

Drawing in the visual identity design process: Casa da Arquitectura

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Abstract. The outcome of a design project is judged by whether it succeeds or fails in achieving an objective, executing a function and the quality of how it manages to do it. This paper proposes an evaluation of the development process that leads to the final formalization and its consequent consideration. It is focused on the performative act of drawing and its performance as a tool for reflection, for mediating between rational intention and the mechanical consequence of the members who execute it (hand-brain operability), and its usefulness as a conductor of a process and communicator of development methodology and narrative.

In graphic design, however synthetic and clear a manual of graphic standards and the presentation of a solution may be, the process validates the result not only by what works in practice, but by what has been discarded and has not withstood constant reflection, criticism, and testing. A final layer is added: the consideration of the aesthetic autonomy and transversal utility that the methodology anchored in the exploration of drawing can achieve. It is by investigating drawing that hypotheses are glimpsed, proposals are criticized and confirmed, and solutions are corrected and shaped.

The practical case that illustrates this reflection is a two-year final project of a master's degree in design, which includes the theoretical contextualization, the project record and the presentation of a solution for a new visual identity for the multidisciplinary cultural entity Casa da Arquitectura, in Matosinhos, Portugal. Our research question was to understand the value of drawing in the design process of this new flexible visual identity and through our active research we were able to validate drawing as a key instrument to assist ideation and testing for the solution.

Keywords: Drawing, Design, Architecture, Visual Identity, Process.

1 Casa da Arquitectura, Portuguese Centre for Architecture

Established in 2007 in Matosinhos, Casa da Arquitectura serves as the Portuguese Centre for Architecture at local, national, and international levels. Since 2017, it has been located within the Real Vinícola complex, which houses exhibition spaces, archives, and facilities for events related to architecture and other artistic and socio-cultural fields. The institution hosts, archives, and makes available various architects' collections, fostering

discourse to strengthen the connection between architecture and society. As Casa da Arquitetura expands, its communication needed to become more complex due to its multifaceted activities. The institution is currently reflecting on its communication strategy, which is complicated by diverse programming targeting different audiences and themes. Financial constraints partially hinder innovative responses to emerging public needs and engagement with younger voices in architecture. Therefore, Casa da Arquitetura requires a cohesive visual identity system to address its fragmented image, clarify its mission, and enhance communication.

The development of this visual identity system requires a comprehensive approach, integrating extensive research and technical and theoretical knowledge from both graphic design and architecture. The relationship between these fields is characterized by parallel developments and intersections that go beyond the typical client-provider dynamic, evident in shared definitions, processes, tools, and objectives. Understanding this relationship is crucial for the visual identity commission, as it allows for a nuanced understanding of the group's expression, including the decoding of symbols, critical analysis of solutions, and contribution to the process and implementation. Architects and communication designers typically share a common language, references, and use mark making as a tool for exploring and conceptualizing ideas.

2 Depth and exploration of drawing in design

Drawing is mind expanding in design, it serves as a portal to new dimensions, new solutions and varying possibilities. Design students and professional designers usually keep a sketchbook in which they register their ideas^[1]. Besides being an accessible tool, drawing allows the coordination between hand and brain, which is a powerful strategy in the design process, not only for the student or researcher, but also for all stakeholders in the design project: when producing and showcasing design iterations, all the parts involved can quickly and promptly engage in the process – students, tutors, audience, and clients. ^[2] As the architect and author of *The Value and Aim of Sketching* states^[3], one can quickly put the idea down on paper before it fades. Ideas might fade quickly. But investing with a tool that is always accessible and almost universal, one can grab the idea, put it to the test, communicate it and validate it towards oneself and to others, more immediately than with any other tool. The ideation process can only be operationalized once it is pragmatized; once there is some sort of image that can be communicated, expressed, and rationalized. Since the mind has a quicker coordination with the hand ^[4] it has a prompter substantiation for the design process. And that is a very vital, energetic, feature in the design process.

Furthermore, the expressiveness, plasticity and ambiguity in quick manual sketching, can promptly open the spectrum interpretation, and allow greater originality ^[5] as it serves as a thinking tool for the design process, in particular, for the visual identity project.

¹ Tavares, P.; Albino, M.; Jorge, S.; Madureira, M.; (2023).

² Glaser, M. (2008).

³ Kahn, Louis I. (1931).

⁴ Wilson, F. R. (1998).

⁵ Molina, J.J. (2005); Rawson, P. (1969); Willats, J. (2006).



Fig. 3. © Michel Denancé. Source: www.rpbw.com/project/centre-georges-pompidou.

The approximate nature of drawing in the process of conceiving a visual identity project, can betoken the structure and meaning for its final stages.

In the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, mimetic virtuosity was replaced by the capacity for abstraction, attention, synthesis [8] and finally, focus - something absolutely essential in the 21st century, in which the proliferation and pervasiveness of visual stimuli of all kinds makes concentration very difficult and disperses attention.[9]

In this way, through drawing, the design project opens doors for reflection, concept, affect, complexity in its synthesis, while opening possibilities. It creates interaction with the memory of the author and observer, it generates opportunities that would otherwise not be so accessible, would turn non-polysemic, non-ambiguous, there would be nothing to add, to refine: the design process takes effect and it becomes richer with and through drawing, it calls for interaction with others (tutors, teachers, audience) because they interact, they complete the message, they engage, observe and create evolution in a pragmatic way. This tactile, gestural mark making process, enables strong synergies with the brain's sensory and motor cortices and its synapses, engaging both cognitive and motor functions, bridging the gap between physical interaction and cognitive processes. It allows for quick, intuitive connections within the brain, enhancing both creative expression and analytical thinking, aiding, and enriching the design project.

The rich language of drawing is a library of paths, structures systems and is like a portal to possibility; in short, it expands the vocabulary of design options.

3 The research process, iterations, refinement, and consequent proposal of a visual identity system for Casa da Arquitectura

The first forays into the project helped to establish the premises of the approach. According to the information gathered in the critical analysis, any solution should bear in mind the need to behave as a multiplicative, flexible, and dynamic system, and be endowed with a language capable of various discourses and physical and digital responses.

⁸ Lehrer, J. (2011).

⁹ Lorenz-Spreen, P.; Mønsted, B. M.; Hövel, P.; Lehmann, S. (2019).

The link to architecture, direct and indirect, in any iteration of the solution's visual language, should be immediate and inseparable. The vocabulary needs to be familiar, both on a technical level, from within the profession, and on a general level, from the external and common perception of architecture. This premise justified an incessant search for symbols and sketches related to architecture, construction, geometry, the urban, housing, the building, the design of a space, the texture of materials and the rhythm of elevations and stereotomy. This was the fuel for shaping the proposal, not in a redundant way, but as silent signifiers, substitutes for words, as stated by Joan Costa [10] when referring to the iconic values of a form, abstract or figurative, in the symbolic representation of an idea.

3.1 Drawing on architectural images

These premises were followed by the processes of gathering and hierarchizing references and the exercise of abstraction in finding common forms and repetitions through sketching and drawing. In the field of architecture, one of the first approaches, which proved to be fundamental and transversal in the development of the project, was the attempt to mathematically explain the proportions present in nature and the consequent relationships with the human figure. The golden section, the golden rectangle and the Fibonacci numerical sequence have been used throughout history. Examples of this are the representation of 'Vitruvius', 1492, which Leonardo DaVinci used in painting and architecture; the 'Golden Section', 1936, which served Ernst Neufert's ergonomic studies, and which are still used and expanded today, to consult the ideal measurements of spatial relationships and the articulation between objects; and 'Modulor', from 1950, which Le Corbusier used to base his modular studies. This last example particularly emphasized the parallelism sought between architecture and graphic design when reducing Le Corbusier's sketches to graphic expression and highlighting the importance of a replicable unit and its fitting into a grid. Technical representations, such as floor plans, elevations, and other analogue quick sketches were analyzed, edited, and dissected (vide figure 3), as well as several representations of the immediate in sketches and drawings (vide figure 5).

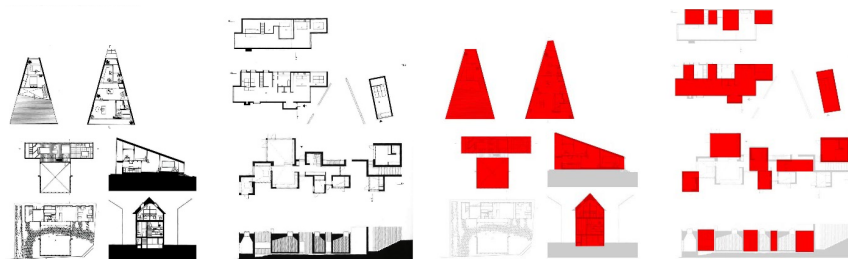


Fig. 4. Floor plans and elevations in the Casa da Arquitectura archive. Source: Author's work on various images collected.

¹⁰ Costa, Joan (2011).

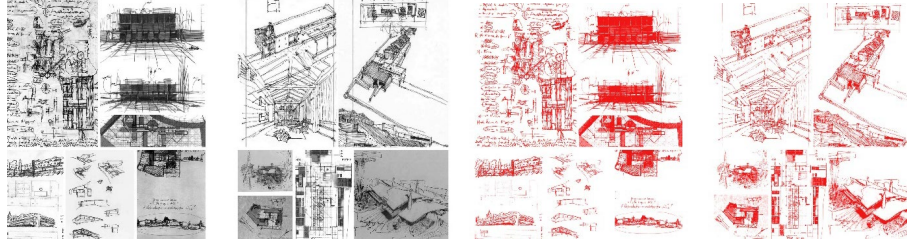


Fig. 5. Project sketches. Source: Author's work on various images taken from the Casa da Arquitectura Archive.

As can be observed in figure 5, during the process of analyzing and replicating sections of the photographs, the aim was to capture the most significant features while disregarding those aspects that were not essential to the work or author. The most distinctive elements of the work present in the photograph were identified, considering the rhythm of its contour and the balance between form and background. The outer contours and varying angles of the silhouettes of the projects were adjusted, drawing sections of the projects in a flat red color over the photographs to create silhouettes.

The components were refined and modified, selecting the most recognizable ones, particularly those with dynamic positive-negative relationships and with high identifiability. Certain elements were edited to enhance clarity of form by removing extraneous elements and emphasizing key features. If the most relevant components were diminished during the simplification of the silhouette with flat color, adjustments were made to preserve the harmony between the shape and background rhythm, as well as the movement of the contour.

After the work done on the references, the development of the project was marked by four phases of formalization. Each one was characterized by reflection and criticism, which were fundamental in identifying problems and flaws in the solution, justifying the next stage and the new objectives to be achieved. The various iterations contributed different weights to the final solution. The elements that resist the logic of the premises, when found, become transversal and support the evolution of the project's narrative.

3.2 Customized typography

The first phase was filled with sketches of graphic explorations around the basic dichotomies of architecture (empty/full, inside/outside, line/plane) and the articulation of symbols and geometries inspired by the references. The main idea at the beginning was to create a personalized, moldable, and fluid typography. The symbology of the elements that would make it up should be sufficient to link it to the architecture and build the entire vocabulary of a communication system. The starting point for the various exercises was the grid based on the golden rectangle, both in its subdivision and expansion. Each attempt at formalization resulted from a specific appropriation of the grid and its potential for variation.

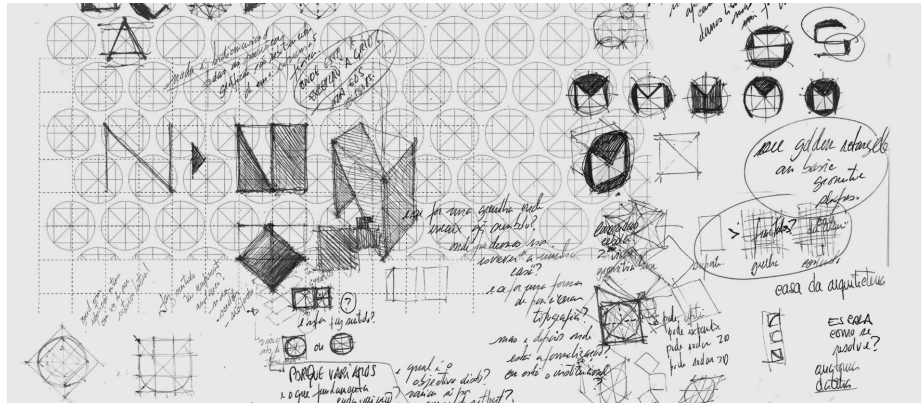


Fig. 6. Phase 1 sketches. Approach 1 - defined by the outside of the golden rectangle, the customization and formation of characters. Source: main author.

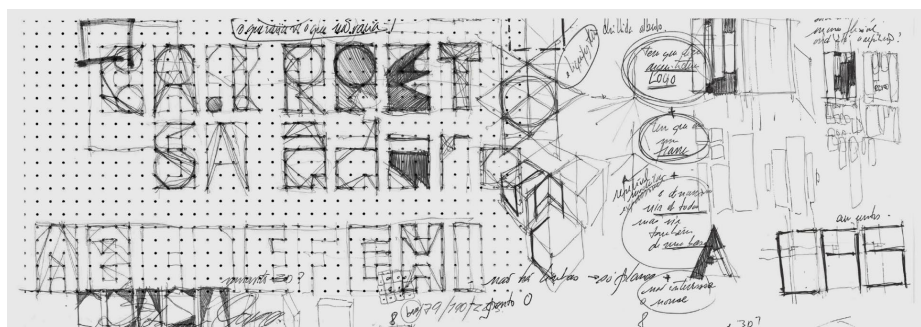


Fig. 7. Phase 1 sketches. Approach 2 - characters defined by spaced fills of the rectangle grid and connection of points inside it. Source: main author.

3.3: Visual syntheses

On this phase, the reflection converged more on the specificity of references brought by Casa da Arquitetura instead of those retrieved from the expanded universe of architecture as discipline. The heterogeneity of the collections and the thousands of documents that make them up is the distinguishing factor from all its counterparts. The plastic value of each piece, which is inseparable from the content that expresses it. The dimension of what it gives rise to and catalyzes: exhibitions, reflections, discussions, publications, inspirations. It is the starting point for all Casa da Arquitetura activity. If each object/model/drawing/photograph/document is an expression of its author's identity, then the articulation of all of them, the joint stain, is the DNA of Casa da Arquitetura.

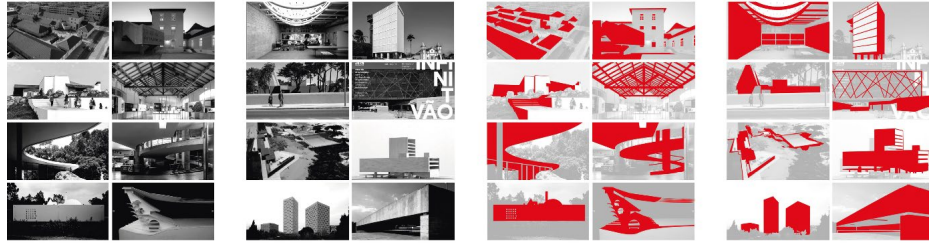


Fig. 8. Progression to the first set of visual syntheses of the system. Source: main author.

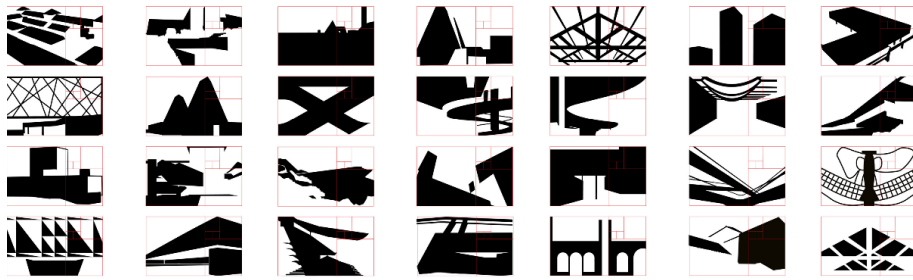


Fig. 9. First set of visual syntheses of the system. Source: main author.

3.4: Laconic visual syntheses and definition and articulation: institutional and thematic

The third phase of development focused on the possibility of creating visual syntheses disconnected from specific pieces in the collection, in order to represent the institutional side of Casa da Arquitectura. The communication system remains the same, the structure of the development of the images maintains the grid, the limits, the relationship between form and background, full and empty and scale of the forms, but the genesis is reformulated so that the result is laconic, purified, independent of association with style, work, or author. The identification of each graphic piece stems from its structure and integration into a system and not from recognizing the reference that originated it.

The process and rules for constructing the new visual syntheses made it possible to think of the iterations in a generative way. The parameters start from fitting into the grid, subdividing the golden rectangle and making shapes proportionally larger than the first one stipulated. The finite results of this composition can be expanded by modifying the boundaries of each unit. The important thing to retain is the relationship between the parts and the plastic and graphic relevance of each image.

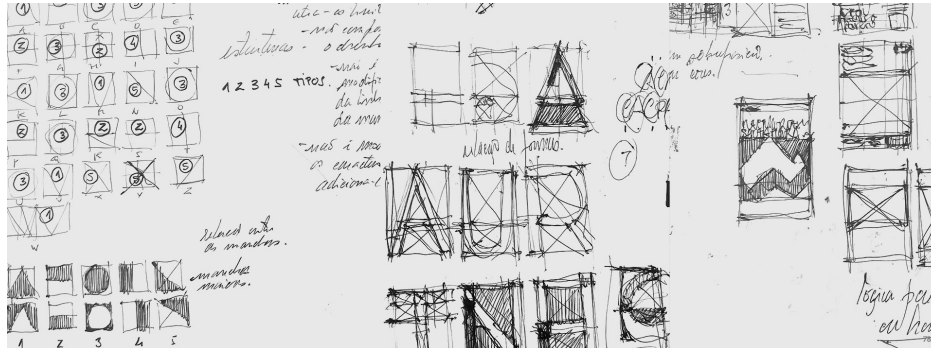


Fig. 10. Exploring the addition of laconic elements to characters. Source: main author.

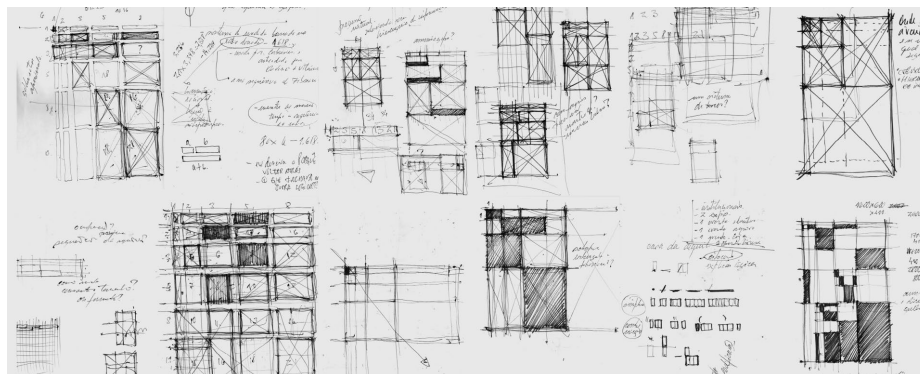


Fig. 11. Exploring the graphic competence of the rectangle on the grid. Source: main author.



Fig. 12. Institutional Posters. Source: mockups made by the main author.

4 Conclusion

The research through and with drawing: made by the synthesis, emulation drawings that came from photographs of the authors' works, by the leveling or exaggerating of the

most iconic parts; planning drawings of models, elevations, grids and technical representations; by the sketch tests of grids, customization of typography and articulation of elements in layout, present in the process of designing a new flexible visual identity for Casa da Arquitectura in Matosinhos, allowed us to communicate, refine and validate solutions and verify the importance of manual drawing as a thinking tool, as a form of communication, expression and opening up possibilities that were then used in the final visual identity.

Through the research in drawing in this design process, the relevance of the various expressions of mark making in the exploration of tangible connections between themes, in the immediate prediction of communication behaviors, in the understanding and explanation of visual intentions and in the informative report of the development process of a visual identity was tangible and enabled us to substantiate the significance of manual drawing as an instrumental tool for conceptualization in this design project. Particularly, it underscored the value of diverse mark making expressions in facilitating the tangible integration of themes, the immediate anticipation of communicative behaviors, the comprehension and articulation of visual intents, and the documentation of the development process of a visual identity. In essence, drawing was recognized as a multifaceted tool for reflection, communication, and information, while also being appreciated for its aesthetic and final qualities, possessing inherent value beyond its initial utilitarian purpose.

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