are essential components that would define the nature of its Visual Identity. The outcomes can range from a creative response to the curatorial brief or marketing objectives using design that emotively teases what to expect of the exhibition.

### 5.1.3 Reconsidering the Roles of Designers and Audiences

A vital characteristic of the Singapore Biennale is that it is designed for audiences who attend it. In my review, I described how these exhibitions are fundamentally a compelling method of presenting art beyond mere chronology (J.Meijers 1996). In doing so, it also brings art audiences together and to different parts of the world for a cultural dialogue through the presentation of contemporary art (Lee 2012, Smith 2016). Additionally, designers are often briefed on the significant role that audiences play in informing the objectives and approaches of design. However, the very conception of audiences are always envisaged generally . The way they are perceived by different teams as specific targets also shape the design of Visual Identity<sup>50</sup>. In that notion, design then becomes part of the process of presenting the biennale as a kind of commercialised spectacle that is often seen to be “mediatised” and “commodified” (Lee 2012, Bauer and Hou 2013).

In this chapter, I reflect on how the audience is perceived and what is their role. This chapter also considers design’s role in the engagement of consumers. These may come from the interest of footfall for the museum, or how Singapore is perceived. In my conversation with Kelvin and Little, their respective design approach is informed

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<sup>50</sup> The general objectives of the Singapore Biennale can be found in Tender for the Provision of Branding, Design and Web Services for Singapore Biennale in Chapter 2.3

dually by the nature of their engagement with the curatorial intentions and the perceived audience.

Kelvin is cautious of using design to interpret too much of the curatorial messaging as he sees “design acting like a canvas in the presentation of art.” Extending from the reference of a canvas as a medium that facilitates the presentation of art, Kelvin also elaborates that Couple does not “try not to brand (the Singapore Biennale in) such a way that it visually competes with the art or says too much.” In other words, he believes that design should hint and not respond to the curatorial statement as the act of responding and interpreting should belong to the participating artists. There is a distinction made between suggesting or pointing to the curatorial messaging and interpreting it. Kelvin echoes this sentiment that design, as another necessarily visual form of media should not compete with the biennale’s artworks. Instead, he shares that the Visual Identity “should emotionally echo the curatorial statement in a subtle way.”

Describing his approach to the Visual Identity of SB2013: *If The World Changed*, Little adds that their visuals relied on their interpretation about migration in Southeast Asia. This is through the use of weather-related vernacular that gave hints to the curatorial direction and the theme of *If the World Changed*. In that way, his approach shares similarity to that of Kelvin’s. The design sought to suggest and give an impression of the curatorial messaging. In my interview with him, he said “(Our) proposal was based on what we thought of the theme: Artists from around Southeast Asia influencing each other and the migration of people via waterways through history. It happened and transformed this region we knew. That was an important element, especially how boats travelled by wind in the past, so we looked at wind patterns and how maps were designed with topographical elements. Those were interesting elements that informed how we developed the logo of the identity which was a wind vane.” The uniqueness of each edition of the Biennale, as the design responds to the changing themes, is then a very intentional choice.

Ultimately, for Kelvin, the main objective of Visual Identity is to market the event to the potential audiences. He says that “the main intention (of design) is to drive people to see the various artworks” and that “end users may not know it is an Art Biennale”.

As such, there is also an urgent need to address the layman. The direction taken for SB2016: *An Atlas of Mirrors*, was established to provoke curiosity through its expressive use of graphic strategies. This curiosity is also seen as an access point to engage the layman who is drawn to the evocative use of graphic devices. These audiences may be compelled to find out more about the unique correlation of “atlas” with “mirrors”—which may not be immediately comprehensible and require greater contextualisation. The use of art in the pre-event applications further serves to tease out particular mood and interpretations. To Kelvin, this was a way for the design to serve as anticipation and interest in art from the public to buy tickets to look at the art.

On the other hand, Little emphasises his passion and familiarity in designing for the arts. Specifically, he sees visual differences and thematic considerations in creative thematic interpretation as a core aspect and selling point for the interest in the Art Biennale. Little said that “There is a larger scope to explore and be creative (with it)” and “instead of just telling people that this is a ‘house’ of art or what art could look like.” His sentiments echo that of Jonathan Schroeder’s words the prevalence of the “cross-fertilisation” of art and identities as historically, “brand culture” and “culture as brand” are often inter-connected (Schroeder 2005). This is also particularly in line with Little’s remarks on his strategic approach in designing SB2013: *If the World Changed* where he employs elements like abstract lines and the wind vane metaphor as an interpretation of the theme and context.

On graphic interpretation as a solution to differentiate and represent, Little described how “[w]e wanted it to give people that sense of interpretation like what art could be as well.” While this was “drastically different from the one before,” there were affinities to approaches for other editions, such as the SB2011: *Open House*, where he said “maybe visually, our approach was closer to what GOTO Design’s [Visual Identity for Singapore Biennale 2011] because it was graphically driven.”

On roles and responsibilities, the curatorial committee and designers take on key roles to shape design outcomes and its relationship with the curatorial premise. Specifically, the designers I interviewed have shown that there was no identical quality in what the

different curatorial committees were looking for except for a certain coherence and efficacy of relaying the biennale's messaging.

The intentions of the design is dependent on the dynamic between the interests and processes of the curators and designers. In that way, the closeness in which both parties work together also points at the very collaborative nature of this working arrangement that would shape how the Singapore Biennale looks like.

However, what informs designers and their approach is not just the engagement with the curatorial messaging and the curatorial committee but also the need to address the audience and how this demographic is perceived. Whether to trigger footfall, to broaden international perception or the reflection of the State's burgeoning cultural capital, audiences are intimately involved in the design process. The designs draw their attention and spur their interest. Very often, how they respond are also used as benchmarks of a successful edition. The role of the audience is complex. Audiences perceived as a point of interest are often directly or indirectly addressed as targets, demonstrate the convoluted disposition between the approaches to Visual Identity and the objectives of it.

There was a diversity in what the curatorial committees were looking for across the different editions. Through hearing different designers explain the intentions behind their design, the study found that these differences often manifest in how consumers are being perceived in the positioning process as interpreters of messagings. My paper proposed a practice based on Stefanie Jansen and Maarten Pieters' framework on co-creation, identifying the interest of audiences to the Singapore Biennale as an active agent in the design process. People-centricity can also play an instrumental part to the scope of work as introduced in my review in chapter 2.2.

The co-creation way of seeing process describes a more distributed responsibility in the developmental process of projects as well as a more empowering position for key partners such as designers. This allows for us to reorganise by how the weight of design's responsibilities dictate the participation of designers as collaborators who are involved centrally in the planning to application of a project. At the same time,

sustainable and practical framework to involve end-users with the process in a few ways to achieve the project's objectives together (Jansen and Pieters 2018).

For the Singapore Biennale, this would be useful for designers and curators in the field, to put into perspective the interpretive and artistic qualities based on its curatorial direction, instead of an overarching consumer-centric outcome. Such outcomes tend to envelope all other nuances that design particularly serves in the arts and culture sector. With this principle of involvement through co-creation, we identify the interest of audiences to the Singapore Biennale as an active agent in the design process rather than being merely catered to. It is through this distinction, that we are able to prevent the conflation of what the Visual Identity encompasses with who the exhibition is for.

An area of future research would be to consider ways that museums can reestablish the conditions of design and how the procurement processes for services of design can be distinguished. This may involve the role of Visual Identity on a more corporate level, expanding on the idea that design starts from within the conception of the project. Having design be scoped alongside the management organisation instead of a brief after allows for a better cohesion of its messages and its communicative design (Flint, Signori et al. 2018). This widened involvement would progress the current procedure of seeing design work as one that is engaged like any other procurement of goods. This reconsideration of design's involvement provides insight into the intentions and outcomes of Visual Identity through the Singapore Biennale. This is achieved through unpacking the institutional structures and collaborative processes that enable different teams to co-create and influence outcomes in practice.

#### 5.1.4 Singapore on a Global Stage

In this chapter, I surveyed the history of visual identity and its intersection into art biennales around the world, starting from the prominent earliest examples, leading up to Singapore's case study. Through my research into the historical backdrop of Art Biennales, I found that this format of presenting art pre-dated the applied arts schools in Germany that profoundly influenced the conception of a visually integrated

direction (Meggs and Purvis 2011, van den Boom 2015). The visuals that served as what we consider as design in today's classification<sup>51</sup>, however, did not embody strategies and concerns of a global scale as "past environments were simpler" with simpler demands as compared to today's increasingly ambiguous and complicated contexts for design today (Friedman, K., Stolterman, E. 2017).

In my review section 2.4, designing for Biennales began with Venice's. Venice Biennale leaned more toward the idea of an art commission in the early 1890s. Painter and decorator Augusto Sezanne commissioned for the art exhibition emulated classical Greco-Roman traditions in the posters. As the format matured into the global phenomenon of today, the exhibition began embracing the thematic approach that borrowed from graphical influence from war posters. It is also at this time that a typographic brand mark was developed to distinguish the official pavilions.

The evolution of the designs over the decades also comes alongside a proliferation of the art biennale format across the world. Art exhibitions with geopolitical and economic stakes heightens the role of design and what it represents. Much of the agency stem from the maturity of the sector that parallel the professionalisation of visual communication as a field. Applied arts schools in Germany profoundly influenced the conception of a visually integrated direction. The establishment of design agencies led to the maturing of procurement processes. These include creative briefs and creative processes that structure what we associate with today as visual identity. Designers develop or contextualise their design approach by "(re)modelling what has been done before them, adapting or combining these approaches according to personal inclinations and stylistic leanings"(Zakia and Nadin 1987). This brings us to the contemporary era of exhibitions, conditions and ideologies today are embedded into contemporary approaches to practice (Koch 1990) via "post-modern" schools of thought.

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<sup>51</sup> In section 2.4, designing for Biennales leaned more toward the idea of an art commission in the early 1890s used Renaissance revival style inspired renders of Venice by painter and decorator Augusto Sezanne. This was largely because of the revival in classical values of ancient Greece and Rome. Commissioned by the Italian Royalty, the art served as what we consider as design today for the Biennale, —an expression of classical Greco-Roman traditions that through representation, captured beauty and mystery of the world — was likely was done to emulate the classical learning and values of ancient Greece and Rome.

My review distinguished how different Visual Identity for Art Biennales around the world evolved to present the editions through cohesive thematic approaches. The Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (Brisbane, Australia) in 1993 for example, focused on presenting Asian cultures to the world and was sparked by the ongoing decentralisation from the inherent Western narrative (Block 2012, Green and Gardner 2016). The design considers identity as brand-making and favours establishing consistency as opposed to thematic adaptations, grounding the foundations of post-colonial representation. Despite Singapore's Art Biennale fairly late in establishment in 2006, it is another demonstrative and recent example of the growing popularity of Art Biennales by major Asian cities around the world. Expression of Biennale themes like 'Belief or 'Wonder' by design studio WORK and advertising agency Up Brand Buzz respectively, the Singapore Biennale was a flashy and colourful engagement of cultural capital as a 'glocal' approach to put the city on the global map that while also fostering nationalist ideals among locals. Critics like Simon Shiekh and Yongwoo Lee have also similarly written about how state-commissioned Art Biennales flexes what the city has to offer.

The first edition was strategically scheduled to coincide with the International Monetary Fund and Formula One Grand Prix Events in 2006 under the 'Renaissance City Plan III'<sup>52</sup> spearheaded by the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts that sought to enliven the city's image with an art exhibition that affixes "a more appealing dimension to its reputation" with a world-class arts and culture sector (Tang 2007).

Visual Identity also has to engage and meet the demands of being accessed across such an expansive reach. In considering the biennale's design through applying semiotic methods, Singapore's range of approaches in visual identities by different design studios illustrate the perpetual renewal of conditions in the cyclical practice of design that brings about outcomes that can range outside of "Type 1: Branded Variety" even when shoe-horned into performing an aestheticizing function for the state (Tang 2007). The Singapore Biennale thereby proves how we perceive Visual Identity for the arts

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<sup>52</sup> This exhibition series is distinctly part of the state-wide initiative and aim to invest in the arts for the purposes of designing Singapore as a vibrant cultural capital and the Renaissance City Plan's citation of other lively arts cities such as Italy, Paris, Hong Kong and New York further accounts for the state's efforts in funding and developing the Singapore Biennale consistently. Since its first edition, Singapore Biennale is held in Singapore once every two years.

and culture sector, where a general unified design system for art and its consumers would be a simplification, considering the global stakes the Biennale straddles.

Positioning and developing itself as a hub for the arts in the region as evidenced by the articulation of the Renaissance City Plans, Singapore has also taken the opportunity to recognise the Art Biennale's unique function and reach to pull and gather global perspectives through the presentation of art around the world. In terms of the valency of its nodes in the Functional Matrix, all identities except SB2006: *Belief* fall within a low to middle ground value of its visual attributes. This trend makes clear the pattern of supervised messagings in the conceptualisation for Singapore Biennale.

Perceptually, it demonstrates a Singaporean convention that leans toward more pronounced messagings as state apparatus to reflect the state's interests. This means that most of the Singapore Biennale visual identities fall into "Type 1: Branded Variety" conventional and facilitatory roles, reflecting a more conceptually-driven approach. This aligns to John Byrne's observation on how the Biennale is also symptomatic of globalisation, resulting in the sharp rise in international Art Biennales.

Sharing about Couple's processes, Kelvin made reference to the reach and scope of the Biennale as extending beyond the local and regional to the global. He described how the design for the Biennale has to be considered on an international level and that they "try to better the design standards locally and regionally." For Kelvin, the Singapore Biennale's visual identity has to be able to stand up to and be comparable "the best biennales in the world", holding up to the perception and scrutiny of the Biennale's operations unfolding on a global stage.

Bearing in mind that visual identity and design work for the Biennale is endowed with such a responsibility to perform on a greater scale, the question of approaches to tackle such a unique challenge also brings us back to the main thrust of the paper. The thesis was built upon the recent discussions which were thinking about existing and useful theoretical and practical frameworks for agencies that design for the arts and culture sector and how they can accommodate both the designer's creative vision and the curatorial vision and narratives. On the proposition of specific needs to visual

identities for the sector, Nick Bell alluded to an unreflexive development in design for art that moves towards a homogeneity of identity design where instead of cultural identity<sup>53</sup>, design gets subsumed into the apprehension of considering its stakes:

“... graphic design finds itself dancing to a tune composed by marketing officers, PR agents, fashion forecasters and brand policemen. It has assimilated their risk-reducing formulas, warmed to that which is familiar, simple, digestible and accessible, witnessed the instantaneous appropriation of new forms and watched them congeal into a fashion that makes everything look the same.” (Bell 2006)

For the Singapore Biennale, we can identify an audience centred role of design to still cater to familiarity, considering its commercial roots — which are to build acquaintance and recognition to compel the audience to buy tickets first. In relation to economic interests of the Arts and Culture Sector, the lack of consistency in its presentation across the editions of the Singapore Biennale in presentation opposes a more coherent presentation of the project to audiences. brand-making commercial strategies that would lend weight to qualities of commitment and investment.

Visual Identity appears to perpetuate the problem or if designed not to, like that of SB2006, can counteract this sameness in its design approach. What we learnt from applying the functional matrix is that Visual Identity for the past five editions are designed to be useful and surprising in different ways — in tandem to the experience intended. Between affective and conceptual registers, the conceptual aspect tends to take form as a response to the theme as interpretation of its content. From creating dynamic logos and graphic systems that modulate across different applications to collaborating with artists to create graphics that correspond with the curatorial statement, we observe how the diversity in approach normalises Jona Piehl’s description of design for arts as one that is not closed to contributions from artistic collaboration and for this thesis and its case studies, it visualises curatorial gestures within the Singapore Biennale experience. It is through this method that we see the potentialities of how Biennales and its design play a direct role to visual interest and

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<sup>53</sup> Cultural Identity is a nuanced approach to visual identity that integrates both the designer's creative vision and the curatorial vision and narratives. This is unconventionally what distinguishes the visual identities for arts and cultural contexts as compared to the more corporate aligning sort of visual identities.

with access and influence, creative literacy, where visual identities for biennales serve as a position to how audiences interpret and understand through the experience.

This can only be possible given the Biennale's distinct set of conditions and challenges that preside over the work of developing Visual Identity and its long history tracing back to the Venice Biennale. One would expect more research and resources for the field. The Singapore Biennale has adequately demonstrated affinities with other lively arts cities and how design is used. It uses thematic key visuals that identify each edition like Venice Biennale, as well as reflect institutional and nationalist idealism similar to early Singapore Arts Festivals. However, this unique context lacks proper discourse and the specialisation of designing for large-scale arts projects is a gap in research and an urgent subject of examination.

For Singapore, the Art Biennale has been modelled as a commercialised entity and its strategies are selectively determined by the influence from how it is seen by the public and private sector, civil society organisations and individuals respectively. Curator and critic Yongwoo Lee describes this commercialised angle as an inevitable side effect of the “entertainmentisation” of Biennales.

In that way, design today is expected to mediate, project and enable the reach that is demanded of any Biennale, let alone the Singapore Biennale as a strategically conceived project by the State to access greater international audiences. The development in the field of visual communication sets unique challenges in designing for the arts and culture sector. As a multi-million dollar, large-scale and international contemporary art exhibition, Singapore Biennale has consistently undergone organisational and perceptual changes. The project also have to contend with high stakes from the investment and visibility on a global level, and not only on a local and regional platform. With the significance of the Biennale as a way of participating in a global phenomenon as well as establishing and accruing cultural capital. The conservative yet diverse visual approaches undertaken by different designers provides insight into the conditions and characteristics of developing visual identities for the Singapore Biennale.

## 5.2 Cultural Identity as a specialisation

This section will assess trends across the five editions of the Singapore Biennale. I would distinguish the types of approaches as well as compare how the Singapore Biennale's visual identities differ from more commonplace definitions of "Visual Identity."

The call for visual identities for arts and cultural projects, also referred to as cultural identities, as a form of specialisation recognises the difference in designing for the arts that take interest and passion. On why they decided to work on the Singapore Biennale, Kelvin Lok from Couple and Little Ong from Ffurious both found that arts and culture design work to be more enjoyable to work on and interesting than the usual. Kelvin also comments on the affinities shared between the fields and acknowledges how "in a way, arts and culture are linked to design." For Little, with his long history of designing for the arts, he feels that aside from financial considerations, designing for art on a "prestigious and large scale" like that of the Biennale is worth trying.

The aesthetic and conceptual scope for designing for art is more liberal than commercial ones. The briefs also usually allow for greater creative licence to develop more interesting identities in close relation to the project or curatorial themes. However, what is interesting is how different designers have remarked that their concepts for arts contexts are not conceived that much differently from the commercial work that they do. Interviews had led me to conclude that art does not have design solutions that are entirely different from commercial briefs. Both Kelvin and Little felt that their Visual Identity for the Singapore Biennale is not that disparate from the identities for other commercial projects. It is interesting that they both agree that the design process and conceptual thinking for something like the Biennale's Visual Identity also apply to other non-arts briefs they undertake. In that way, the call for specialisation is not so much derived from how designing for the arts entails a new set of processes. Its complexities arise instead from the engagement with artistic content (curatorial messaging, exhibition information) and with the stakeholders (curatorial committee and audiences).

Concerning audience expectations, the designers that I interviewed also have different ideas of the audience, thereby developing Visual Identities differently. My interviewees also pointed out how negotiations with curatorial committees are fundamentally different from commercial clients. Kelvin and Little have mentioned how the development of the art exhibition is not so straightforward. The people at the receiving end of their concepts and proposals are also wired differently with different priorities and interests. Working with people in the arts do not pan out in the same way as managers in the non-art fields. Little said that “[t]heir mindsets and objectives are different, so the way we deal with them has to shift, the language has to change in order to meet at a certain place and decisions are not definite.” This “language” of dealing with the arts is crucial as to why cultural identities is a field that is a specialisation in itself. Little attests to how practice indeed requires a theoretical basis that I explored through my discussions on cohesive and application typologies and the application of semiotic methods for Visual Identity. This characterises the design process for the arts and establishes “cultural identity” as a form of specialisation that requires specific attention and finesse to accommodate both the designer’s creative vision and the curatorial vision and narratives. Cultural Identity referred to in my paper finds connection to typological specificity. We refer to any visual identity that deviates from outcomes that can range outside of “Type 1: Branded Variety”.

Through the methods of my study, it has come to knowledge that Singapore Biennale designers described the specific attention and finesse to accommodate both the designer’s creative vision and the curatorial vision and narratives. However, based on our research, even if the process of developing these visual identities range within “Type 1: Branded Variety”, not all are different from identities in other non-art fields, the unique set of challenges and conditions of designing for the arts, as described in the interviews, is also what makes it altogether distinct.

My in-depth interviews and semiotic study through the case of the Singapore Biennale had led me to retain the use of “visual identity” as a term to encompass specialised approaches to visual identities in the arts and culture sector, such as the one described by Nick Bell as “cultural identity”. To Kelvin, audiences play a crucial part in the process and are required to “complete” the Visual Identity as receivers of the

suggestions and hints delivered through the design. The “completion” of the visual identity through the audience also means getting them to grasp the curatorial messaging that is communicated through design. As such, this task of communication is also the most intricate. It requires the representation, reiteration and also effective distillation of complex curatorial messagings. As mentioned above, Couple also believes in capturing the emotional quality or tone of the curatorial messaging. As such their design also works by selecting the use of “artworks that [responds to] or echoes the curatorial statement [emotively]. By featuring works with the right tone, the [overall] design will feel that way.” Kelvin has also made clear that as designers, they do not take on the artist’s role of interpreting and responding to the theme but rather they suggest and hint at the themes.

To Little, the element of surprise and appreciation of novel interpretations of the theme is what he identifies as attracting audiences. For him, “Choosing between an identity that is constant to an identity that is always different, I would go with always different as it represents surprise.” However, this sense of surprise or novelty must also present still represent the curatorial or exhibition premise legibly to audiences. For SB2013: *If the World Changed*, Little describes his concept using metaphorical elements. Wind vanes and current lines were used to mean a more perennial idea of the theme of “change”. Visual Identity was still largely coherent across different key applications. To Little the visual interest is the selling point for each edition. We consider how the theme is best interpreted for the year, and how it differs from the preceding year, “we were responding to the two (editions of the Singapore Biennale) before. We made the Singapore Biennale look organised. We wanted it to give people that sense of interpretation like what art could be as well.”

Beyond the requirement to communicate the curatorial messaging clearly, the Visual Identity of the Biennale also engages in stakes of the event’s positioning on a global stage and the design necessarily postures the Singapore Biennale to better align with international standards and to stand comfortably alongside other Biennales across the world. For Couple, the identity for the Singapore Biennale has to compare with the best biennales in the world” and stand on the same stage.

On a tangential note to comparing, the identity also has to negotiate existing design conventions or standards. In an interview with design writer Justin Zhuang for The Design Society, the designer for SB2006: *Belief*, Theseus Chan from WORK, made a case for identities that do not fit the mould. He shares that

“even though our preferences as designers might differ from the general public, it’s safe to say that anything that looks out of the ordinary is sure to get their attention.”(Zhuang, J. 2016)

Such an approach certainly exemplifies the sense of an identity that attempts to break out of the mould and draw audiences with its discordant but eye-catching qualities. In that way, Theseus’ viewpoint redefines design and what it serves for Art Biennales. For SB2006: *Belief*, the experimental, textured and unique approach to Visual Identity utilises multiple patterns and colour schemes. These elements reflected diverse beliefs and do not correspond too closely to particular ideas across the Visual Identity Phases. This approach aligns to my review on the conception of Art Biennales, as expressed in curatorial terms by Lee Weng Choy, is designed to challenge the norm. The complex navigation of maintaining an expressive and nuanced design that does not detract from the artworks and the artists is also part of the reason why the field of cultural identity can be considered as a form of specialisation.

Working through the curatorial messagings undertaken by design, audiences take a central part in receiving and thereby “completing” the Visual Identity. However, how the design is developed to engage audiences is not quite an exact science and how it is done upon is often contingent on unique conditions.

The recognition of cultural identities as a form of specialisation does not signal to an exact set of procedures and processes. Rather, the approach should be one that is as open as possible, with no particular typological leaning. Although designers that I have interviewed have found similarities in the general process and outcomes between arts and commercial work such as “integrated campaigns,” the call for specialisation is found in Hyland’s review on Bell’s description of “Cultural Identities”. He posits that

to the furthest description of distinction, prevails more commonly in the Arts but is not strictly apparent in this field.

For designers working on the Singapore Biennale, it requires practitioners to firstly be equipped with the ability to distinguish Visual Identity types across the interpretive spectrum. This is in order to better understand what works best for the unique circumstance and curatorial context. Secondly, to understand the various stakeholders, expectations of design and the various layers that require managing so as to reach the objectives at hand.

These considerations demonstrate the importance of having methods to inform Visual Identity concepts. In the professional field, we are able to chart design strategies in distinct ways, and coherence becomes a way to formulate the character of the design. A more robust framework would place emphasis on looking at Visual Identity as parts and a whole. This is done to consider design based on visual cohesiveness and durational phases, instead of subjective values such as good or bad, or based on a standard that evaluates success based on how well the design stems from ideological orientations by styles or schools of thought.

Through using the cohesive and application types detailed in the previous section, the five editions of the Singapore Biennale capture a spectrum of approaches that are diverse and expanded, or developed experimentally. However, these types should not be interpreted at face value. It merely allows for a more concise and considered way of describing and evaluating design and its approaches. There is no particular type of Visual Identity that is more successful in its objectives. The findings from my interviews in relation to semiotics describes how there is no one set way about things. For a continuously changing entity like the Singapore Biennale, all the editions are viable and valid designs that represent the Singapore Biennale in meaningful ways.

My in-depth interviews and semiotic study through the case of the Singapore Biennale had led me to allow the definition of visual identity as a term to encompass specialised approaches to visual identities in the arts and culture sector. It is one where art does not have design solutions that are necessarily different from commercial briefs like

that of Bell's cultural identity, even when negotiations with curatorial committees are fundamentally different from commercial clients. Instead, I see the role of visual identity for arts and culture as an inclusive design process that accommodates both the designer's creative vision and the curatorial vision and narratives.

My in-depth interviews and semiotic study through the case of the Singapore Biennale had led me to retain the use of the more general term "visual identity" in order to encompass the range of approaches to visual identities in the arts and culture sector. Visual Identity as an overarching term includes the type described by Nick Bell as "cultural identity".

The use of the term cultural identity is referred to as a way to distinguish and forward the speculative typology<sup>54</sup> as a subset of visual identity. Cultural identity is used to describe identities that deviate from "Type 1: Branded Variety" by analysis. The continual use of the term cultural identity in this study is my way to include and forward his speculative discussion within particular types, as a subset of the overarching term of visual identity.

The organisation and collection of Visual Identity Types also bring insight into Visual Identity through a study of its various outcomes. A possible furthering of my research in the conceptualisation process of design development would be to produce a scheme that simplifies how we can examine outcomes. This assessment of strategies can be designed for organisers or design agencies to describe, categorise and execute the right strategy for their visual identities in their process.

In the earlier sections, we have also discussed the complexity in considering how Visual Identities often belie a disproportionate amalgamation of intentions. However, this complexity does not often surface beyond the simple glossing and attention paid to mere objectives and correspondences. Instead, they render an elaborate and unique process too simplistic in terms of descriptive communication. This specific issue also stems from a lack of visual theory in the design field. This prevents us to discuss in

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<sup>54</sup> Nick Bell's definition of Cultural Identity is a nuanced approach to visual identity that integrates both the designer's creative vision and the curatorial vision and narratives. This is unconventionally what distinguishes the visual identities for arts and cultural contexts as compared to the more corporate aligning sort of visual identities.

detail the various expectations, interests and ping-ponging in discussions that inform the eventual outcomes

Hence, graphic designers could also seek to integrate semiotic methods into a design strategy assessment technique during ideation. In this way, such a method could also function as a pivotal backbone for the design work for cultural identities and other fields. This could be used in practice through a set of key questions that probe into the complications of what the design entails beyond the premise of a creative brief. This can be found in my appendix fig. 8.2.

These questions would allow any design agency to better define the context of design before deciding on the appropriate design approach to visual identity. This would also provide the developmental process a measured and analytical way to develop design for projects. This is especially in the arts and culture field where contemporary art and its curatorial statement is a key factor to the overall artistic direction of the exhibition.

As a designer, outcome-postulation through strategy assessment provides a basis from which allows me to compare design outcomes. This diagnosis of visual identity can identify the areas that fail to cohere, especially in outsourced areas such as marketing in the pre-event and content driven on-site phase of design.

### **5.3 A Macro view on Art, Culture and Art Biennales**

The cyclical nature of Visual Identity also proves useful by renewing the bi-annual project with each refresh. Taking into account the types of approaches and comparing functional and meaning behaviours of Visual Identity across the five editions, it is clear that the Art Biennale is defined by the differences. This differentiation is of value for a series known consistently for changes not only in the Visual Identity but also in the organising committees.

For every edition of the Singapore Biennale so far, the respective organisational committee redesigns the creative brief from scratch. These are often short-term needs designed for a specific edition, with little to no correspondence to the previous or

following edition. This setup also keeps the series diverse and consistently unique, in tandem with the concept of the Art Biennale that seeks to introduce new knowledge and stimulate artistic production and cultural dialogue. The series of unique visual identities across the five editions can be seen as beneficial to the collective understanding of the Singapore Biennale.

Taking into account the exhibition's duration and complexity of the process, it would be worthwhile asking if design is the most pragmatic gesture to reflect difference? After all, design has often been conceived and regarded by its traditional definition of compelling consumers "by building familiarity and recognition" (Williams 2009, Humberstone 2015). Along this understanding, Visual Identity is the consistent framework or system that allows content to embody or develop a sense of consistency and familiarity to consumers.

The conundrum of thinking about Visual Identity for the Singapore Biennale in the long-term is the short-term approach that is undertaken with every edition. The considerations of a persistent long-term Visual Identity framework would have to be realistic in deciding how such a framework can last through the cyclical nature of the biennale's processes and set-up. With regards to the aspect of contending with changing circumstances, I have also investigated the situation of related large-scale international contemporary art exhibitions that predated the Singapore Biennale. Singapore Arts Festival and Singapore International Festival of Arts have undergone a few rounds of rebranding at junctures of organisational consolidation and new management. With brand systems that were meant to stand for multiple editions as these structural strategies aim to foster a sense of consistency through design that can be reliably traced through the past editions. However, this consistency and continuation was also not something they could work out in the long-term. Low spectatorship caused the government-funded festival to be reviewed in 1999 and 2012 again which among the resolutions, was noting that the festival lacked "a clear focus and identity" (National Arts Council 2012). The change was mainly an organisational one, but resultantly, also entails a design change as well, as seen in fig. 2.5. It was evident, the long-term festival identity exacerbated the issue.

Every edition's long-term Visual Identity framework is only as coherent as the execution of its applications. This is a difficult task when considering the volatility and lack of organisational structure and intrinsic value of difference between the editions. Otherwise, we may foresee the same problem where the execution of Visual Identity further puts a spotlight on the chaos of such internal changes.

Opinions vary on the Visual Identity of the Singapore Biennale, Little Ong from Ffurious believes that difference is necessary and why people want to come. He shares that, “[t]he Visual Identity didn’t encompass the series. It established that change is a constant.” To him, the element of surprise is what makes it exciting. However, not all designers find value in the difference. Kelvin Lok from Couple saw the value in establishing a recurring framework for the key visual to set a structure in how one conceives of the Singapore Biennale through its various editions. This framework established alongside changing visuals offers the series a general correspondence that also maintains a sense of visual legacy. As the appointed designers of the latest 2019 edition of the Singapore Biennale at the time of the interview, they are the only design team that has worked on two consecutive editions of the Biennale. Kelvin takes on a different view actively as they “are currently trying to address the biennale as a series now”, where “keeping certain structures and elements the same (to identify the Biennale as a series) is necessary.” Kelvin believes that some structure is always helpful to guide new audiences to better understand it is an art exhibition — something that he finds is lost amidst the concerns for translation of themes and visuals.

In comparison, my review also justified the utilitarian usage of Venice Biennale's logo mark. Its mark identifies official pavilions alongside the various thematic visual identities that come every year. The red logo remains an identifiable mark for participating nations, artists and organisations which identifies their involvement in the prestigious event. Such an example is a more traditional notion of Visual Identity that is developed to matter in the long-run. This approach builds long-term engagements that bank on familiarity developed across different editions. It works for outcomes that seek to build its 'brand' across an extended period of time, something which every edition of the Singapore Biennale is not organised to suggest, yet.

At the same time, this chapter also expressed the benefits of a cyclical refresh of Visual Identity. It draws on other long-term benefits such as circumventing the changes in the Biennale organisational structure and direction that happens with every cycle. Despite organisational changes and positioning shifts in the Singapore Biennale across the editions, the event's Visual Identity refresh with no long-term Visual Identity framework allows the Singapore Biennale to be perceptually immune to its consistent restructuring.

With regards to how designers are brought in, chosen and engaged, it is also clear that despite its gravity and significance, design is still not valued enough. For the most part, designers are still brought in like that of a vendor. This is despite the stakes that are invested in the Visual Identity. Something that is worth considering is a reevaluation of the pitching and procurement processes to be restructured in the same way the organisational committee has over the years. Kelvin has brought up the counter-productive procurement process, where “(Generally) we don't agree with coming up with visual proposals in to bid. It's wrong to choose design based on two weeks worth of work to represent the Biennale for next two years.” Little also shares in this sentiment and describes how “(t)here is a lack of in-depth discussion that could take place earlier, does affect the process. You are in the situation where you are doing more guesswork than actually being very clear about what the intention could be.”

For designers, it is clear that the preliminary processes are not the most well regarded. The interviewees have also brought up how the process of bidding and quoting requires a disproportionate amount of work towards a decision that is not at all clear. Kelvin feels that creative services should not begin with “what you can deliver and for how much.” Instead, he suggests that establishing a collaborative rapport is essential at the beginning, where “if it (is premised around) partnership, then the approach could work.” Little also concurs in favour of having design already take on a collaborative role at the beginning and not only after the procurement phase. He remarks that, “I wish there was more conversations taking place rather than reading from one document or going for a briefing with a hundred people (that often ends up being) a repeat of the document.”

## 5.4 Addressing the situated-research of Visual Identity for the Singapore Biennale in relation to Art Biennales at large

This chapter discusses the adaptability of the research's insights and methods from the discussion to the broader context of the Arts and Cultural field. The pinpointed characteristics of the various Visual Identities for the Singapore Biennale in this paper have also belied clear distinctions and changes in the organisation of the first five editions. This paper is then useful for the organising committee to better understand the role and outcomes of design to develop it for the future editions of the Singapore Biennale. Looking beyond this case-study, the Singaporean Biennale context also shares common traits with other Art Biennales or large-scale International Contemporary Art Exhibitions around the world. One example would be the state-commissioned set up of Art Biennales are a common model in major cities around the world.

The Singapore Biennale is part of a global trend of exhibition-making. Through the paper's insights into how the Singapore Biennale's organising committees engage design agencies, we can also better reconfigure the procurement process of organisers to choose and work with designers, production specialists and exhibition designers. This would parallel the way artists and curatorial committee and to develop a process that better suits the creative procedures and its collaborative nature.

Singapore is also a conservative case study, in that its cultural investment and engagement with the arts are not like many other setups elsewhere. Singapore's geopolitical and economic strategies by the commissioning State can also be traced to the intention of accruing cultural capital that is identified in other cities. Hence, the ways that we navigate concepts and design's influence may be mitigated by that locality, which circumscribes processes with certain entrenched conventions. My findings on design procedures as well as long term framework considerations are based on Singaporean conditions and do not cover a general condition applicable for any design agency working on the arts and culture sector in other localities.

The typological and semiotic analysis are methods developed to describe with a theoretical basis to substantiate using design's interpretive values. Typological

analysis establishes a spectrum of what we regard and perceive as visual identities. It provides a wider throw of different types of Visual Identity that need to be considered in relation to contexts such as artworks that are designed, art fair and museum art exhibitions identities among others. The utilisation of Skagg's semiotic analysis is a way to read design by charting it into functional and affective spectrums that facilitate description and evaluation of design's concepts. These methods centre on perceptual substantiation which is also the key issue designers face when having to propose and communicate design. As the creative process is a conversational one, the reading and analysis procedure can be embedded into the proposal and ideation phases of development. Design agencies can draw on a similar language and framework to articulate approaches to design and with objectives fleshed out.

Through my research, these solutions introduce theoretical frameworks in design development. These are meant for designers to better channel the right strategy for their visual identities through means that are considered and clearly measured. In cases such as a rebranding or positioning exercise for any Visual Identity, these methods can use methods explored in this paper to assist practitioners to assess design by evaluating concepts and calibrating characteristics to achieve specific objectives.

This paper furnishes a theoretical angle into the practice for designers of Art Biennales. This would validate a more meaningful collaboration for teams to come to standard, diagnose their strategies in ideation or simply redevelop the means of what Visual Identity can do. Through the charting of profiles in my assessment, visual identities fall into diverse categories. By having an overview of different nodes in its functional matrix and registers in its semantic profile, we open up ways to consider strategies to visual identity outside of messaging-centred design that facilitates instead of expressing particular positions. With that, the research enables organisers and designers to define and compare visual identities through characteristics that matter to the Singapore Biennale. This method allows us to measure the complex aesthetic interpretations to graphic design. This uses distinct semantic profiles that describe non-conforming identities that appear undesigned or detrimental to theoretical notions of visual identity. Instead, this method of interpretation reveals the inherent strategies of these identities as strategically adaptable and content-driven

that are critical to the condition and discourse of the themes and objectives of the art biennale.

Specifically, the study is a beneficial reference point for future editions of the Singapore Biennale and other Art Biennales around the world. Additionally, there are other situations within the Singapore context that could use my study on the Singapore Biennale as a comparative assessment. I could weigh the interests that define the need for a cyclical method to Visual Identity and a long-term Visual Identity framework. One such event would be the long running Singapore International Festival for the Arts where in my review, that has proven to be a meaningful case study to consider restructuring and rebranding exercises and its benefits or limitations.

## 6 Conclusion

This thesis explores the theoretical and practical ways to approach Visual Identity designs through the first five editions of the Singapore Biennale from 2006–2016. Through my methods, I addressed the objective of the paper by developing methods that establish communicative strategies to help with visual literacy between the organising committee and design agencies to measure and evaluate design.

To achieve this, the study forms a framework from three main methods. Firstly the collection and organisation of Visual Identity applications, secondly, the application of semiotic methods of interpretation and thirdly, by conducting interviews with the graphic designers who were involved with past editions of Singapore Biennale. The main findings from the study are briefly summarised below.

With regards to the roles and responsibilities in the design development process, my interviews and research defined the scope of Visual Identity. It is used to bridge many targets and interests that are integral in how the Singapore Biennale functions and is developed for. My study has shown that the design agency often has to work through counterintuitive and unfavourable processes set in design's engagement through pitching and procurement procedures. I was able to justify how process reflects such

diverse outcomes by recognising fundamental differences across the directions and team dynamics between each edition's organising team and design agency. The Creative Brief and bidding process are essential components that define the effectiveness and rigour in the early pitching and ideation process.

Through the interviews, there was also insight gleaned into the current engagement of design agencies which begins at the pitching phase that also comes to frame and directs the subsequent design processes. However, there are limitations of working through a tender or pitching system. It forecloses a collaborative approach that draws on the designer's expertise to develop visual identity and propose its appropriate applications.

By elaborating on the contextual and procedural concerns to the Singapore Biennale, as well as addressing its long-term concerns, the purposeful interpretations of design outcomes help substantiate the role and significance of design within the moving parts of a large-scale art exhibition. This establishes the categorical definition of "cultural identities". In that way, it also helps articulate the case for the regard of cultural identities as a unique field of specialisation that requires a particular "language" in its process as well as expert navigation of a unique set of challenges and conditions elaborated in the paper.

Through the interviews, I also discovered the Singapore Biennale has a common focus on audiences as a key design objective, but when audiences are conceived as mere "targets" for footfall or impression. As a reconfiguration of the role of the audience, my discussion proposed a reconfiguration based on Stefanie Jansen and Maarten Pieters' co-creative framework. To them, co-creation is seeing the interest of audiences to the Singapore Biennale as an active agent in the design process, instead of working to cater to them as objectives, like how they are currently addressed. Processes that engage audiences could be focus groups to consider views before the event, observe responses during the event and create surveys that collect impressions on the visual identity after the event.

With audiences understood as a part of the demographic who develop and “complete” the Visual Identity also becomes a necessarily complex outcome that is alongside designers and curators. The difficulty of reading and assessing Visual Identity approaches and outcomes is also assuaged by the study’s focus on comparing the Phases and Types of visual identities through the collection and organisation of Visual Identity applications.

These types of approaches are defined by durational and semantic means. These methods allow me to discuss and compare different Visual Identity outcomes in differentiated Visual Identity Types without falling into vague and abstract descriptors that do not clearly define purposes and results. This lack of language to approaches prevent us to pinpoint specific aspects in its duration to consider the important perceptual moments of the lifespan of Visual Identity across the different phases of the exhibition event.

As the creative process is a conversational one, the reading and analysis procedure can be embedded into the proposal and ideation period of development where design agencies can use to specify by Visual Identity Phase or cohesive Types. This research method establishes a diverse spectrum of possibilities that can be communicatively discerned. This exercise sets the backdrop for ideation or assessment as it also normalises all types of approaches. The cyclical nature of the Singapore Biennale and its changing organisational team and curatorial direction also requires a design approach that is specifically tailored to a changing context. Hence, the study does not seek to privilege one approach over another. It also validates lesser-cohesive or unconventional approaches in the different editions of the Visual Identity.

On the evaluation of visual identities for the Singapore biennale, my adoption of Skagg’s model of semiotics in design was also useful in undertaking a design-focused examination that charts, reads and interprets meaning behaviours across the five editions of the Singapore Biennale.

Following that, the Semantic Profiling of Visual Identity features a tabulation of meaning behaviours that span by the degree of affective or conceptual registers for the

Visual Identities for each edition of the Singapore Biennale from 2006 to 2015. From creating dynamic logos and graphic systems that modulate across different applications to collaborating with artists to create graphics that correspond with the curatorial statement, there is a great diversity in terms of approaches to design. With formal descriptions of distinct registers in each of the five editions of the Singapore Biennale, the analysis develops an articulation of semiotic basis to behavioural profiles within Visual Identity Types. This method allows us to measure the complex aesthetic interpretations to graphic design, using distinct Semantic Profiles that describe non-conforming identities and to also make sense of them.

I also used the Functional Matrix for assessing Visual Identity. This is a method of analysing immediacy or definitivity in its perceptual cues with close relation to the exhibition's premise or production. I produced interpretations across soft and hard semiotic attributes to explain how the design outcomes can inform the interpretive behaviours of audiences. Characteristics for these attributes range across Concrete, Praxis, Tonal and Form functional attributes. By having an overview of different nodes in its Functional Matrix and registers in its Semantic Profile, we can also consider strategies to visual identity outside of "Type 1: Branded Variety". This enable organisers and designers to define and compare visual identities through characteristics that matter to the Singapore Biennale. This would be useful in practice to calibrate directions for Visual Identity either by negotiating nodes or registers or through plotting the options in the chart and finding the suitable option.

The semiotic methods allow practitioners to measure the complex aesthetic interpretations to graphic design using distinct Profiles that describe non-conforming identities that may appear uncohesive or detrimental to theoretical notions of visual identity. Instead, this method of interpretation reveals the inherent strategies of these identities as strategically adaptable and content-driven that are critical to the condition and discourse of the themes and objectives of the Art Biennale.

From my findings, I concluded that this reintroduction of structural relations served to uncover the nature of Visual Identity outcomes. The past five editions are a demonstration of how Visual Identity can have plural permutations. This is useful in

keeping the series diverse and consistently unique that is in tandem to the conception and experience of the Biennale.

Lastly, the way that editions for the Singapore Biennale have been examined as case study for a theoretical point of reference. It also pays attention to a practical course of action so as to infer meaning and design approach in precise values and spectrums. The marriage of theory and practice here also allows for us to chart possible outcomes in concise and measured language that is useful for discussion with organising committee and targets.

## 6.1 Suggestions for Future Research.

Singapore Biennale is a common state-commissioned format of Visual Identity that many smaller festivals and contexts can look into, especially in the emerging asian market of Art Biennales. However, my findings on design procedures as well as long term framework considerations do function within Singaporean conditions. My approaches do not necessarily cover a general or global context applicable for any design agency working on the arts and culture sector. This case study examined comments on local procurement processes as well as an inherently conservative arts and cultural backdrop, where its cultural investment and engagement with art is specific and not identical to other setups.

However, the thesis can be furthered or contested by other design researchers interested to look into alternative case studies of the burgeoning field of Art Biennales beyond Singapore. Singapore Biennale's first five editions would make it a significant and resonant case study because it provides a definitive example of the "biennialization" trend, particularly in Asia, the study can be expanded to focus on the broader Asian region and to encompass global perspectives on the topic. This looks at Visual Identity across different socio-economic and geo-political contexts where art, design and culture could hold its creative strategies differently from the case studies of the Singapore Biennale.

On the process of design development, an area of future research would be to consider ways that museums can reestablish the conditions of design and how the procurement processes for services of design can be distinguished. This may expand the role of Visual Identity into a more corporate conception. This encompasses exploring the idea that design starts from within, as an “internal alignment within the management organisation” that allows for a better cohesion of its messages and design (Flint, Signori et al. 2018). This would also counter the current procedure of seeing design work as one that is engaged like any other procurement of goods. Such research would work through the current knowledge of the capacities of Visual Identity and enable a further understanding on how design shapes the outcome and make the case for design to be valued in the part of a collaborator.

Approaches to visual identity are useful to identify and be aware of in the ideation process, especially when considering the perpetual renewal of conditions in the cyclical practice of Biennales. It is important to decide what is appropriate for the edition and the resolution process involves the designer having to discern techniques of their own. This consideration extends beyond the design outcome and into the management of processes and communication channels with the curatorial committee. By having an overview of different nodes in its Functional Matrix and registers in its Semantic Profile, we open ways to consider strategies to visual identity without oversimplification. These challenges embedded in the process indicate room for change.

Specifically, I was able to justify how the conditions and processes reflect such diverse outcomes. The designers I interviewed have shown that there was no identical quality in what the different curatorial committees were looking for, except for a certain coherence and efficacy of relaying the biennale’s messaging in the brief. This is described in interviews, fundamental differences in preferences and strategies across the directions and team dynamics between each edition’s organising team and design agency. We also identify the interest of audiences to the Singapore Biennale as an active agent in the design process rather than being merely catered to. It is through this distinction, that we are able to prevent the conflation of what the Visual Identity encompasses artistically with who the exhibition is designed for. The designers’

sharing of their experience of the Singapore Biennale puts into perspective a consensus of how certain procedures and structures could be improved or further discussed.

As an expansion<sup>55</sup> from this case study, my research can become a resource for design and curatorial practitioners through a strategy assessment procedure developed from a direct result of my research methods. This is developed for designers to utilise semiotic language and creative strategy as a diagnostic tool for design. It comes in two portions: identifying processes through strategy analysis where I would ask categories of questions. The assessment process is initiated using a set of guiding questions, followed by a strategy report that consolidates and charts a proposal. This assessment enables organisers and designers to define and compare visual identities through characteristics and factors that matter to the Singapore Biennale. The overview would be useful in practice to calibrate directions for Visual Identity either by negotiating nodes or registers or through plotting the options in the chart and finding the suitable option. This is introduced and expanded on in my appendix, chapter 8.2 A working development of Strategy Assessment procedure.

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<sup>55</sup> The expanded research is not included in the main paper because it is an offshoot from my main research objectives which is to clarify aspects of design practice and processes, making a case for the role of design in large-scale arts projects like biennales. I will pursue to further develop the applications of my findings beyond this paper.

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## 8 Appendix

### 8.1 Charts and Graphs

#### Objectives in the Tender for the Provision of Branding, Design and Web Services for Singapore Biennale.

- Position Singapore and the Singapore Biennale as an important contemporary art exhibition for critical artist and artwork presentation, and curatorial discourse among stakeholders of SAM.
- Position Singapore Biennale as an inspiring, interesting and relevant must-see / must-do event on the social and lifestyle calendar to SAM's key target audiences.
- Build awareness of the Singapore Biennale and interest in the visual arts among Singaporeans and permanent residents of different age groups and segments of society.
- Strengthen Singapore Biennale's unique positioning as a place of discovery for Southeast Asian artists through new artwork commissions or existing works that have not been widely presented among serious and budding art lovers.
- Develop a rich discussion and sharing of perspectives around inter-regionalities, shared cultures and histories through curatorial discourse and collaboration within Southeast Asia, and with the wider region (eg. India and China) through contemporary art.

Taken from the 2019 Tender for the Provision of Branding, Design and Web Services for Singapore Biennale.

### 8.2 A working development of Strategy Assessment procedure

The design strategy assessment is developed as a broad diagnostic tool for designers to utilise during the research and strategy planning of the design development process. Key components central to the approach is a result of my research methods. This is achieved by clarifying key variables that determines the outcome as well as making semiotic language accessible. The assessment process is initiated using a set of guiding questions I call "Strategy Assessment Questions" that would be used to generate informed options plotted against a chart based on my semiotic research. This

“Strategy Report” is a convenient method that introduces components of assessments as well as concerns that affect the highly contingent process. It consolidates the assessment used for the stakeholders to make a better informed decision. This would be summarised through a strategy report that consolidates and proposes the relevant approaches based on the designer’s assessment.

### Strategy Assessment Questions

The questionnaire starts with positioning, outlining what a business should generally do to communicate its product or service to its customers.

#### **1. Positioning**

- What is the purpose behind your project?
- Is there anything different about this project compared to your usual projects?
- What do you want to achieve with this project?

In order to decide the concept in relation to other projects alike, it would be useful to have the organising committee attempt to articulate the novelty of their project and to differentiate their project through the following position statement:

#### **2. Differentiation**

- Our \_\_\_\_\_ is the only \_\_\_\_\_ that \_\_\_\_\_.

Following that, we would consider stakeholder values and objectives, and compare it to the project’s vision. This would also allow for stakeholders to calibrate their ideal outcomes through examples and preferences:

#### **3. Values**

- Do you agree that the following values should be central to this project?
- Is there a tone, mood or style that is consistent with these values? Are there any that should be avoided?
- Are there any stylistic and aesthetic references that can inform this project?

Because ideas around audiences differ between people, it would also be necessary to have the organisers describe and further explain what they would expect and mean when they define their end-users or consumers:

#### 4. Audiences

- Who is your audience?
- Do you want to change or grow your audience?

Additionally, it is also crucial to enquire about the project stakeholders' needs and to gauge their interests and expectations:

#### 5. Stakeholders

- Who is involved in decision making and who are the stakeholders?
- What areas are they particular about?
- Are there carriers of the brand (e.g. public-facing staff) that need to be considered for this project?

As all design work unfolds through a series of conversations and negotiations, it is crucial to discuss the key phases of the design by enquiring on the channels of communication that they may wish to work through.

#### 6. Channels

- What are your organisation's current key channels of communication?
- Which channel works best for your organisation?
- Are there any phases of the event you want to improve engagement with?
- What would be a key deliverable of this project?

### Strategy Assessment Report

The Strategy Assessment Report is the designer's diagnosis of details raised in the questionnaire. This is achieved by plotting points on the axis to demarcate approaches optioned out or compared, based on coordinate of the semiotic intersection.

Fig 8.1 Coordinates of semiotic intersection for visual identity is a representation of results from my strategy analysis. It is a visual tool designed to communicate design outcomes through different functional and behavioural values, covering intersecting spectrums of expressive to conceptual and functional to abstract. Each position on the chart is a reading that intersects different valencies of its behavioural values.

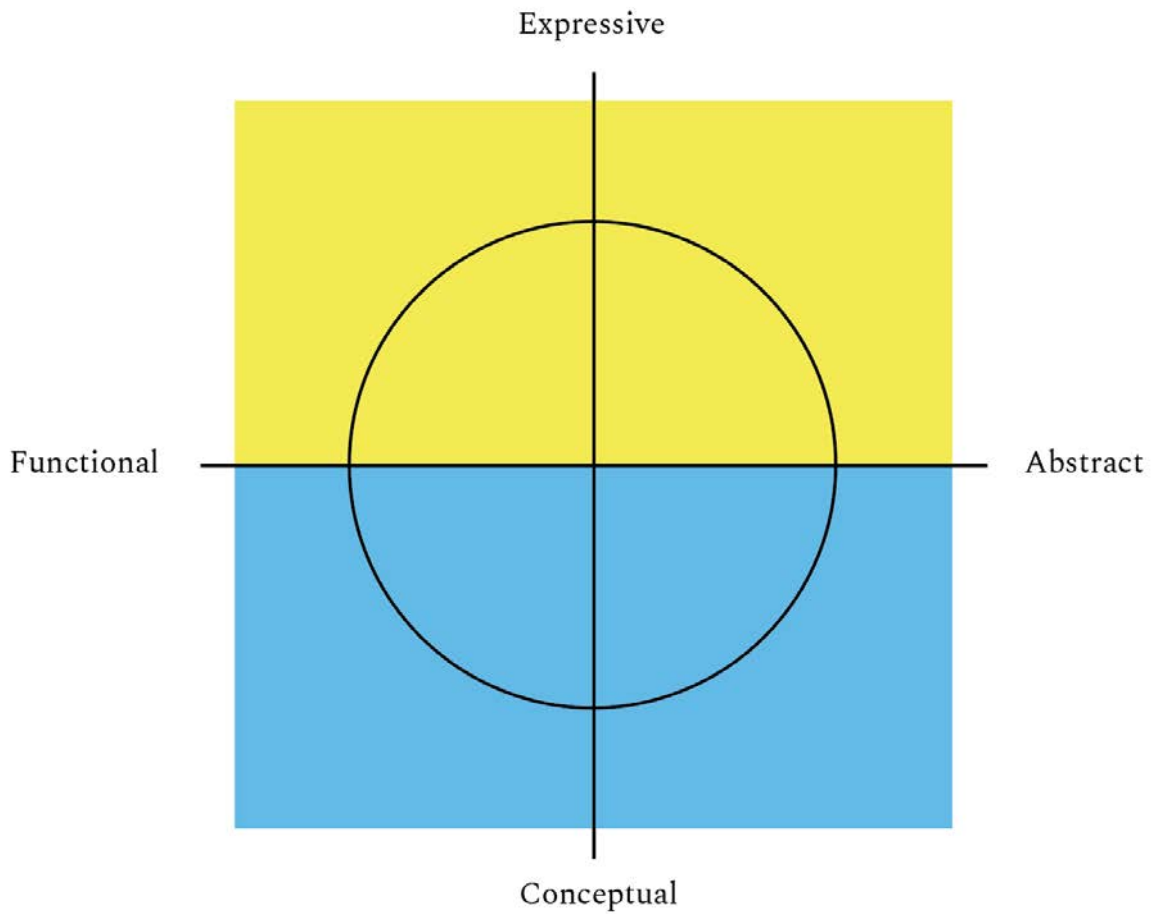


Fig 8.1 Coordinates of semiotic intersection for visual identity strategy assessment

Along the y-axis' expressive – conceptual spectrum, designers assess design solutions that rely on formal features, e.g. colours and typography, to convey meaning as an expressive quality. On the other end of the spectrum, we propose designs that lean toward the use of symbols, connotational aspects and mood created as conceptual. Along the x-axis' functional – abstract spectrum, we consider design solutions that are utilitarian, relying on form and tone, clear and straightforward presentation, pragmatic use of elements. On the other end of the spectrum, we propose designs that lean toward the use of forms not bound by context, where the presentation is less specific and direct.

**On readings concerning conventions**

All options are ascertained by the distance of the point from the x-axis and the y-axis. One way to read the chart is to allow stakeholders to consider whether the identity design should stray outside of the circle boundary from the intersection in Fig 8.1. Identities that tend to keep within the circle boundary on its xy coordinates tend to reflect a more even handed or generalised outcome that may appear rather uncharacteristic as audiences may not be able to articulate any specific functional and behavioural values as compared to scaling any specific set of approaches.

### **On readings concerning co-authorship**

This draft chart also features layer based on Piehl's matrix introduced in my literary review, that considers the coverage of graphic roles that sees to co-authoring labeled in yellow, and designers playing a more facilitatory role through metaphorical means, in blue. These allows us to find and discuss the patterns such as how most visual identities tend to fall under the "Abstract – Metaphorical content facilitator" category of visual identity. As well as note how the edition with the highest footfall in SB2006, sits in the opposite "Expressive — Functional, content creation" category of visual identity.

Through the development of this Strategy Assessment process, I was able to put into practice what I have learnt from my different research findings through the Singapore Biennale and use it in practice.

## **8.3 Transcript of Interview with Kelvin Lok of Couple**

### **Why did you decide to work on Singapore Biennale?**

It was a tender process that they have to go through. [We] didn't decide to do it. They called a few companies and [the Biennale team] shortlisted us. We run a business so whatever project we do, we have to see if it is profitable, good for the portfolio or if it is interesting to work on. [As a business], we will try to go for most jobs unless it is really unethical or the pitching process is too demanding for the total budget of the project.

For the Singapore Biennale we know that [the production of it has] a certain value, and we know that we can pitch for it. Some projects are not worth the whole value of the pitching process], so [those] doesn't make sense [to us].

Doing arts & culture or consumer-facing projects are definitely more interesting than [designing for] business to business. [Usually] it requires a different kind of thinking as compared to corporate or B2B clients. In a way, arts and culture is linked to design and we enjoy <the subject matter> just like how we all enjoy going to museums.

**Are there anything different about the development of Visual Identity for the Singapore Biennale as compared to non art visual identities?**

For us, as a design company, we approach all jobs the same. We address the creative brief and objectives of the client. For corporate clients [it could be addressing] the awareness of the product. For arts [jobs], [its similar in that] we [address] the curatorial statement.

[The degree of deviation in approach depends on the process]. For the arts, it's more subjective, [the design has to relate to feelings], [and decisions depend on the] team and consumer, hence the working process [comes from a wider consensus].

**When and how was design utilised in the development of the Singapore Biennale?**

[3.35min]

For Atlas of Mirrors, we worked closely with the curators, specifically the [art director of the Singapore Biennale that year], Susie Lingham. Even though we were hired by the marketing team, we worked with the director every step of the way, from the confirmation of the curatorial statement.

[The role of design is] ultimately marketing driven, [serving] to drive people to go see and pay for the event.

**So it is not so much curatorially or content driven?**

It is curatorial driven [in the sense that] you need to communicate the curatorial statement, but the key objective is marketing driven, [in that the main intention] is to

drive people to see the various artworks. For the 2016 edition, we were not involved in the exhibition aspect as they had an in-house exhibition designer.

For Visual Identity, design [acts like a canvas in the presentation of art]. [We] try not to brand [the Singapore Biennale in] such a way that [it visually competes with the art] or says too much.

To us, nothing speaks [about the Biennale] better [and more directly] than showing the artworks, [even a small preview of it]. We selected the artworks that [responds to] or echoes the curatorial statement [emotively]. [By featuring works with the right tone], the [overall] design will feel that way.

**Elaborate on the considerations of the design and why the Biennale team felt it worked.**

We thought it worked is because it is crafted just enough to say something about the statement but it doesn't [overshadow] the artworks in an exhibition space or when it is beside the artwork. [We did not rely on] novelty or [gimmicks], [but rather], it is a representation of the curatorial statement. [Sometimes], designers tend to respond to the curatorial statement but we think this is inappropriate. [Visual Identity] represents [the Biennale] and [not a response to it. We leave that to the artists.]

Typically, we come up with a few options and then there was a consensus this worked the best and visually and emotionally it echoes the curatorial statement in a subtle way. [For the Arts] it shouldn't say so much, and it shouldn't have an overpowering element such that will set an interpretation or perceive the artwork [exhibition?] differently.

**Is an identity system that is adaptive and dynamic, related to approaching Art Biennales?**

We created an identity that can transform and shift based on application [for practical reasons]. We approached it not with a key visual, but a logo mark. Applications range from a print catalogue to large advertising spaces, hence we considered how we can the logo mark in a dynamic and [lively] way. This reflects the curatorial brief of

self-reflection, and mirrors with no single primary configuration, the [essence of] change and dependency is all part of the concept.

**Who are the teams involved and how collaborative is it? Is it collaboration? Is collaboration a significant part of the process?**

The process depends heavily on the director of the [Singapore Biennale edition]. Susie was the one that made sure the identity was different or pushed to the best way possible. For The Atlas of Mirrors, the curatorial statement evolved with the design. The work is “collaborative” in the sense of how we discussed the adaptations across marketing and the exhibition such as bus advertisements or the exhibition catalogue. But because it is a government project with a corporate structure, the brief has to be developed first and what we had to design is determined at first: the deliverables and how much they cost. We [eventually] worked within our scope and even go beyond it, to show what it can be done in exhibition space or catalogues. For Visual Identity whether arts or corporate clients, the [main] deliverable is the logo and the [identity] guidelines. We have to show how it works and across possibilities. After the approval, it is up to Susie and her team to push the [teams producing them].

**What ultimately decides and who approves / decision make across the phases?**

Susie was the core decision maker as she was artistic director of the Singapore Biennale and [Singapore Art Museum]. This is [different from] the [upcoming] Singapore Biennale 2019, [where we liaise with the whole team, involving] Patrick who is the guest curator and artistic director for this edition, alongside a team of in-house curators and the marketing team. There is more [direct input across the board], different from the more [consolidated process during the 2016] edition.

**Is there anything that can improve the developmental process of Visual Identity for an Art Biennale?**

If we want a change in design processes, it needs to start from the top. The organiser would have to have a different take on the designers [involvement]. For government organisations whether they are buying computers or buying design services, they use the same kind of workflow to procure services: what you can deliver and for how much.

The level of collaboration [between designer and the client] depends on the theme, if it [is premised around] partnership, then the approach could work. The process of hiring a designer to work on a project is a two way thing, whether the designers would also be willing to work on a project if the scope and money is not determined until mid-way through. It depends on how much a designer is willing to put their time into something indeterminate at the start, should also be considered.

**How productive is Singapore's open bid / public tender system / creative brief [if any] and how did it inform the Visual Identity?**

It depends on how the institution looks at it. I think when they hire an artistic director for each edition of the Biennale, they don't go through the regular procurement process. Instead, they consider what the person did, how involved is he/she in the arts scene, how networked as well as his credentials. The way they hire a designer should be the same way: You should be hired based on your portfolio, awards, the work you did and how effective it is, instead of talking about scope and cost at the beginning which [inevitably] sets the tone for the rest of the [process].

**Is there anything that can improve the developmental process of Visual Identity for an Art Biennale?**

[Generally] we don't agree with coming up with visual proposals in to bid. Submit your track record, portfolio and write up works, but if you come up with a visual, that doesn't work as designers have to work in silo and come up with a proposal they think it works and submit, [which becomes more or less just] guess work. It's wrong to choose design based on two weeks worth of work to represent the Biennale for next two years.

For the Atlas of Mirrors, we submitted visual things but it wasn't a full logo, it was a rough sketch and idea that shows the potential of a key visual. When we started the project we were willing to start from scratch and [the design] changed a lot. Even for the one we are working now [SB2019], we submitted the potential of the visual and now we are working with the curators to see how we can develop it.

Everything can be better in the realm of the designer. Things can be better marketed, designed, branded, but we work within what we are given, we work within limitations.

**What did the Visual Identity do for the identity do as a single edition and as a series? Is the Singapore Biennale something to be systemised? [35:13min]**

For every project we do we try to better the design standards locally and regionally. We compare with the best biennales in the world and how the Visual Identity stands up to that. Catering to footfall is important but so is the recall value of the visual and whether people remember it. While we think it should not overshadow art it should be able to stand by itself and remember it.

We are currently trying to address the biennale as a series now. The key visual [relays] the curatorial statement completely but keeping certain structures and elements the same [to identify the Biennale as a series] is necessary. I remembered Singapore Art Week had a strong logo similar to the red logo from the Venice Biennale.

**Do you see the role of designer as someone who would connect the different needs and targets of the Biennale?**

We explored different covers, Atlas of Mirrors, it definitely needs to say “Singapore Biennale” from a communications and marketing point of view. End users may not know it is an Art Biennale. We need to address the layman. As much as we can be experimental, we need to inform the audience that it's about the arts.

We are very practical designers, conceptually and ideas wise, we like the process and how ideas can drive a design. But our approach is very pragmatic based on what ideas work for the audience and curators because we need to balance and justify why reaching the clients objective and awareness and an identity for the Biennale.

Our work links alot of intentions. We speak for the curators and museum visually, we also address layman this is an Art Biennale [that may interest them to go visit].

Branding is very important as recall value and it set the tone for the artworks. If you don't brand [the exhibition], you wont remember it, it will just be artworks in a museum.

## 8.4 Transcript of Interview with Little Ong of Ffurious

### **Why did you decide to work on developing the Singapore Biennale?**

We have always loved and had been involved with designing for the arts. Be it Theatreworks, Esplanade or the music scene, it has always been an industry we enjoyed. For the Singapore Biennale, it is prestigious and large scale. There is a larger scope to explore and be creative [with it].

The Singapore Biennale opportunity came along when we got invited to quote. We went in for the bid, we pitched for it and in 2013 we got the job! [The budget] always the problem working for the arts. We went for it because now we got arts client who can pay! <Laughs>

I don't think [designing for arts] is for everyone. Because I'm familiar in the arts scene, sometimes it can be trying in certain areas and processes. There are hurdles for any client, but I don't think its an issue for me.

The focus of our agency is a bit different as well. We are not 100% commercially driven, not just to make money but a joy of being creative. Some agencies are in it chasing for awards, bigger jobs or bigger titles. For us, it's always about interesting and diverse jobs that we can be more creative with.

### **When and how was design utilised in the development of the Singapore Biennale?**

There are definitely developments from the initial stage, but the intention for what we were tasked to do is clear. The Gebiz documents there was already a list [of design applications] to quote for.

There was so much that was defined from the pitching process. The marketing plan was 90% in place and we went along with it, but naturally, there were some changes after.

We knew the focus was on art and artists [from the Southeast Asian region]. It was by the Singapore Art Museum and the team of curators leading it. The theme together with a write up was set, so we knew what the theme was going to be. It was quite

broad and open ended, *If the World Changed*. It good that it was open ended because proposals came in with different perspectives. Agencies came in to interpret and give their take from it and we came in with ours.

**Elaborate on the considerations of the design and why the Biennale team felt it worked.**

I'm guessing [how we interpreted the theme well] and maybe also, how different it was from the previous Singapore Biennale [edition].

[Our] proposal was based on what we thought of the theme: Artists from around Southeast Asia influencing each other and the migration of people via waterways through history. It happened and transformed this region we knew. That was an important element, especially how boats travelled was by wind in the past, so we looked at wind patterns and and how maps were designed with topographical elements. Those were interesting elements and that informed how we developed the logo of the identity which was a wind vane. What I like is that solution was that it was also quite variable and an event like an Art Biennale where there are so many collaterals to be done, the opportunity to steers away from being boring is greater. We had all these elements that we then figured out different ways of showing them in different materials.

**Who are the teams involved in the design and how collaborative was its development?**

The basis of design is that it has to be a collaboration. It can't exist without a client or brief. It is not self expression or we won't have the job. When we work with the Singapore Art Museum team, we work with the whole team, not just 1 voice. There was a lead, but we have the team alongside the director. there are a lot of voices to level out, everyones voice matters, as a design team. The design evolved with every feedback from the start [of the process]. All these come together to make it a great event.

**What do you think the Visual Identity did for the Singapore Biennale edition and as a series?**

Choosing between an identity that is constant to an identity that is always different, I would go with always different as it represents surprise. If a platform like Singapore Biennale retains the same identity, it would be established to be the same thing. [However,] if it is constantly changing, you can't pinpoint what exactly it would be and that is what makes it exciting. We have smaller scale festivals like M1 Fringe Festival, logo side is always the same but because you have the thematic campaign that is very strong and different, it works. For me it is important to look into the identity that suit what the event it is about. As long as the emotions organisers and designers want the audience to feel is successfully [conveyed] then you have a good identity.

**Was there anything different about the development of Visual Identity for the Singapore Biennale as compared to non art visual identities?**

The one before they had one curator, [the edition we worked on, they had] multiple curators doing different things. Internally, they had to get used to that process and while it was being defined that had to get that process working with an agency. So there was two struggles going on.

There are degrees of differences. [As compared to other editions], the team we worked on was a lot bigger. I remembered at one point telling them I can only answer to one "chef", more would complicate the situation and create tensions. Sometimes its 5-8 people [involved] but most of the time, we worked with the lead curator. She basically ran the show.

[Art and non-art visual identities are] similar to an extent. For commercial work, we usually deal with a manager, who has a consensus on the direction. [There are commercial projects] where we also have multiple opinions and you have to manage that situation at a certain point [and with that,] I would say process is not much different.

For the Singapore Biennale team, at certain moments, it got abit frustrating. Later on in the process, everyone got quite busy and when we just talked with the lead curator, things got slightly better.

I think what I do recall was that, because you deal with artistic people, the mindsets that you deal with is something that [can be] quite different from commercially driven people. Their mindsets and objectives are different, so the way we deal with them has to shift, the language has to change in order to meet at a certain place and decisions are not definite. In some way we had to struggle with such responses and that was a tricky part.

**How productive is Singapore's open bid / public tender system / creative brief [if any] and how did it inform the Visual Identity?**

So the first part of this is what do I think about the system, I don't think it's a lot different from how clients seeking out agencies for work, they get recommendations from friends, they will call a few agencies and they will be picking from the few. The [bidding] system puts another layer to that. there are two ways, one is by invite only. the organisation has already done their research and decided which are the few they are only inviting to this. that's the better way to do it. The other way is the open system where they put it out to Gebiz and try to attract the bees. that we hardly participate as this will only come down to cost most of the time.

For the Singapore Biennale, its by invite, you know client is already interested in work you do, there is a bit of respect knowledge and connection built into it. You know they kind of like your style, it's no longer just shooting in the dark anymore, you do stand a chance and that changes the creative process abit more, I think its a system that needs to be in place, where there is alot more businesses here.

Of course the bidding system is changing as well. The bad part for it in recent times government organisations have been starting to get rate cards and lock down on agencies and this prevents opportunities for other companies, but otherwise I don't mind the system, I think I understand where it comes from and the need to be transparent because of public funds are used, it needs to be there to be tracked. I'm ok with it.

**Is there anything that can improve the developmental process of Visual Identity for an Art Biennale?**

I wish there was more conversations taking place rather than reading from one document or going for a briefing with a hundred people [that often ends up being] a repeat of the document. You don't get the chance for the conversation is rarely taking place. You don't get the face time and discussions open up a lot more. There is a lack of in-depth discussion that could take place earlier, does affect the process. You are in the situation where you are doing more guess work than actually being very clear about what the intention could be.

**Was there anything different about the development of Visual Identity for the Singapore Biennale as compared to non art visual identities?**

I've never really thought that the scope of the work we did was specifically arts in that sense, because designing it would be the same approach and process for something else from another industry. I don't think that the approach for the Singapore Biennale is very much different than how we approach an integrated campaign for a product. Same thing if [we developed the Visual Identity] for a beer label. We have a certain image of it that we want to achieve a certain thing for a beer label. We developed collaterals and animation and we get varied responses from what we want from that.

**How do you find designs that also are conceptual gestures, critical perspectives to the issues, performatory methods to challenge audience's purview?**

We are met with themes that are quite open ended and we are not trying to create any tension out of that. In fact, the themes had been really quite harmonious, its [often about] coming together not telling people how different you are.

**What do you think the Visual Identity did for the Singapore Biennale edition and as a series?**

The Visual Identity didn't encompass the series. It established that change is a constant. [What we did] was drastically different from the one before, maybe visually, our approach was closer to what GOTO Design's [Visual Identity for Singapore Biennale 2011] because it was graphically driven. WORK's approach was very painterly. In that sense, we were responding to the two [editions of the Singapore Biennale] before. We made the Singapore Biennale look organised. We wanted it to give people that sense of interpretation like what art could be as well.

We wanted to balance the two, where we created a structure and also, a sense of interpretation for the visuals. instead of just telling people that this is a “house” of art or what art could look like.

## 8.5 Glossary of Terms

### Arts and Culture Sector

I refer to the arts and culture sector as a distinct branch of a nation’s economy. For the Arts aspect, it is defined as the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power. Composed of many creative endeavors and disciplines, it typically takes the form of painting, sculpture, music, film and dance. On the Cultural aspect of the sector, it refers to the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society and material objects acquired by a group of people in the course of generations.

### Branding

A brand is a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers . Branding is endowing products and services with the power of a brand.

### Competitive Bidding

Transparent procurement method in which bids from competing contractors, suppliers, or vendors are invited by openly advertising the scope, specifications, and terms and conditions of the proposed contract as well as the criteria by which the bids will be evaluated. (Online Business Dictionary)

### Commercial

By commercial, the study refers to a project that is created for economic value and success in the consumer market rather than artistic or other value as a primary aim.

### Coherence (Visual Identity)

Coherence of Visual Identity here is defined as a form of conceptual consistency by means of recurring or corresponding visual elements. Intentional incoherence on the other hand could be a strategy meant to oppose a consistent sensibility.

#### Cultural Identity (Nick Bell's definition)

Cultural Identity is a nuanced approach to visual identity that integrates both the designer's creative vision and the curatorial vision and narratives. This is unconventionally what distinguishes the visual identities for arts and cultural contexts as compared to the more corporate aligning sort of visual identities.

#### Design Agency

A business focused on graphic design and usually comprising of a team that is led by an expertise in implementing combination of values, strategy and design tailored to their clients' needs.

#### Invitation to Tender

The initiating step of a competitive tendering process in which qualified suppliers or contractors are invited to submit sealed bids for construction or for supply of specific and clearly defined goods or services during a specified timeframe. (Invitation To Tender For The Provision Of Branding, Design And Web Services For Singapore Biennale 2019)

#### Organising Committee

A person or team who organizes the creation and development of large-scale events. It involves studying the brand, identifying its target audience, devising the event concept, and coordinating the technical aspects before actually launching the event. (Ramsborg, G.C., 2008)

#### Visual Identity

Visible elements of a brand, such as color, form, and shape, which encapsulate and convey the symbolic meanings that cannot be imparted through words alone. These elements are manipulated to construct the perceptual form of design that graphic designers develop for the purpose of the encounter by consumers.