

DESN 2023 GradEx Website

Case Study

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Sean Reibling, Justin Chiu, Khadija Bari, Gajanan Ketheeswaran

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Background & Research

About the Project

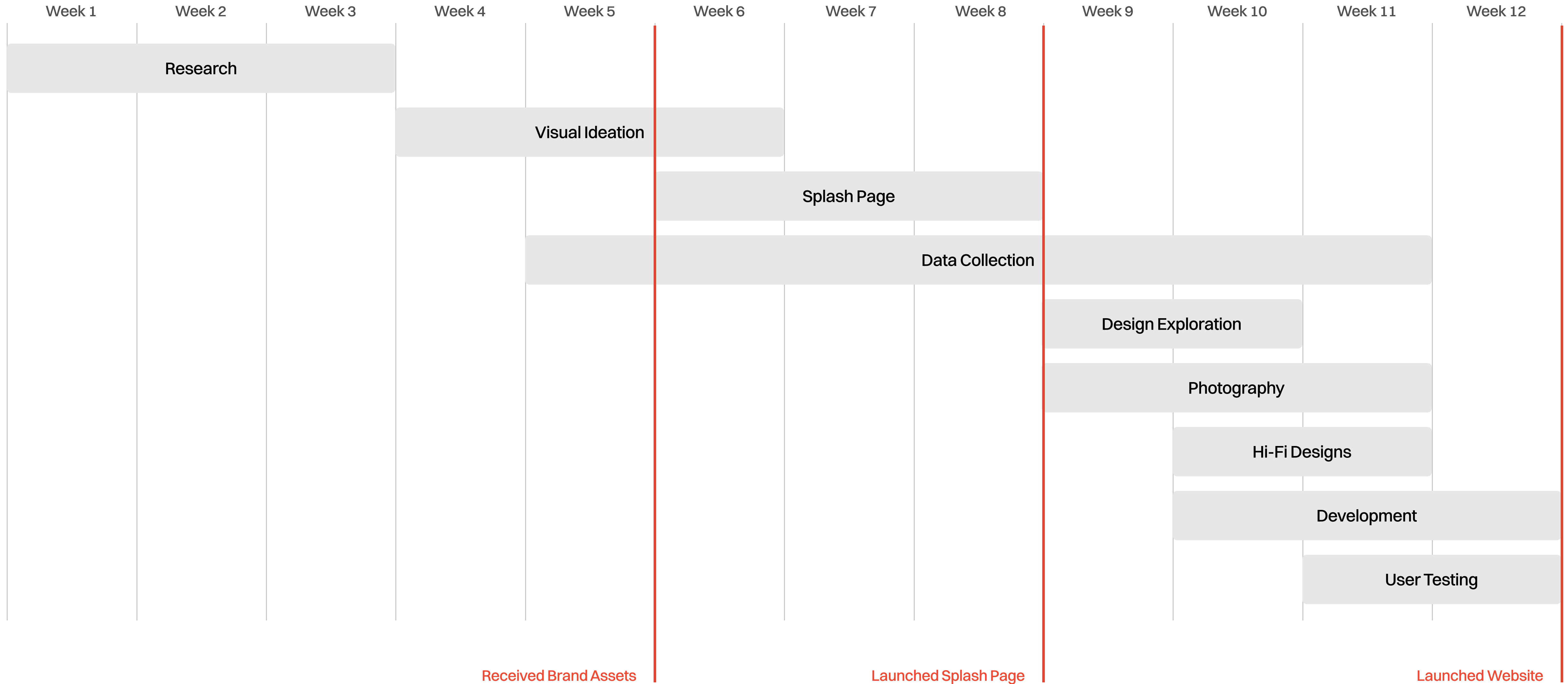
Overview

The DESN GradEx is a yearly exhibition showcasing the up-and-coming talent of the graduating design class.

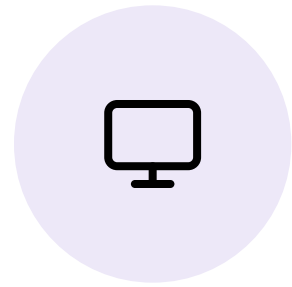
Our cohort had the honour of putting together the inaugural in-person and digital exhibition of the new Bachelor of Design (DESN) program at York University.

This case study details the collaborative design and development process that we went through to build and launch the GradEx website.

Project Timeline

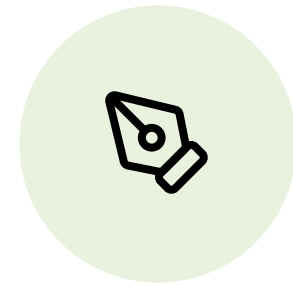


Team Structures



Digital

Responsible for designing and developing the exhibition website and establishing a digital presence at the in-person event



Creative & Branding

Responsible for establishing the theme and brand identity for the exhibition and providing direction for all applications of the brand



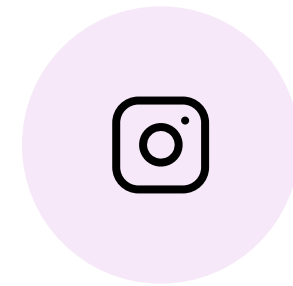
Employee & Recruiter Relations

Responsible for conducting outreach and building connections with relevant industry recruiters



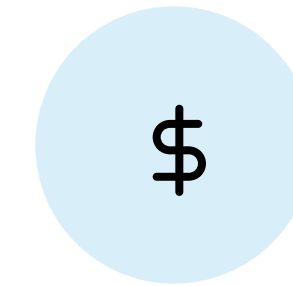
Logistics

Responsible for hosting the in-person event and managing the finances for the exhibition



Marketing

Responsible for promoting the exhibition through various online social media platforms and to generate traction for the exhibition



Sponsorships & Funding

Responsible for securing sponsorships and donations from relevant design businesses

Digital Roles

Sean Reibling

Team leader

Project management
UI / UX
Frontend Webflow development
Content management
Content validation / QA

Khadija Bari

Team co-leader

Project management
UI / UX
Content validation / QA

Justin Chiu

Frontend development
Interactive motion
Content management

Gajanan Ketheeswaran

Motion design
Motion storyboarding
Content validation / QA

Madeline Rubba

Photography post-production
Motion storyboarding
Content validation / QA

Megan Furlong

Frontend development
Content validation / QA
UI / UX

Iris Mamac

UI / UX
Content validation / QA

Other Contributors

Branding

Creative Team

Established graduating exhibit brand identity and provided brand assets

Photography

Abigail Wiley

Photographed all graduate portraits and managed upload of originals

Copywriting

Jennifer Huynh

Provided copywriting for key headlines and paragraphs across the site

Research Methodologies

Empathy Mapping

We began by creating an empathy map examining both our aspirations and fears for our future-selves post-graduation. This provided insight into areas where our grad exhibit could help us achieve these goals.

Fears

Debt, unemployment, rejection, failure, finances, layoffs

Frustrations

Finances, economy, poor mental health, lack of experience

Wants

Work-life balance, industry connections, financial stability

Aspirations

Promotions, finding mentors, enjoying work, confidence



Key Findings

Find Jobs

- Students want to gain the attention and exposure of industry recruiters in order to secure great jobs
- Students want a way to network, view, and share their accomplishments

Build Confidence

- Currently, there is a lack of confidence in capability as being designers (high imposter syndrome)
- Students want a way to confidently present themselves and their work

Build Program Reputation

- Students want to prepare for success and make a good first impression for the first showcase of our design program, and the years to come
- Students want to establish a good reputation among industry professionals and organizations who do not yet know of our program.

Problem Statement

Problem Statement

How might we create an engaging, user-friendly website that showcases the work of our inaugural class to effectively reach a wider audience online?

Defining Success

Measuring Success

01

Traffic and Engagement

80 new users/day during in-person grad show

- 40% of event attendees

900 new users in 6 months

- 2x attendance of in-person show

5 minutes average engagement time

- Enough time to navigate to 2 profiles and/or case studies

02

Employer / Recruiter Conversions

50 recruiter connections on LinkedIn

- average 1.5 connections per graduate

33 recruiter messages or e-mails

- average 1 message or e-mail per graduate

03

User Feedback

Positive user feedback

- At least 90% satisfaction rate

Successful site navigation

- Users are able to utilize all functions of the website with minimal friction and in a timely manner

Design Objectives



Content-First Design

Ensure the website's user interface does not overpower student work. To achieve this, we may employ a design that features a minimal colour palette and clean typefaces.



Discoverability

Consistently presenting opportunities for users to discover both graduates and their case studies. This can be achieved by surfacing more content suggestions at the end of a page, as well as providing intuitive ways to manually discover content such as filtering and real-time search.



Continuity

Create an experience where the user can seamlessly navigate between pages and sections. This can be achieved via smooth page transitions, fast image loading, and intuitive animations and transitions for menu and search dropdowns.

Design Objectives

Must dos

- Profiles, bio, and projects, and social links
- 'Filtering' system based on discipline & search by names
- Consider content of case studies (project overviews VS. case studies – show whole project or link out?)
- Events page (physical or digital location details) ✓
- Project tags should be ranked or limited to a certain number
- Discoverability should be relevant to ones project vs one's interest in jobs
If someone only does only branding for e.g., put their work before projects that also have branding
- Portraits need to be cohesive and compressed haha (maybe same overlay colour or B&W)?
- Resume and work experience? (uploaded/ linked document)
- Add changing spotlights to main page
- Add thumbnail/ profile photo of designer underneath projects
- Contact information/form in footer?
- below projects - 'more from this user' or 'other projects like this' (e.g. more interaction projects)

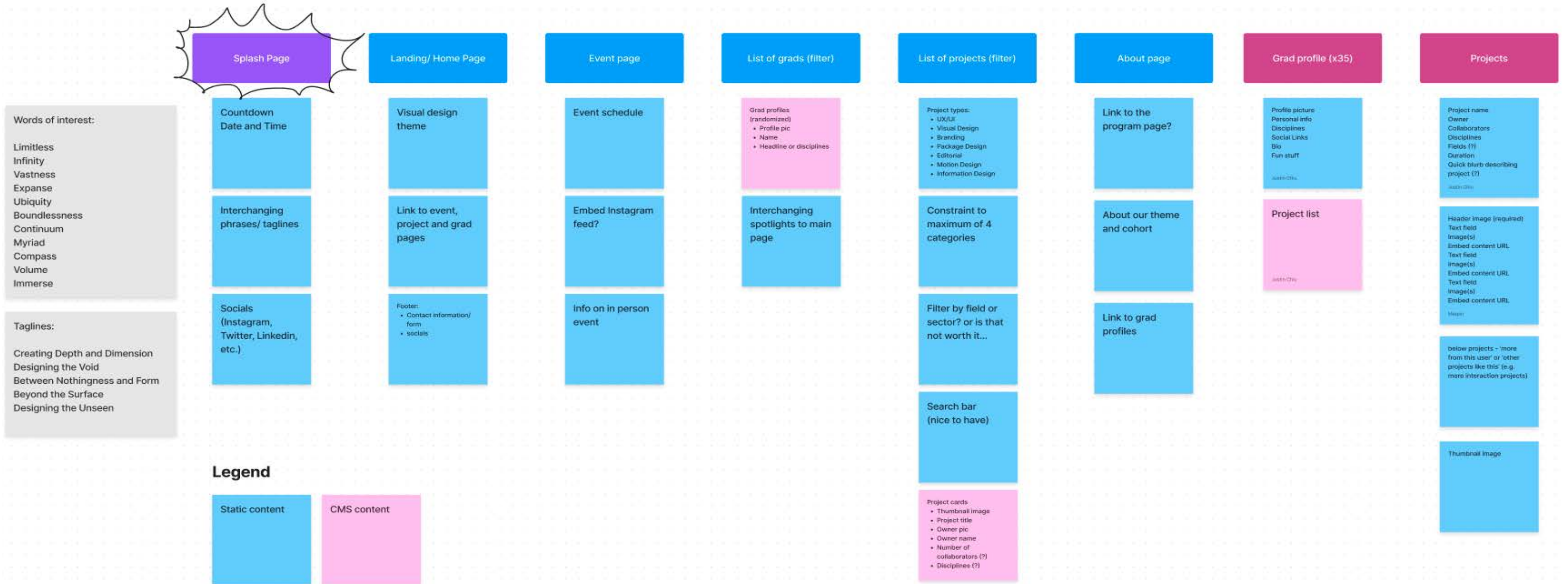
Would-love-to dos

- Categories related to sector or topic that the design project is about, e.g. healthcare, arts+culture, social justice
- Related/similar projects or more from this designer
- Pop-up survey (or just a quick 1 Q) that asks viewers what type of work they are most interested in, etc. → shows them grads who specialize in that discipline
- Marketing promo videos with DESN students marketing the show/ venue
- Personal bio videos?
- Let each designer have their own personality somehow – through answers to fun questions, quotes, personal logos/ icons etc.
- Allow people to bookmark designers and projects so they can go back and find them easily (e.g. cache, Jetboost?)
- A webpage within a webpage viewer with website nav controls so that people can view others' portfolio sites but easily return to the grad site (e.g. iframe)? (or just open in new tab)
- Barba.js – seamless transitions between pages, URL replacement
- Lottie motion graphics on website from After Effects

Legend

- BUILDING CONFIDENCE
- JOB RECRUITMENT
- PROGRAM REPUTATION

Design Objectives

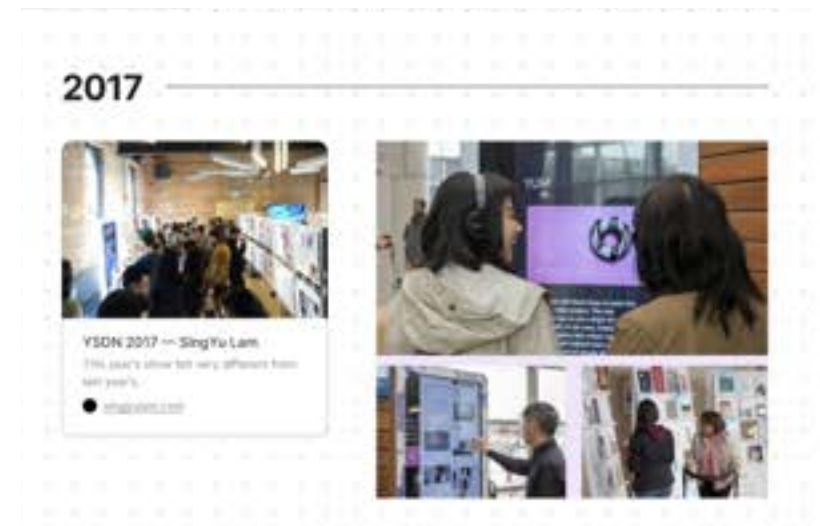


Creation Process

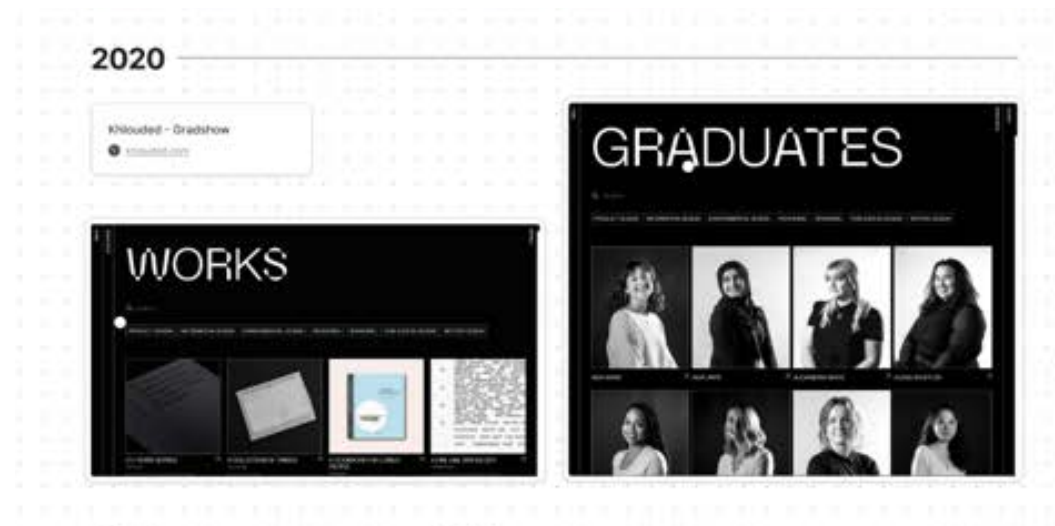
Design Exploration

Moodboards

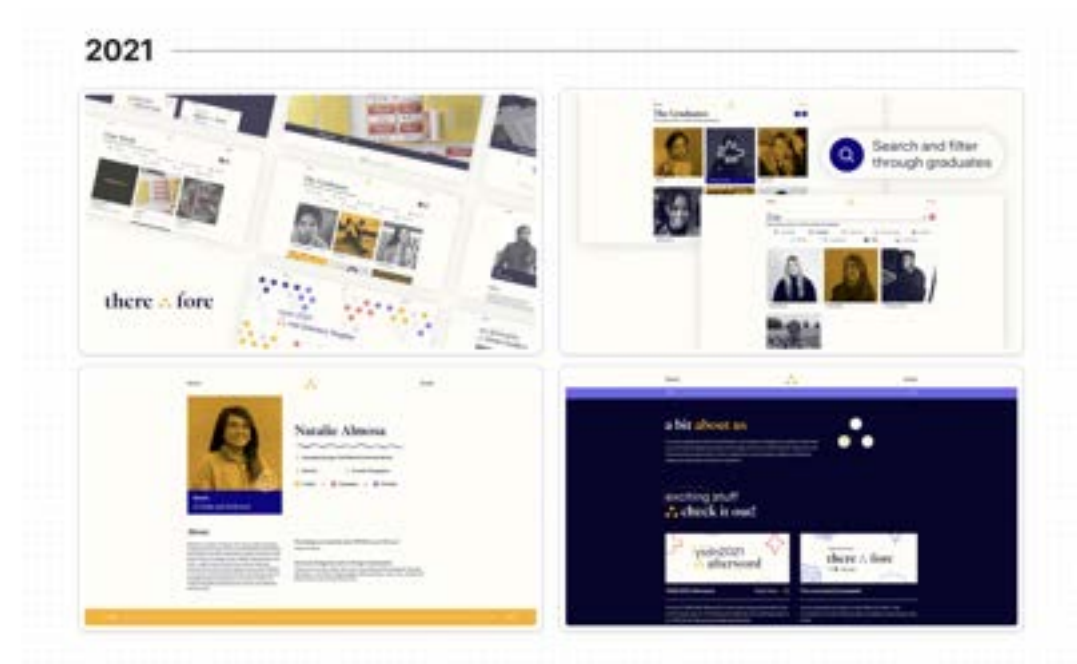
Past GradEx Sites



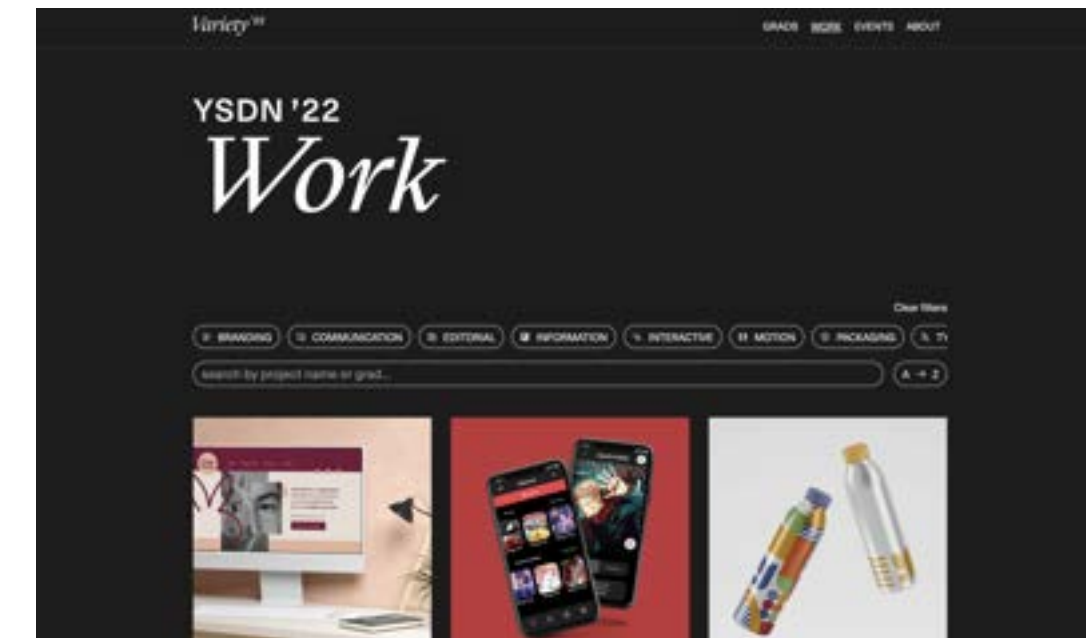
2017



2020



2021

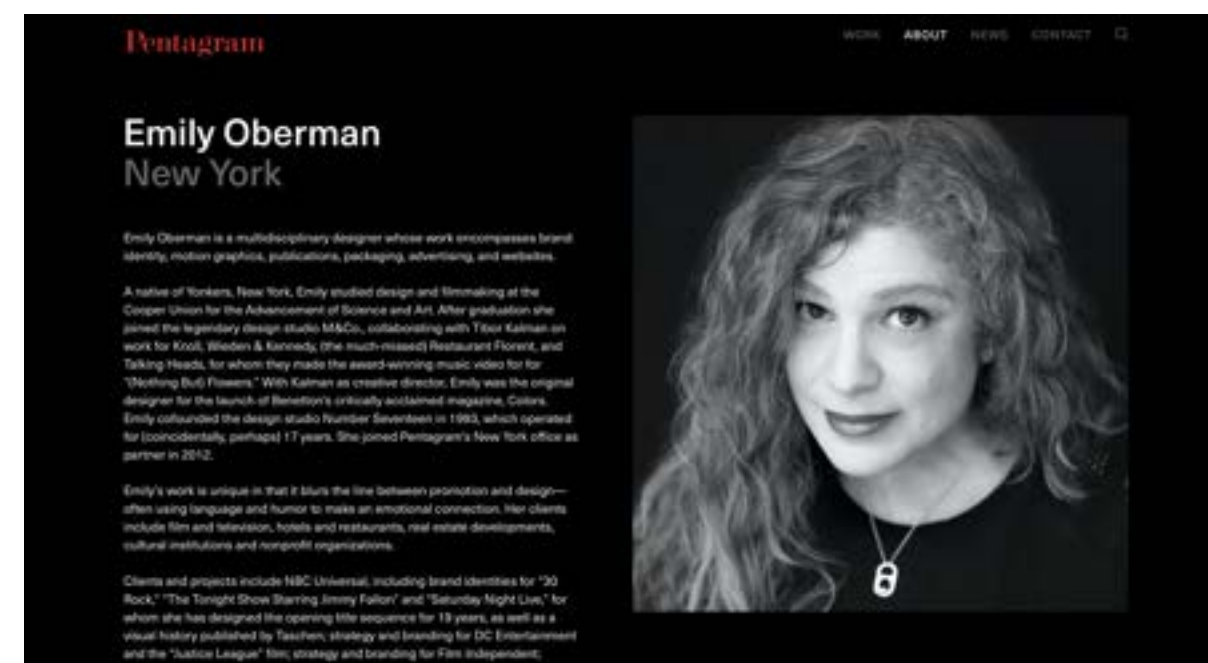


2022

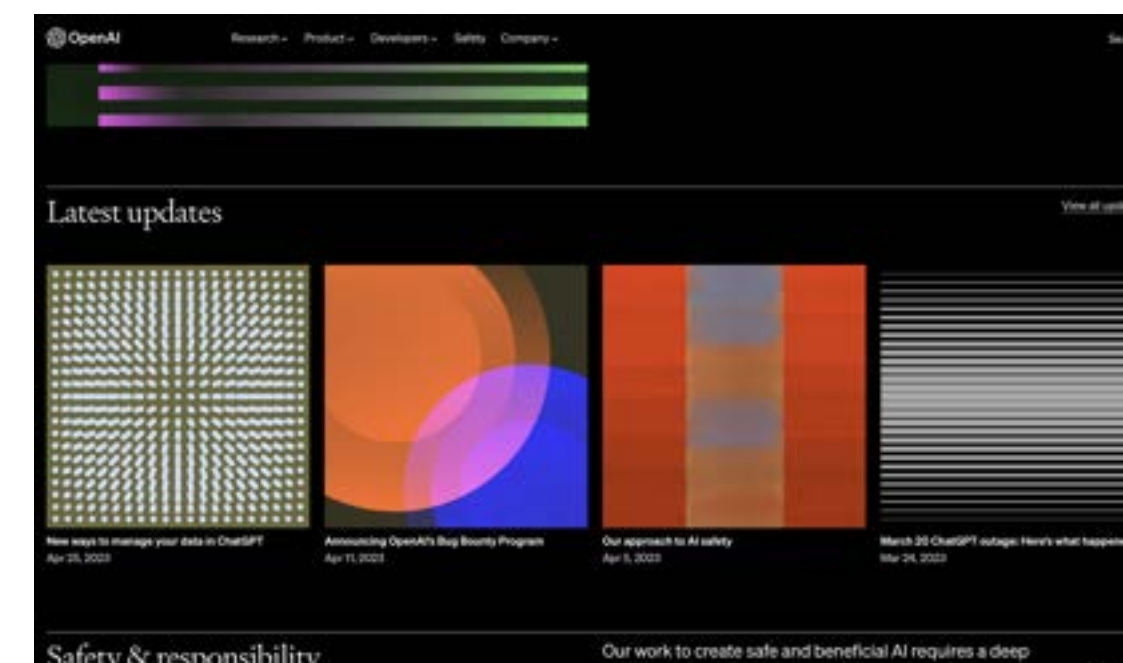
Visual Inspiration



Area 17



Pentagram



OpenAI

Preliminary Brand Assets

Logo overview

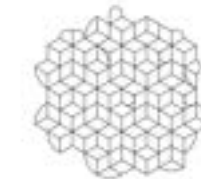
The logo is dynamic, using both the patterns from the penrose assets, along with the wordmark which stays consistent throughout each variation.



Graphic Motif: Variations



Garnish
Only used large scale, or by itself as a decorating element.
Examples: inside covers, divider blocks on web, decorating elements for windows, tote bag etc.



Outline
Only used at large scale or on its own. Colour can be added behind or to create shapes depending on application.
Examples: wayfinding, 'thank you' cards, social media, motion graphics



Tier 1
Used as an overlay on image for visual interest, or on its own.
Examples: social media posts, printed posters, splash page



Solid
Only used for social media images.



Tier 2
Used as an overlay on image for visual interest, or on its own.
Examples: social media posts, printed posters, splash page

General Sans

HOW TO USE

- Use for all body copy
- May also use for slightly larger blocks of text like pull-quotes or short descriptive sub-lines
- Avoid using for display headlines

General Sans
 General Sans
 General Sans
 General Sans
General Sans
General Sans



Primary colours

These are the colours that will be used for the majority of all design work. Black as the accent colour on a white background. The "off-white" is used as the secondary colour on the penrose patterns.



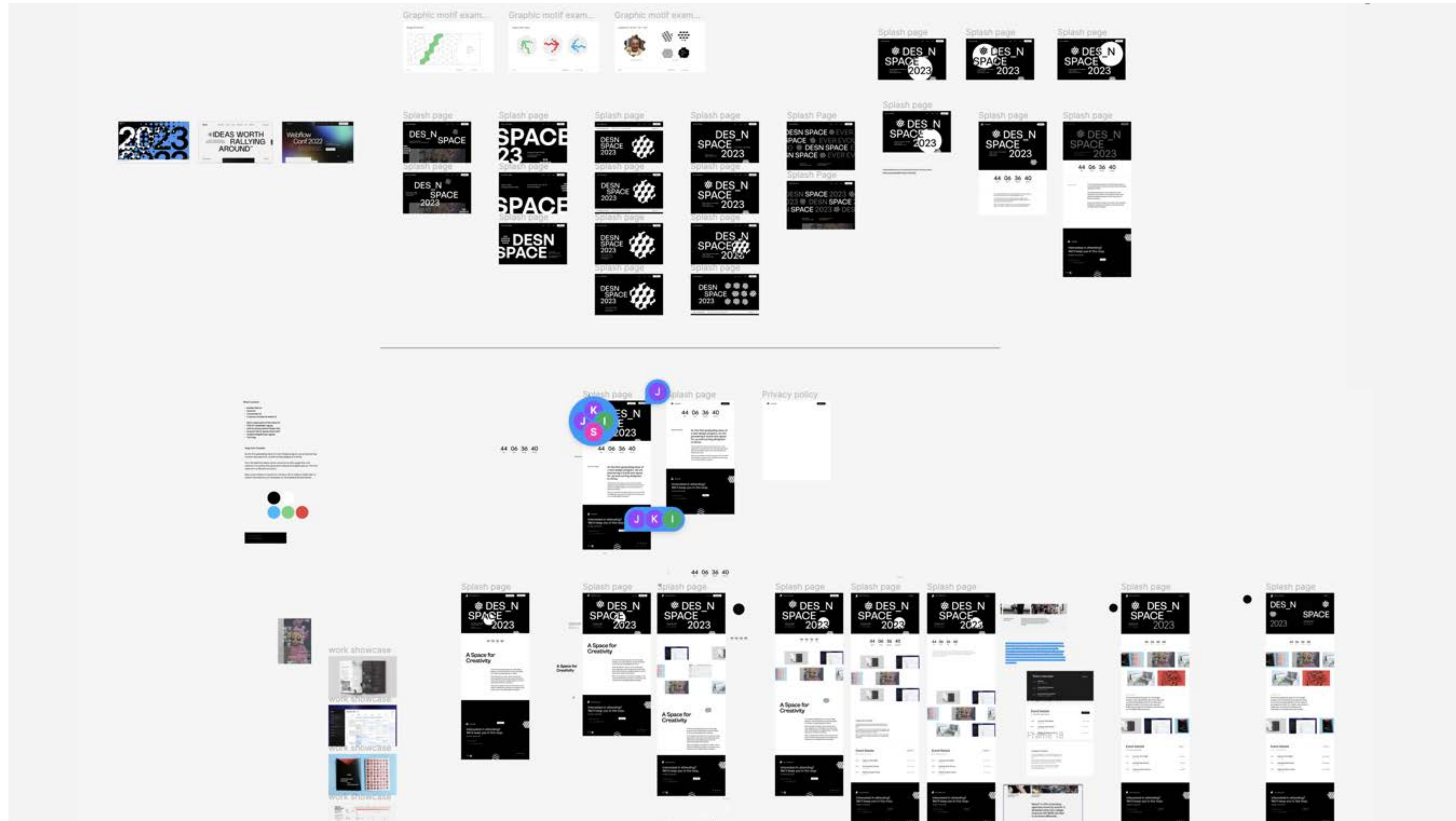
Black
 HEX: #000000
 CMYK: 0, 0, 0, 100
 RGB: 0, 0, 0

White
 HEX: #FFFFFF
 CMYK: 0, 0, 0, 0
 RGB: 255, 255, 255

Off-White
 HEX: #FAFAFA
 CMYK: 2, 1, 1, 0
 RGB: 250, 250, 254

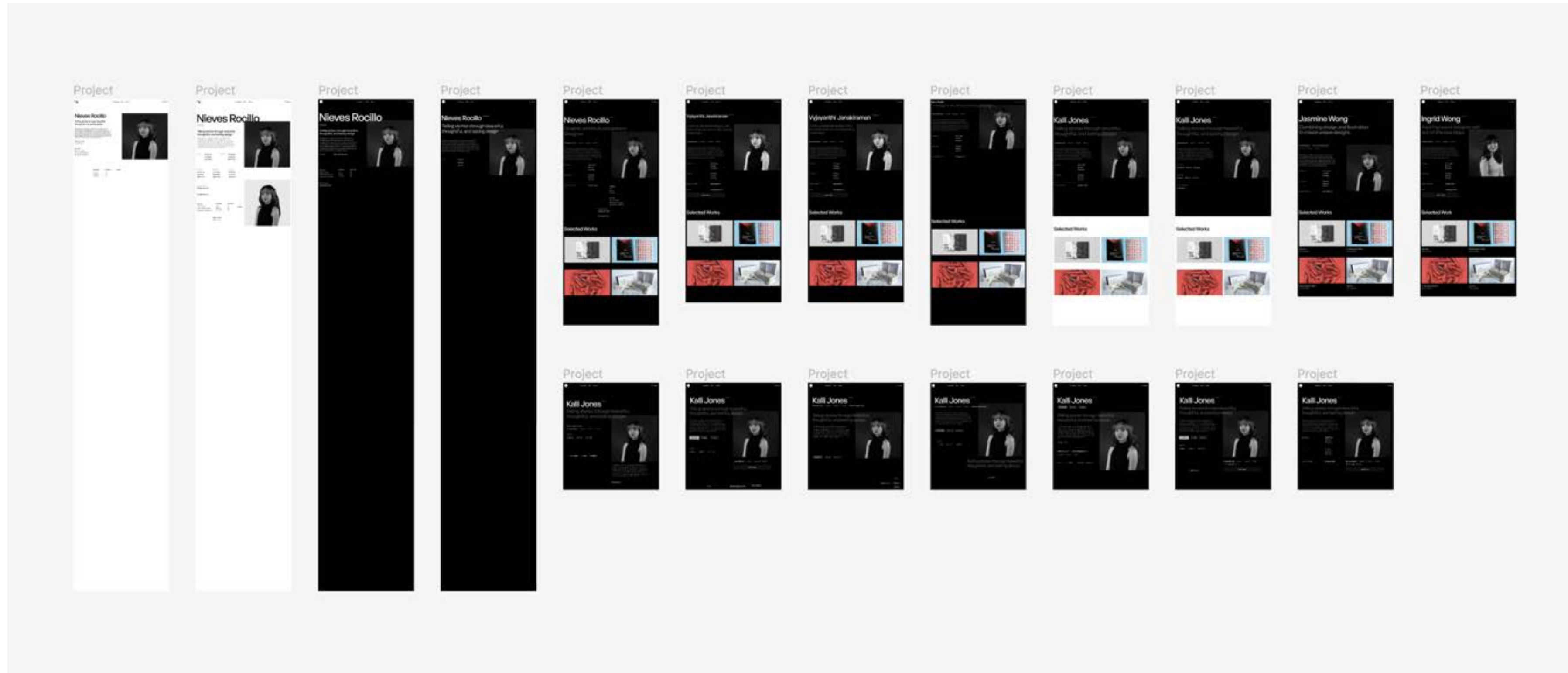
We were provided with a set of brand guidelines that loosely outlined the implementation of the identity. Type and colour guidelines were provided along with the primary identifying geometric pattern assets and logos, scaled to fit various contexts from physical signage to digital mobile devices.

Exploration: Splash Page



We explored various visual directions for the splash page that utilized our brand visual identity in a fun, dynamic, and compelling way. We experimented with principles like scale and weight in order to achieve these outcomes.

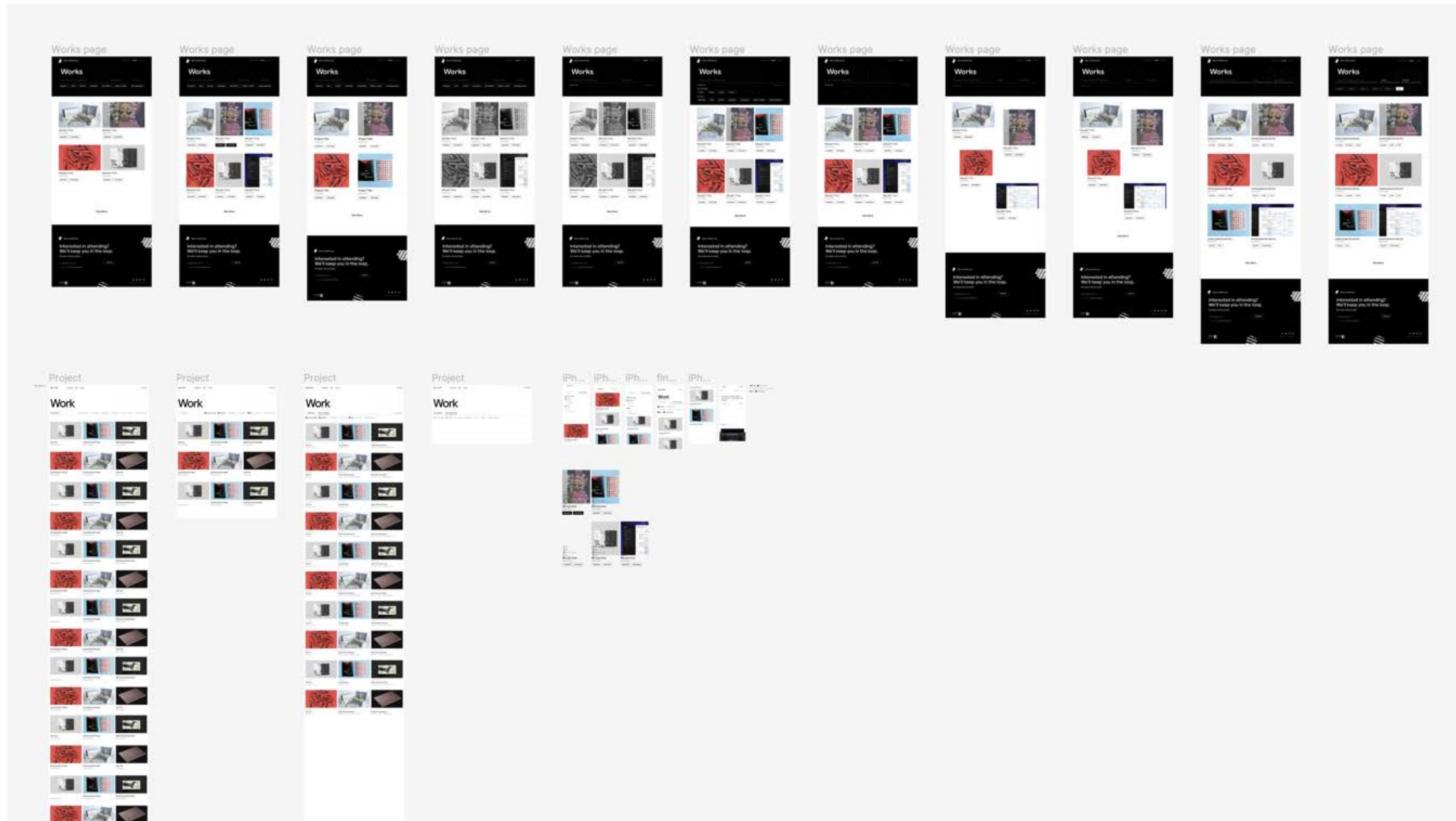
Exploration: Profiles



The profile page required lots of iteration upon discovering that our biggest challenge was designing for dynamic content.

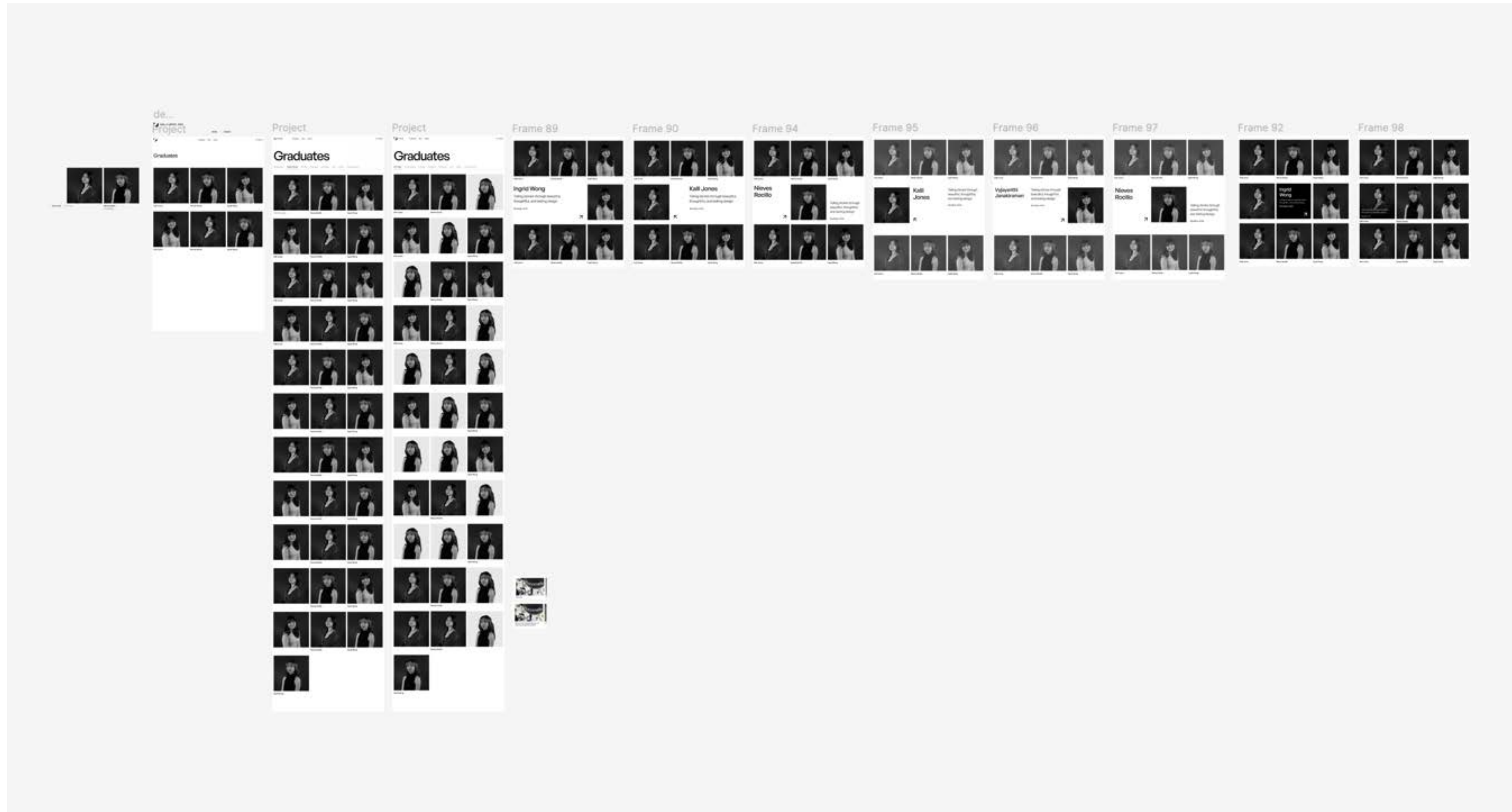
Considering each grad would provide different content of different lengths to display on their individual profiles, we had to account for these variations and explored various visual directions to achieve this.

Exploration: Work



We explored various visual directions as to how we can best showcase our grads' work. We ended up going with a visual direction that practiced continuity across other pages we'd designed for the site, featuring a simple, clean, and elegant appearance that doesn't over shine the work.

Exploration: Graduates

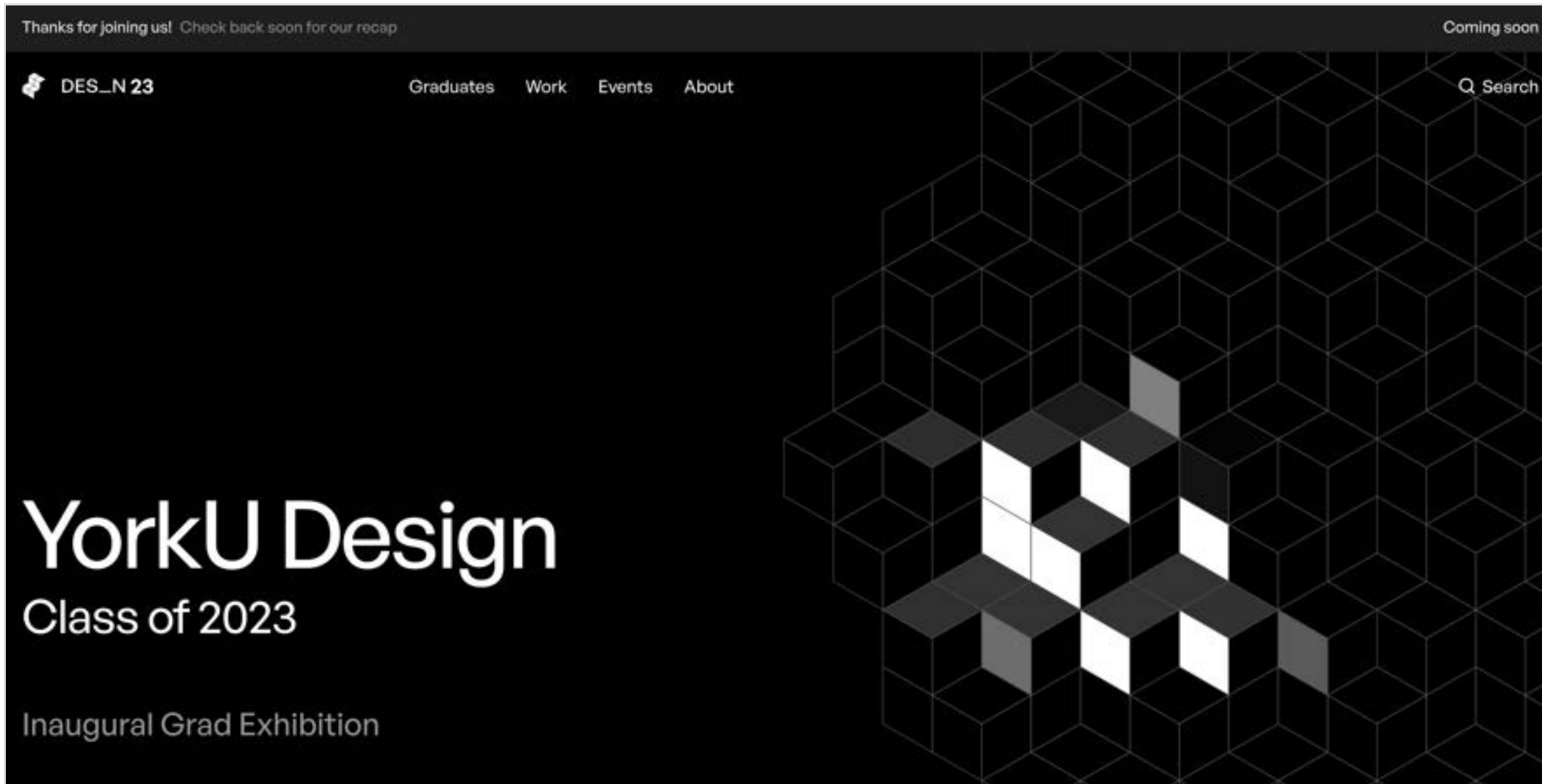


To avoid potential issues on selecting grads based on their appearance or name, our team considered various visual directions and hover-interactions to showcase a bit more about the grad.

We also considered showcasing the disciplines of each grad to provide a bit more context on their practice and work, and displaying a similar filtering scale as other pages to practice continuity.

Final Designs & Rationale

Home Page



Website Entry Point

Our developers collaborated with our branding partner to make the visual identity more dynamic for the hero and gage interest.

This page features a bit of everything to give visitors different avenues to explore, from student work, to graduates, and information about the show.



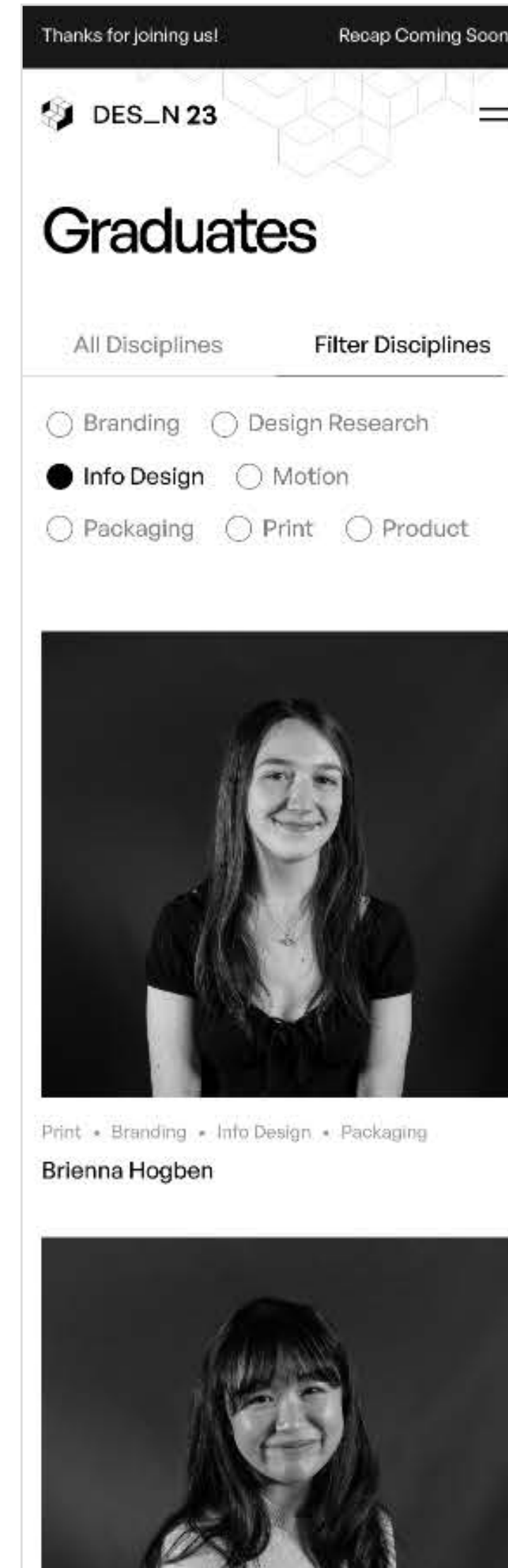
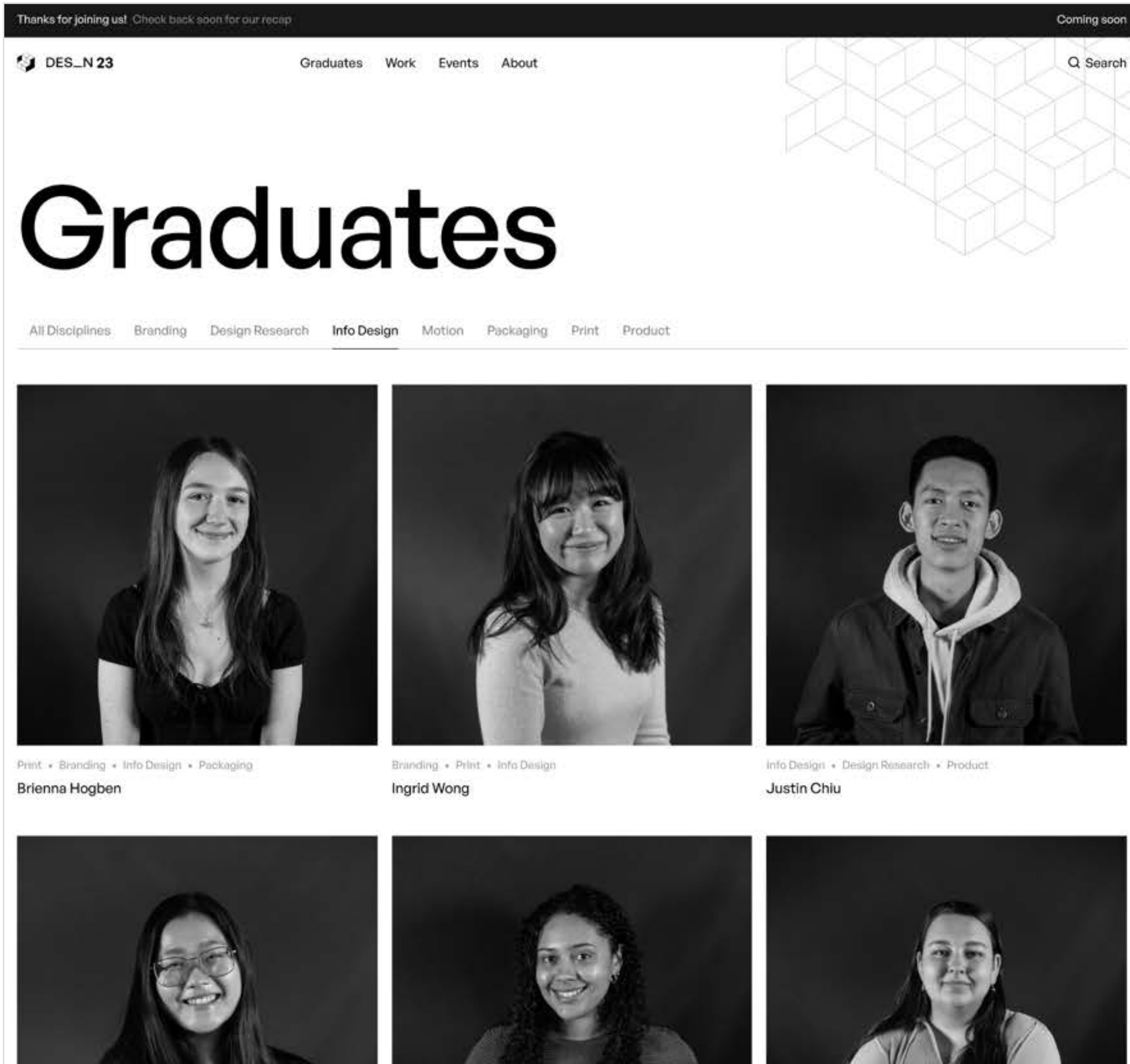
Ingrid Wong
Academy Leader

We're carving out a space for new designers to thrive.

[About our cohort](#)

Featured Work [View all](#)

Graduates List



Photographs

We collaborated with our photographer to get professional headshots taken of each grad for consistency on the site.

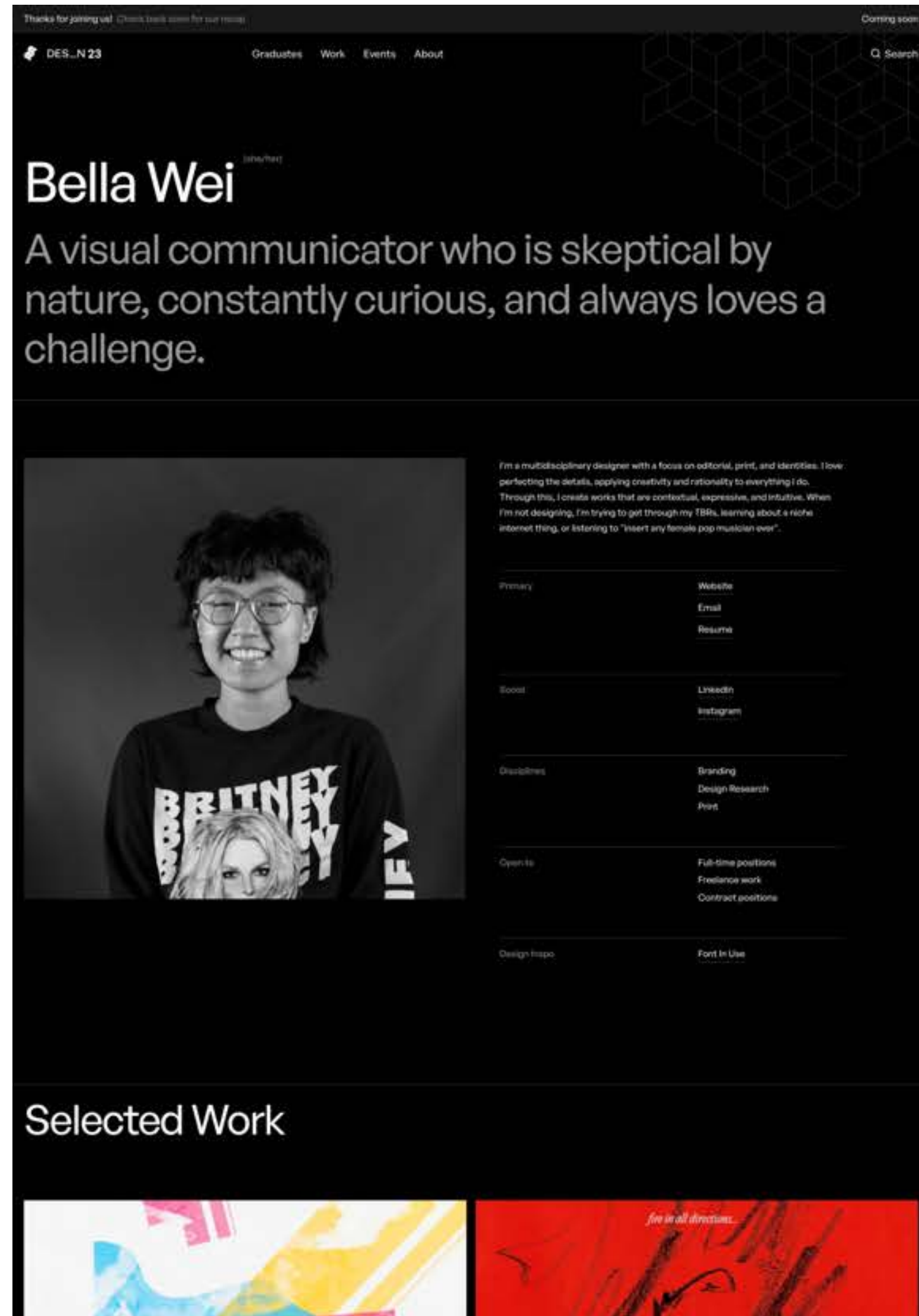
Filtering

Visitors can filter through grads by disciplines at any point. By default, all grads are listed in alphabetical order by first name.

UI Design

The UI is kept simple and elegant to compliment our larger brand identity and consider good practices for intuitive interactions on the site.

Graduate Profiles



Displaying Details

All relevant information about the student, such as their name, design disciplines of interest, their work and more are provided on this page.

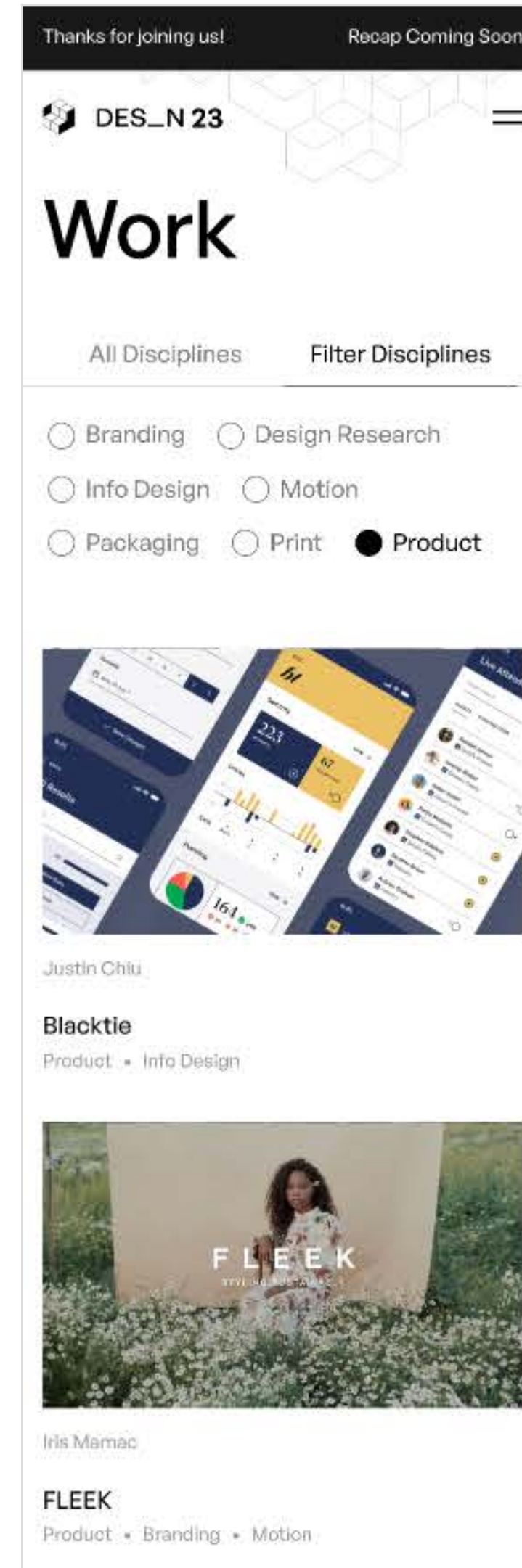
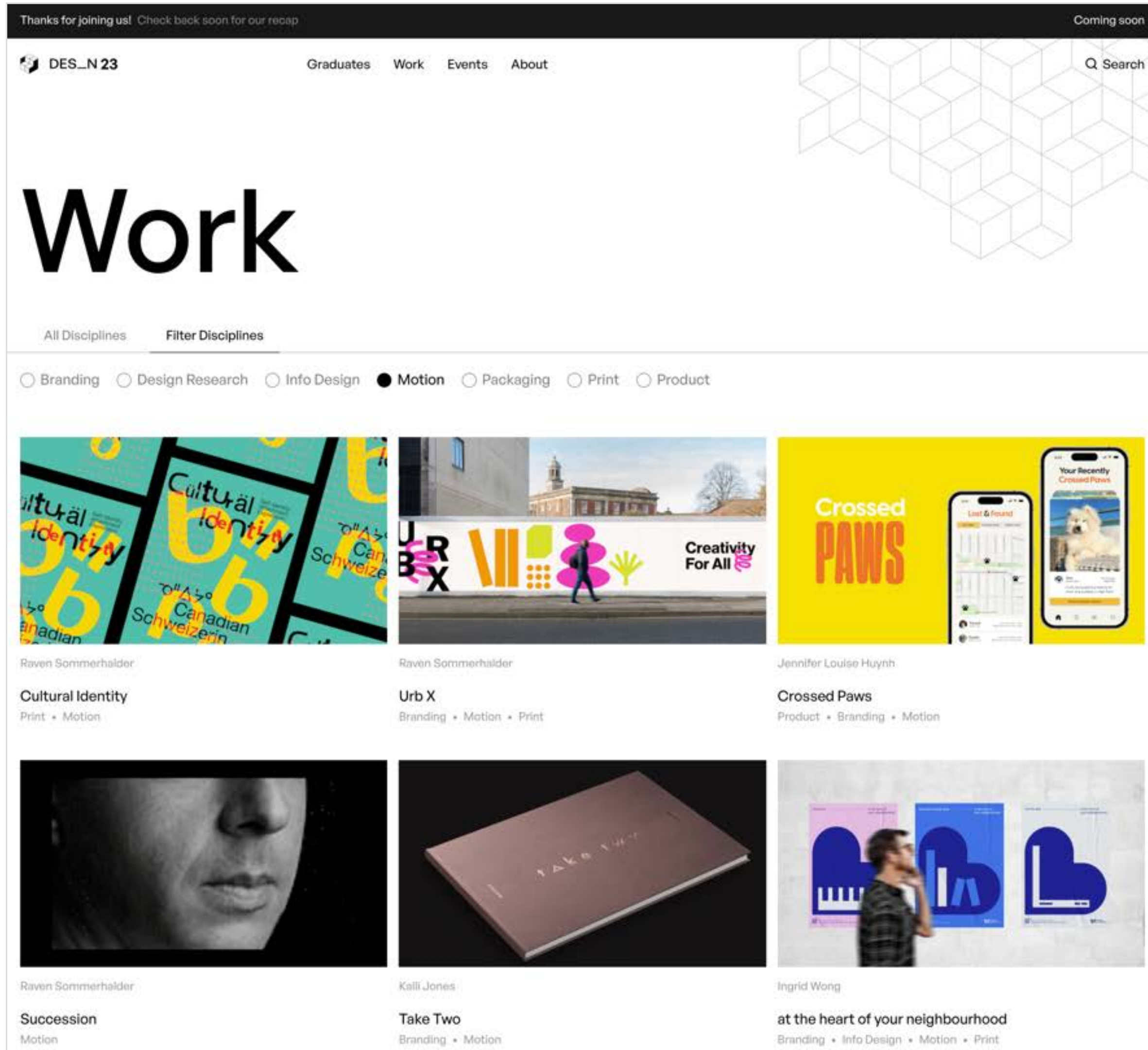
The UI is kept structured and aligned to a grid to account for varying dynamic content across all our grads' information.

Lines are used for sectioning to separate different parts of the page, as well as complement our brand.

Discoverability

Near the bottom of the page, we provide visitors with opportunities to discover more students so that they're always left with more avenues to explore.

Works List



Filtering

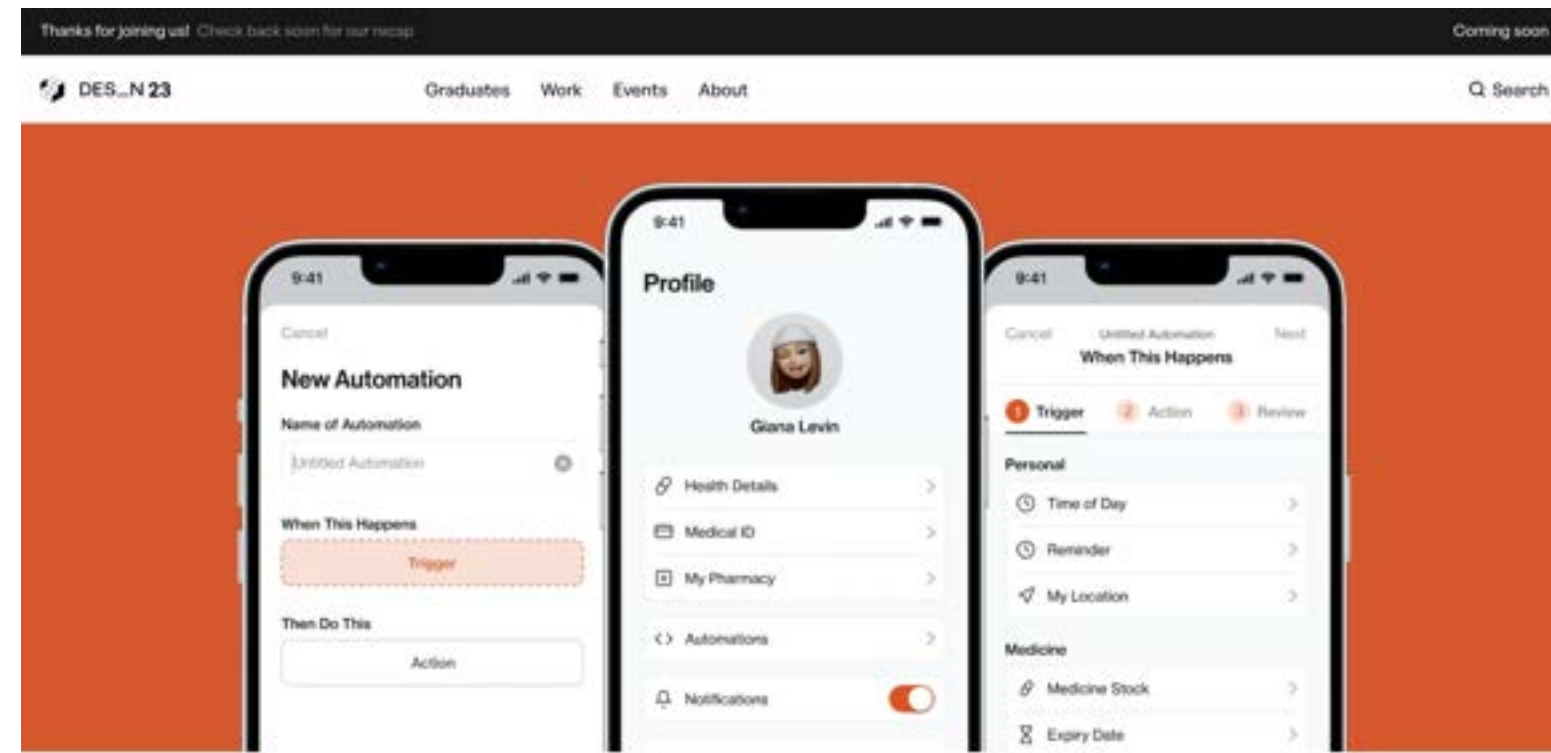
Visitors can filter through work by disciplines at any point. By default, all listed works are placed in a randomized order, and continue to randomize upon page refresh to give all students equal opportunity for exposure.

We feature a different filtering function on this page so that visitors can filter by work that incorporates multiple areas of design interest.

UI Design

The UI is kept simple and elegant to compliment our larger brand identity and consider good practices for intuitive interactions on the site.

Case Studies



Thanks for joining us! Check back soon for our recap. Coming soon

DES_N 23 Graduates Work Events About Search

Refill
Custom Automations for your Personal Healthcare Experience

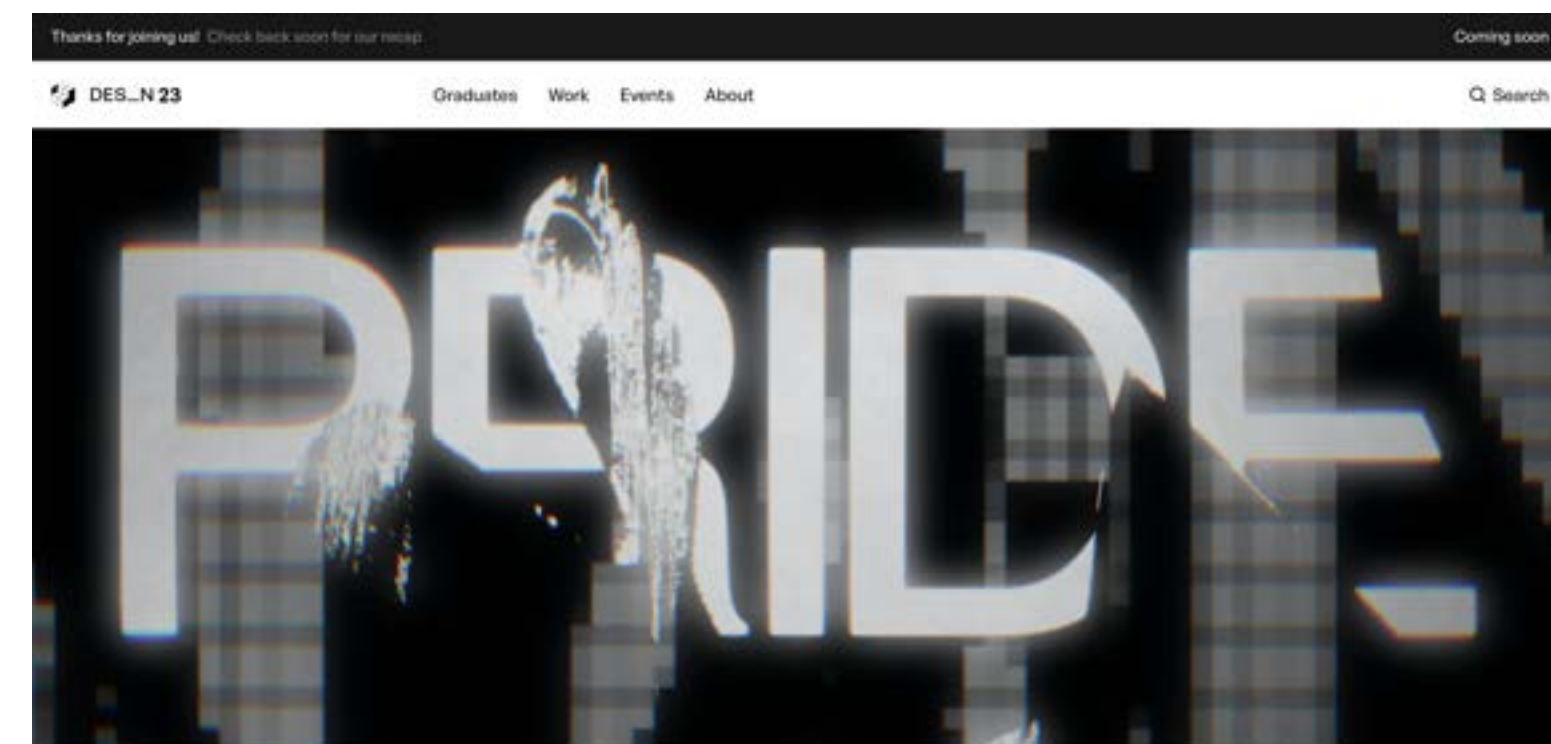
Product • Branding • Motion

Collaborators
Kenny Khau

Length of Project
6 Weeks

Final Product
<https://www.figma.com/proto/SzeN6C9u2LuwJ/V/>

External Case Study
<https://www.khadjabari.ca/refill-app>



Thanks for joining us! Check back soon for our recap. Coming soon

DES_N 23 Graduates Work Events About Search

Pinoy Pride / Filipino Pride

Design Research • Motion • Print

Length of Project
24 Weeks



at the heart of your neighbourhood
A campaign created to promote the Toronto Public Library's resources and services

tpl. toronto public library

Project Statement



Why this matters



DES_N 23

Nieves Rocillo

Packaging • Branding

Magkasama Bilang Isa
A Filipino wedding gift of dried rice and noodles, packaged “together as one.”

Project Details +



Displaying Work Details

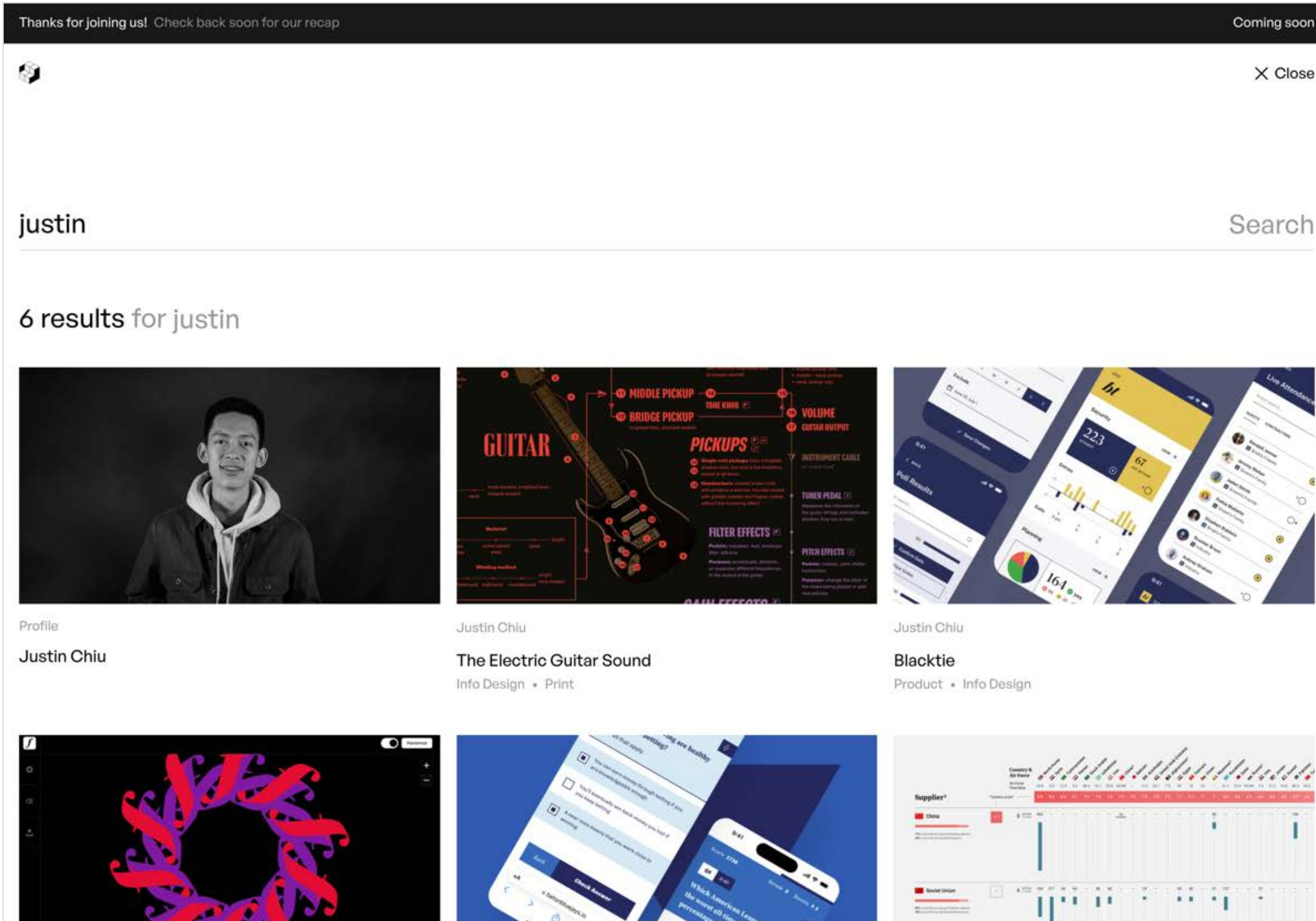
We feature an image-first approach on all case studies to gauge interest with the viewer.

We provided students with multiple ways to display their work, but set constraints on the layout to maintain visual consistency across the site.

Discoverability

Near the bottom of the page, we provide visitors with opportunities to discover more of the student's work so that they're always left with more avenues to explore.

Search Function



Search Function Abilities

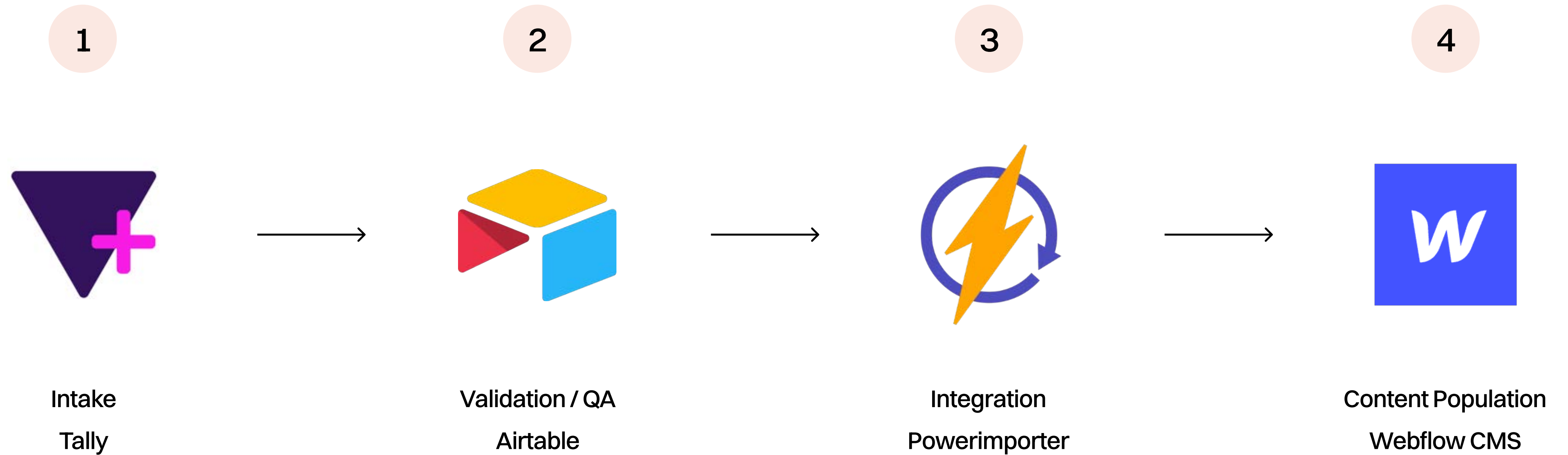
Visitors have the option to search for any grad or project through this function, with grads always appearing first.

UI Design

The UI of this search function is kept full-width to maintain consistency on the 3-column grid that we've employed across other pages on the site, as well as to account for practices on UI/UX familiarity.

Data Collection

Data Pipeline



Intake

Tally

Graduate Profile Submission Form

To populate the graduate profiles on the website, we collected information such as specializations, contact information, and work availability from each graduate.

- Name
- Pronouns
- Email address
- LinkedIn profile
- Portfolio link
- Social links
- Disciplines
- Top disciplines
- Designer bio
- Profile headline
- Openness to work
- Resume

LinkedIn Profile

Please double-check your URL

Portfolio Link

Other Social 1

- please provide in URL form
- career or design-related socials preferred

Other Social 2

Designer Bio

All Disciplines *

- Pick all the disciplines you're specializing in
- Product Design = Digital, Interaction, Web, UI/UX

- Branding
- Design Research
- Info Design
- Motion
- Packaging

Intake

Tally

Project Submission Form

Each graduate submitted a minimum of four project case studies for the website. Through the form, we collected metadata, images, video links, copy, and formatting preferences.

- Project owner
- Collaborators
- Name of projects
- Disciplines
- Length of project in weeks
- Links to final product and case study
- Project blurb
- Thumbnail image
- Hero image
- Headings and text blocks
- Images
- Image layout options
- Vimeo links
- Other notes

Collaborative Project?

No Yes

Name of Project

All Project Disciplines

Branding

Product

Packaging

Motion

Print

Info Design

Design Research

Length of project

In number of weeks

Link to prototype or final product

Link to external project page or case study

On a personal portfolio, website, or social

Project Blurb

Short one-liner describing project

Thumbnail Image

Goes on "All Projects" page of website

Accepts .jpg, .jpeg, .png, .svg, .webp files

Size limit: 3.9 MB

Hero Image

- first image on project page
- may be displayed full-width

Accepts .jpg, .jpeg, .png, .svg, .webp files

Size limit: 3.9 MB

A. Text

B. Content

Images (optional)

Validation & Quality Assurance

Airtable

Tally to Airtable API

All profile and project data collected from graduates in Tally was routed into Airtable by mapping Tally form inputs to corresponding Airtable fields.

Validating content & QA

Each submission record was reviewed for correct formatting and consistency. Airtable automation workflows were used to format data types such as full names and URLs.

Image Compression

We wrote a script to batch automate the creation of compressed thumbnail images and portraits.

Approval & Sync

Once validated with status of “Approved”, submissions were added automatically to another table to await syncing through PowerImporter to the Webflow CMS.

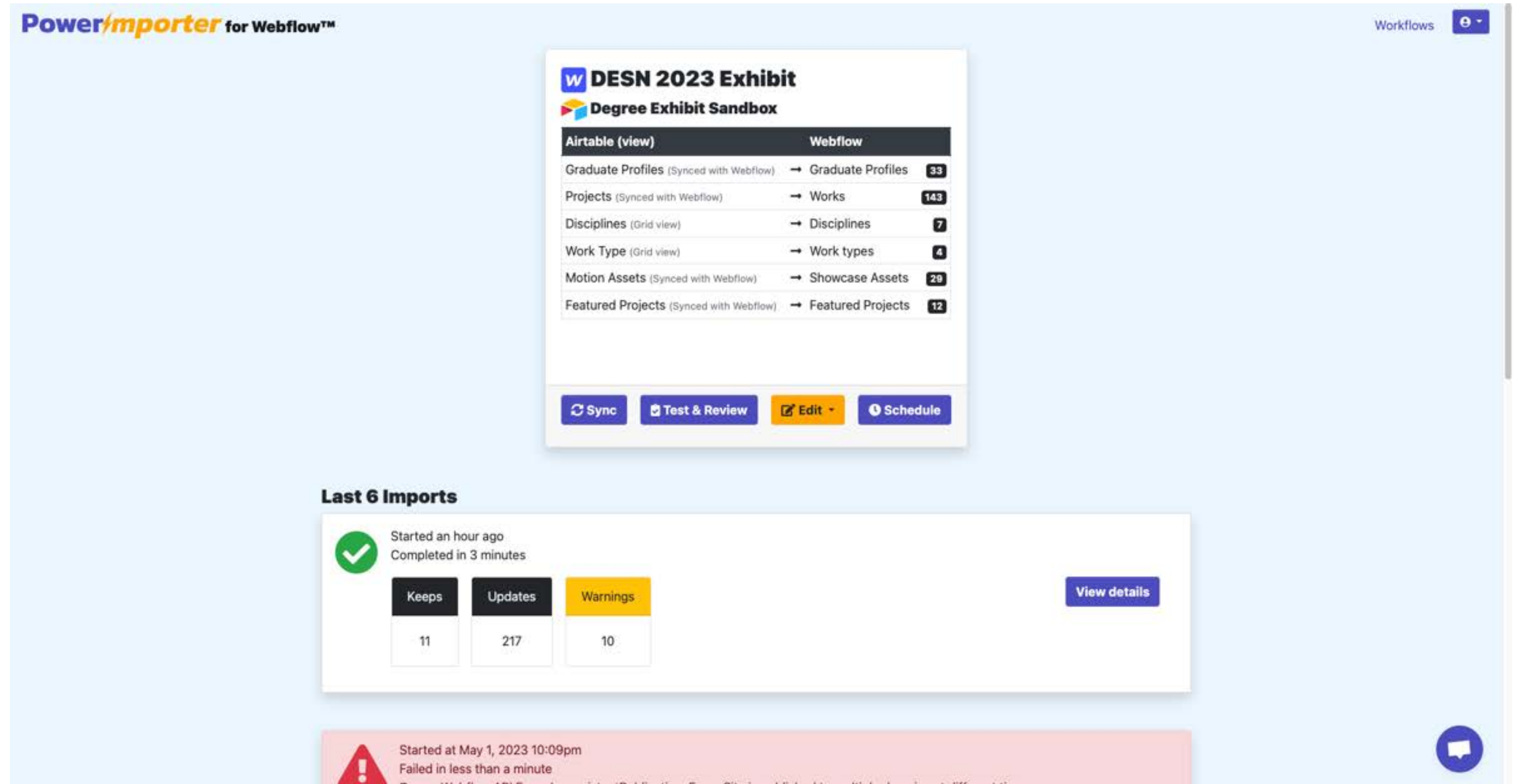
Files	Status	All disciplines	Owned projects
Justin Chiu	Approved	Design Research Info D	Authoritarianism and Air
Bella Wei	Approved	Branding Design Resea	Montreal International Ja
Mariam Hoda	Approved	Branding Design Resea	Unfair & Lovely Muslim
Khadja Bari	Approved	Product Branding Des	Refill Linear Gismo S
Hailey Luong	Approved	Branding Product Des	Gyve Eat Your Plants
Anika Jingco	Approved	Branding Print Design	Mayumu Common Thr
Peri Agate	Approved	Print Design Research	Sapphic Intimacy - Raun
Raven Sommerhalder	Approved	Branding Print Motion	Images Festival Urb X
Madeline Rubba	Approved	Design Research Info D	SDG 15: Life on Land U
Vyjayanthi Janakiraman	Approved	Design Research Info D	La Tomatina Festival fo
+ Add file			
Category			
Info Design			
Files	Status	All disciplines	Owned projects
Justin Chiu	Approved	Design Research Info D	Authoritarianism and Air
Sean Reibling	Approved	Branding Product Info	Waypoint Shopquest
Brienna Hogben	Approved	Branding Info Design	365 Days of Music Mut
Kristen Chan	Approved	Branding Packaging P	Kō-en Washi Tape Packa
Peri Agate	Approved	Print Design Research	Sapphic Intimacy - Raun
Myah Willis	Approved	Branding Print Motion	Intrusive Inner Voice Pro
Zornitsa Stoimenova	Approved	Branding Info Design	Cudō HORST Arts & Mi
Megan Furlong	Approved	Info Design Print Prod	Musical Movies Why Pt

Integration

PowerImporter

Syncing from Airtable to Webflow

Submissions marked as “Approved” in Airtable were automatically synced with our primary CMS via a third-party automation workflow software called PowerImporter. This process occurred once every hour and allowed content to automatically populate the live website.



Content Population

Webflow CMS

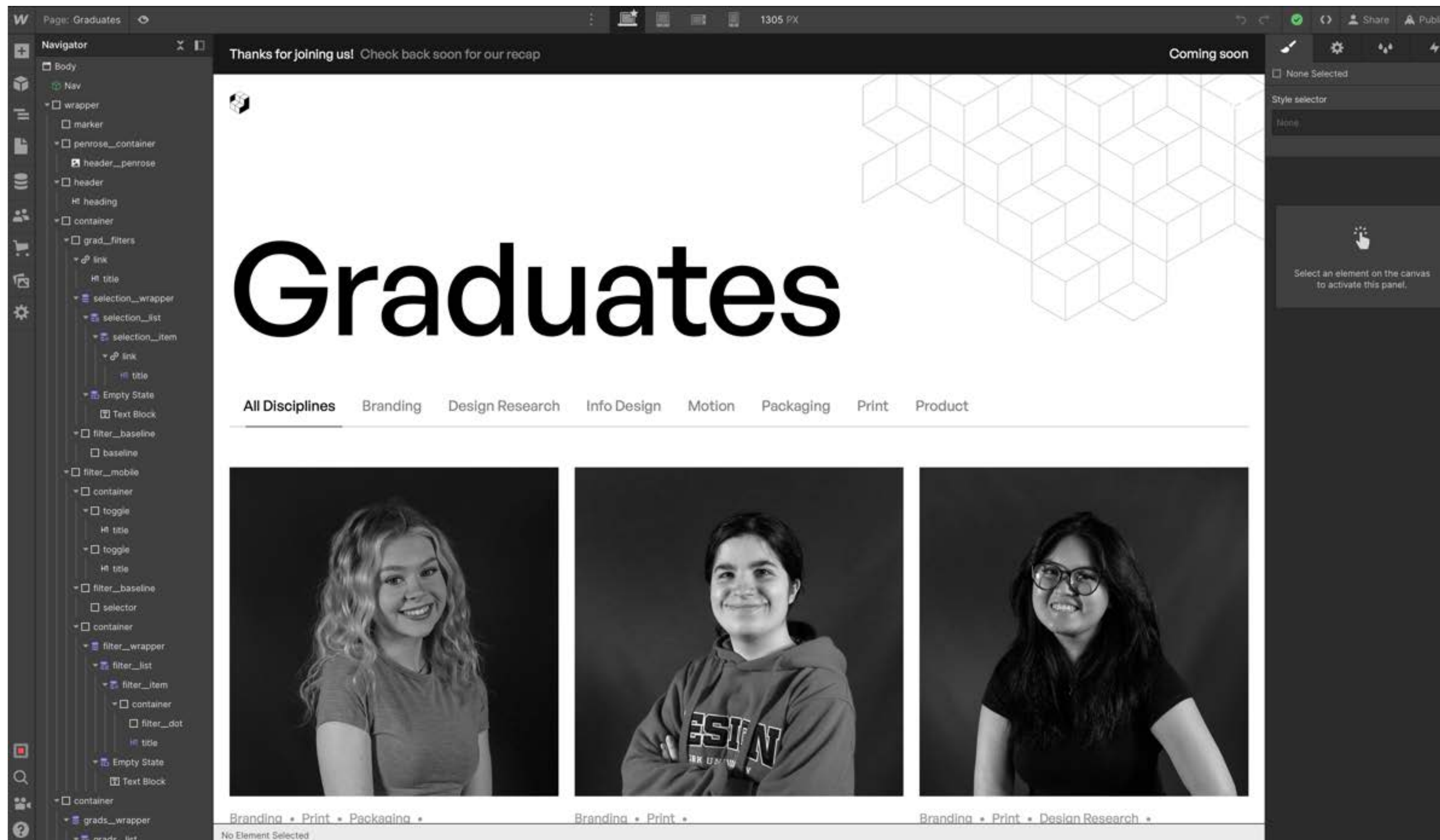
Primary CMS

Since the bulk of our website ran on Webflow, we utilized their CMS to populate content into each custom template for graduate profiles and case studies. However, we never altered or added any data within this phase as data could not be synced backwards to Airtable.

Name of project	Status	Project owner	Top discipline	Created	Modified	Published
Crossed Paws	Published	Jennifer Louise Huynh	Product	Apr 13, 2023 6:02 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM
Succession	Published	Raven Sommerhalder	Motion	Apr 14, 2023 1:03 AM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM
Nuit Blanche Visual Identity	Published	Katherine Yu	Branding	Apr 14, 2023 1:03 AM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM
YOU	Published	Katherine Yu	Packaging	Apr 15, 2023 11:02 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM
Somer	Published	Khadija Bari	Product	Apr 20, 2023 6:43 AM	May 1, 2023 10:14 PM	May 1, 2023 10:14 PM
The Door in the Wall	Published	Megan Furlong	Print	Apr 26, 2023 7:53 PM	May 1, 2023 10:14 PM	May 1, 2023 10:14 PM
at the heart of your neighbourh...	Published	Ingrid Wong	Branding	Apr 13, 2023 6:02 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM
LOG OFF Journal	Published	Meaghan Gonsalves	Print	Apr 14, 2023 1:02 AM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM
Mustang Stampede Packaging ...	Published	Brienna Hogben	Packaging	Apr 8, 2023 10:33 PM	May 1, 2023 10:12 PM	May 1, 2023 10:12 PM
VELD Music Festival	Published	Claudia Ladeira	Branding	Apr 8, 2023 10:33 PM	May 1, 2023 10:12 PM	May 1, 2023 10:12 PM
Ur Cancelled	Published	Madeline Rubba	Print	Apr 14, 2023 1:02 AM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM
Montreal International Jazz Fes...	Published	Bella Wei	Branding	Apr 15, 2023 10:02 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM
Cudó	Published	Zornitsa Stoimenova	Packaging	Apr 13, 2023 6:02 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM
PAWZ	Published	Claudia Ladeira	Packaging	Apr 16, 2023 10:02 PM	May 1, 2023 10:14 PM	May 1, 2023 10:14 PM
Linear	Published	Khadija Bari	Product	Apr 17, 2023 5:01 AM	May 1, 2023 10:14 PM	May 1, 2023 10:14 PM
Shoot Magazine	Published	Adrianna Kirovski	Print	Apr 13, 2023 5:02 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM
Visualizing WWII	Published	Kristen Chan	Info Design	Apr 14, 2023 1:02 AM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM
Lemon Festival	Published	Ingrid Wong	Branding	Apr 16, 2023 12:02 AM	May 1, 2023 10:14 PM	May 1, 2023 10:14 PM
Yum Cha Beauty	Published	Jasmine Wong	Packaging	Apr 15, 2023 11:02 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM	May 1, 2023 10:13 PM

Development Process

Webflow



HTML / CSS

We translated Figma prototypes of the website into live HTML and CSS through the Webflow's no-code editor, which populated dynamic elements with content synced from our Airtable database to our Webflow CMS.

Responsiveness

We applied breakpoint-specific styling through Webflow's media query interface to ensure that the website was responsive to mobile, tablet, and desktop screen sizes.

CMS Template Pages

Based on profile and case study page templates we designed in the editor, Webflow generated a dynamic page per graduate and project. By using conditional visibility, each page was tailored to the project based on the layout preferences specified in the Tally form.

Hosting Custom Code

```
global.navBg("white");
// cmsSlider();
window.onscroll = "";
body.style.backgroundColor = "transparent";
},
],
views: [{
  namespace: 'home',
  afterEnter() {
    global.homeInit();
    window.onresize = function() {
      global.mobileMenuClose();
      penrose.setSize();
    };
  },
},
{
  namespace: 'graduates',
  afterEnter() {
    // cmsLoad();
    window.onresize = function() {
      global.mobileMenuClose();
    };
  },
  grads.init();
},
],
{
  namespace: 'work',
  beforeLeave() {
```

GitHub

We pushed custom CSS and JavaScript to a GitHub repository which automatically published to GitHub Pages. We then applied the stylesheets and scripts to the live website through `<link>` and `<script>` tags in Webflow's custom head code and custom body code fields.

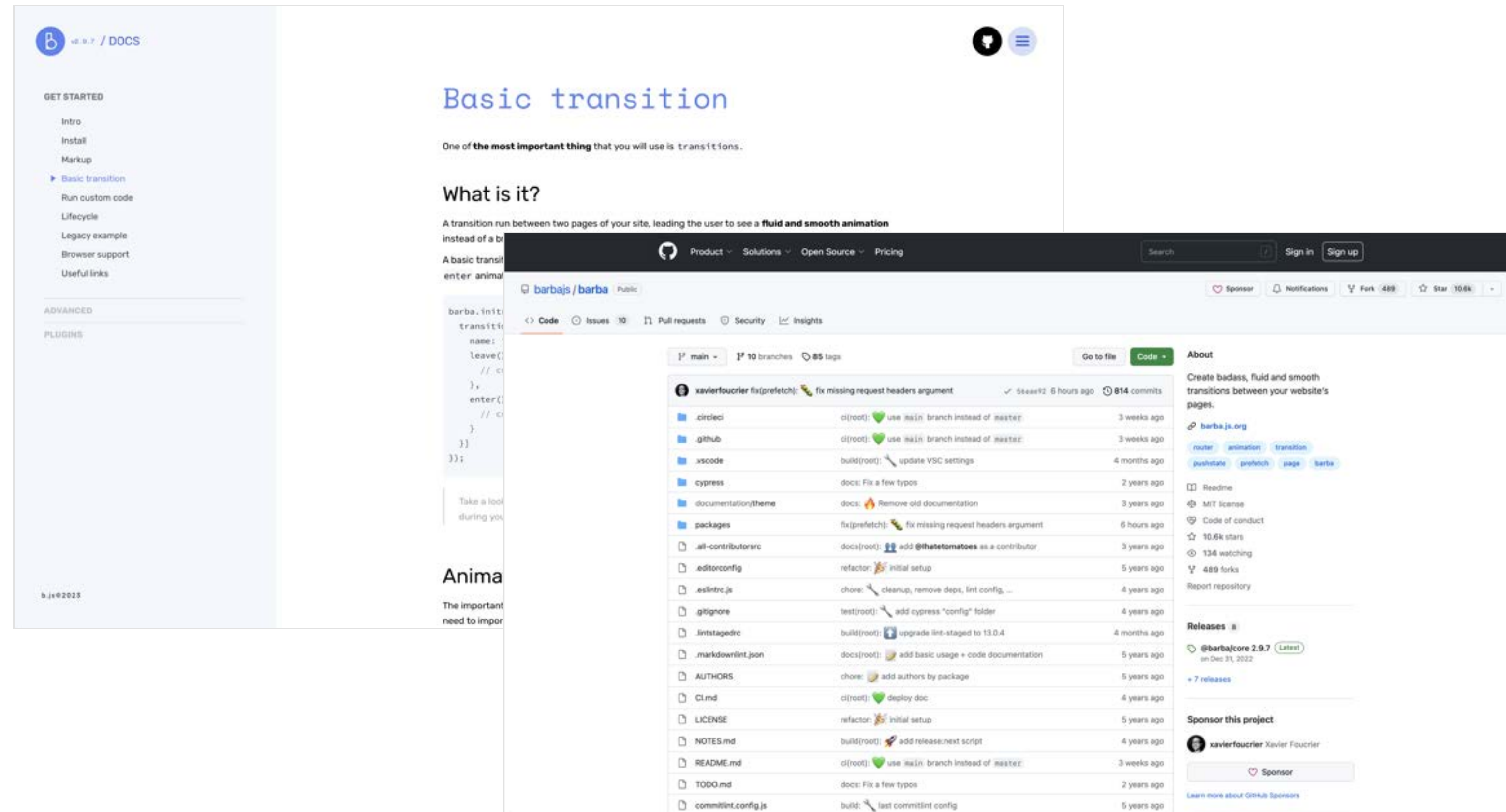
Custom Coded Features

A significant portion of the website's interactive features was custom-coded, including all filtering interfaces, complex animations, and the geometric pattern on the home page.

Other Libraries

- Barba.js - page transitions and prefetching
- GreenSock Animation Protocol - transitions
- Finsweet - extended Webflow CMS functionality
- ganlanyuan/tiny-slider - custom image slider

Page Transitions



Seamless Navigation

Barba.js - <https://barba.js.org/>

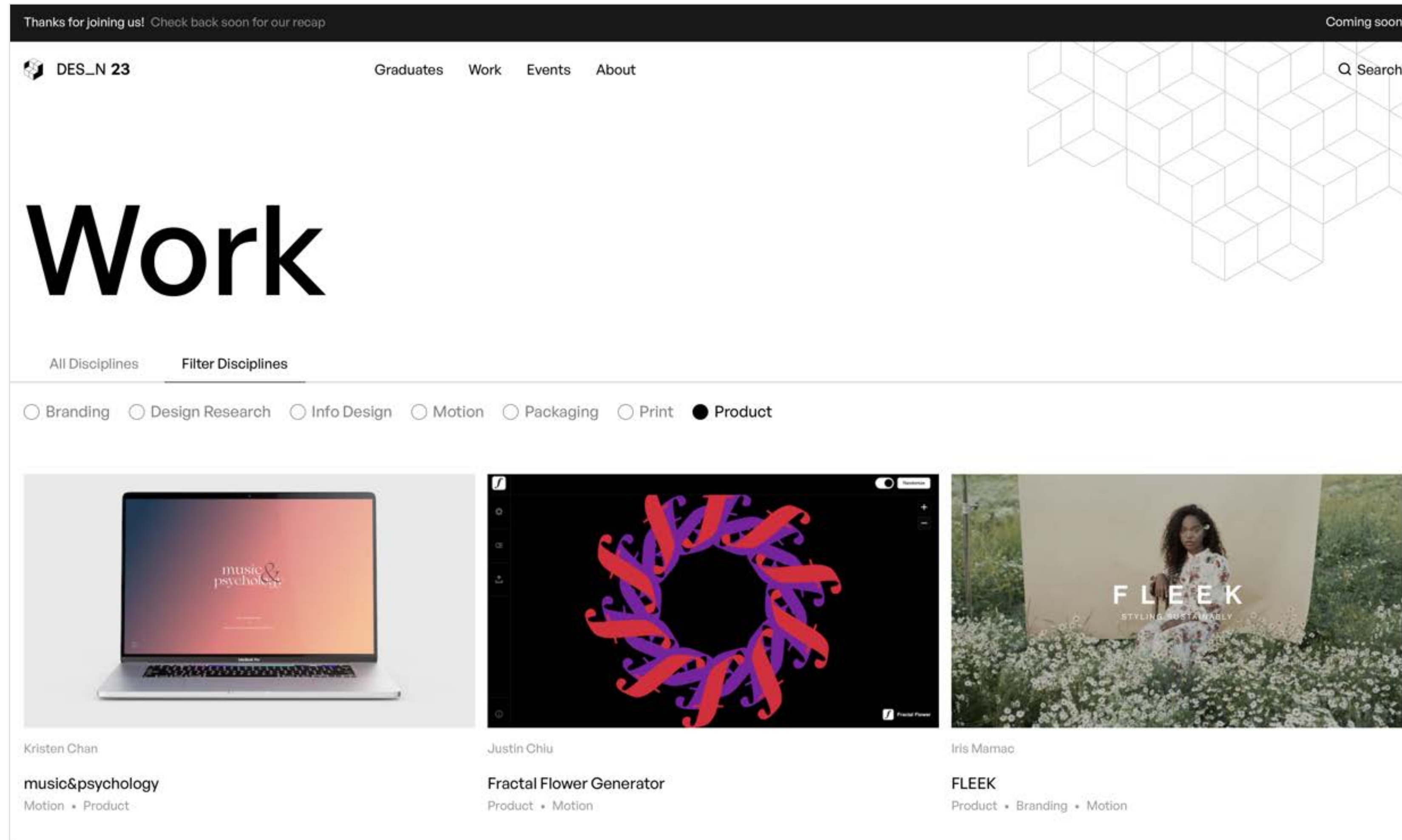
We designed seamless transitions between pages of the website with Barba.js, which allowed us to eliminate the white screen flash a viewer would normally see when navigating from page to page.

Instead of loading the destination page from scratch, Barba.js retains common elements such as the navbar while adding and removing content that is unique to each page, changing the URL in the address bar at the end.

Nine Transitions

In total, we specified nine different transitions depending on what page the user is currently on and what page they are navigating to. Barba.js also allowed us to run custom code before, during, and after a page transition depending on the current page and destination page.

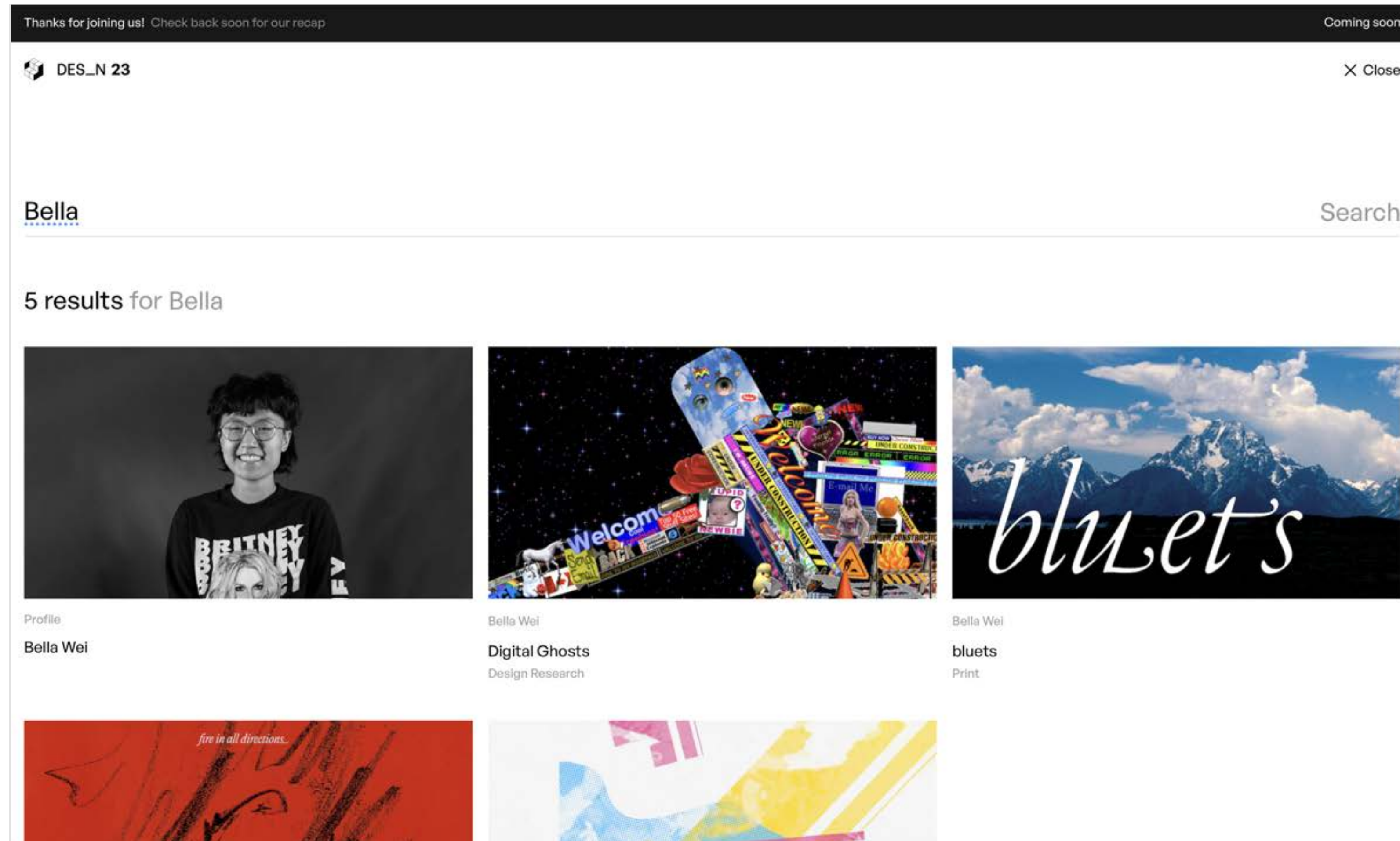
Filtering



Filtering by Discipline

Our code responds to click events on the filtering interface by showing or hiding specific CMS items. Despite 30+ graduate profiles and 130+ project case studies, loading them all on page load is still reasonably fast because the thumbnail images are heavily compressed.

Real-Time Search

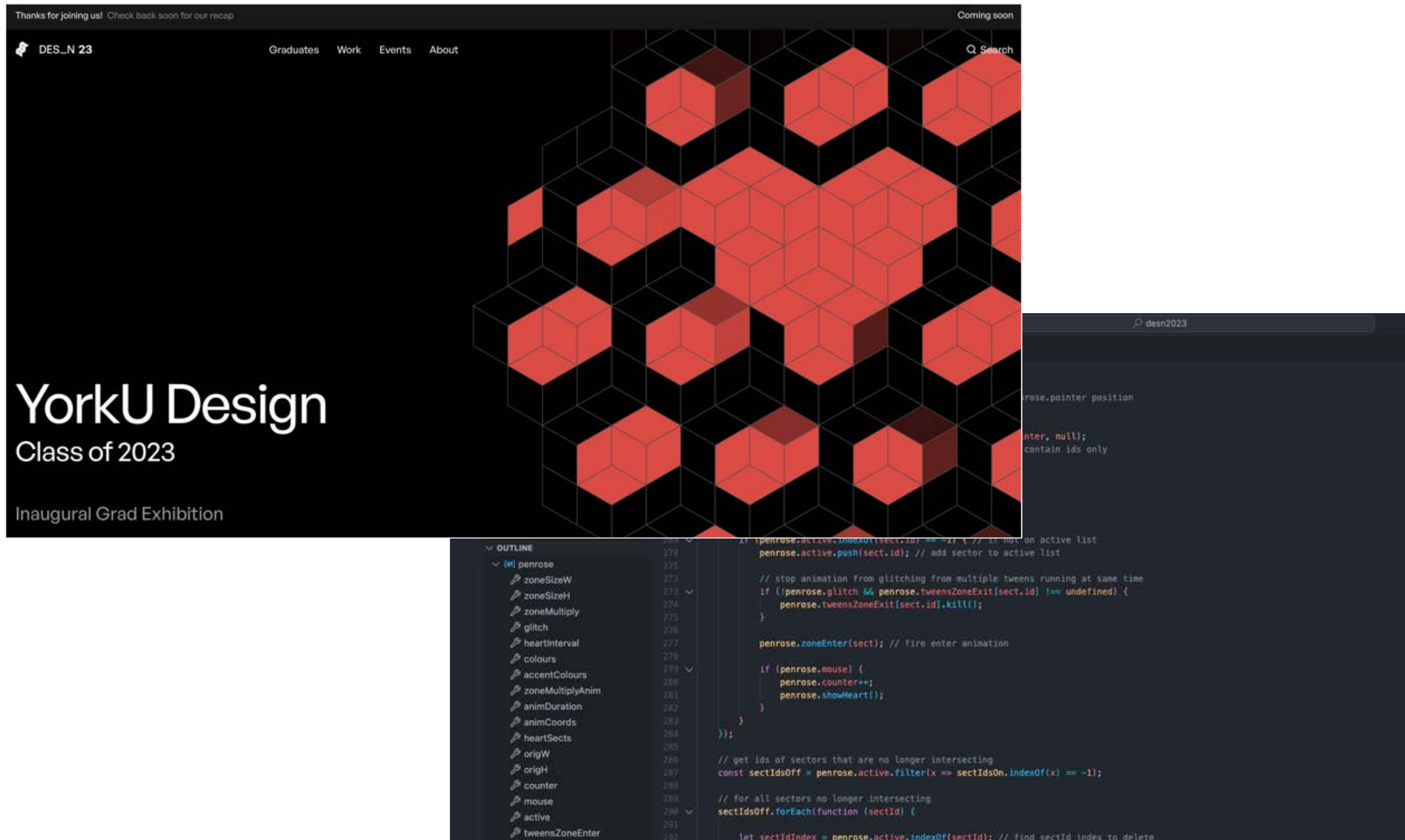


Real-time Search

Although our graduate and work pages contain filtering options, we felt it important to create a fast and seamless search function. The search implementation is global and can surface both graduate profiles and project names based on the query, with the profile always appearing as the first result.

This was achieved using a javascript library called Finsweet Attributes, which adds third-party extensions to Webflow, and can easily be initialized via custom data attributes in the designer. The specific plugins used are 'CMS Combine' coupled with 'CMS Filter'.

Interactive Motion



Hovering & Dragging

When a user hovers on the pattern, an invisible SVG rectangle follows the cursor. Any sector of the pattern which intersects with this invisible rectangle transitions to full opacity, revealing a fill of white or grey. The animation is the same when dragging on the pattern, except that the rectangle expands and the upward-facing sectors change to one of three colours.

When a sector no longer intersects with the rectangle, it stays at full opacity for a moment and then fades out. The timing of the decay animation varies based on a random number generator.

Automatic Animation

When a user is not hovering over the pattern, the position of the invisible rectangle is animated automatically through interpolation between pairs of coordinates. Any sectors that intersect with rectangle continue to animate to full opacity.

Heart Animation

When a user has caused sectors to light up 300 times, an animation sequence is played, revealing a heart shape in the middle of the geometric pattern.

Challenges Faced

Technical

Code Experience

What we faced

- Development team of three members had limited experience with JavaScript, Git, and GitHub and no experience with back-end web development
- Low comfort level with asynchronous operations and code libraries

How we resolved it

- Developing most HTML and CSS in Webflow
- Enlisted a known developer from outside the design program to advise on back-end development issues
- Leveraged Stack Overflow, ChatGPT, and Bing Chat to learn development concepts and syntax and solve specific problems

Webflow Limitations

What we faced

- Limits on lines of custom code allowed
- Limits on number of CMS fields, nested CMS lists, CMS items loaded on live page
- Webflow Editor lag due to high volume of CMS items
- Webflow IX2 animation engine not compatible with Barba.js page transitions

How we resolved it

- Hosted all custom CSS and JavaScript on GitHub Pages and created dependencies
- Implemented third-party plugins such as Finsweet Attributes to expand CMS capabilities
- Developed custom JavaScript solutions to address a variety of Webflow limitations, coding animations with Green Sock (GSAP) library

Page Transitions (Barba.js)

What we faced

- Page transitions frequently aborted if the browser encountered errors or was too slow to load the next page
- Code would not destroy and reinitialize on transition
- Elements from both previous and next pages would coexist during transitions, causing querySelector commands to get the wrong elements

How we resolved it

- Turned on Barba debug mode and used browser debugger to find and address errors
- Develop custom JavaScript with all pages in mind, limiting the number of global variables to prevent conflicts
- Created a utility function to always select elements from the next page only

Development Review

Do Differently

- Try a different library for seamless page transitions, such as dogstudio/highway, pjax, smoothstate, swup, or turbolinks
- Develop the website entirely in bespoke code to avoid the limitations of Webflow on CMS content, styling, and animations
- Develop the website locally with a simulated live server for faster testing and debugging

Further Improve

- Implement low-quality image placeholders, srcsets, and lazy rendering to speed up page load while preserving resolution
- Improve prefetching of destination page content to make page transitions smoother
- Use semantic HTML tags and attributes to improve accessibility
- Add image light-box functionality to project case study pages to allow user to view images up close

Insights

Collaboration

How Teams Collaborated

Cross-functional all hands

Each week, teams would present their progress, next steps, and blockers to the remaining teams in order to stay updated and streamlined on progress.

Team lead meetings

Bi-weekly, team leads would gather to discuss any dependencies, blockers, or needs from their respective teams, as well as make executive decisions collectively.

Team meetings

Each week, teams would gather privately to discuss and collaborate towards progress in their respective teams and tasks. This progress would be presented at each week's all-hands to update remaining teams.

Cross-Functional Dependencies

	Required from Us	Required from Them
Creative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input into branding discussions to best optimize the brand for digital best practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative direction on graduating exhibit theme and visual identity • Brand assets such as typefaces and geometric pattern assets
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Splash/landing page with exhibit details start promoting the graduating exhibit • Edited photography for each graduate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copywriting for key sections of the website
Recruiter Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Splash/landing page with details on time, place, and tickets to link to when sending emails to recruiters and employers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A
Sponsorships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Splash/landing page with general event details to provide as context in emails sent to potential sponsors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of sponsors for the “About” page of the website
Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website links for in-person exhibit signage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about in-person exhibit for the “Event” page

Challenges Faced

Inter-Team

Communication

What we faced

- Inter-team communication happened between team leads, who relayed messages to their teams, causing misunderstandings
- Limited central leadership and inter-team collaboration led to misalignment

How we resolved it

- We pivoted towards synchronous conversations with entire teams rather than team leads only
- Augmented meetings with dedicated workspace channels for inter-team collaboration
- Touched base regularly with members of other teams to ensure alignment on specific components of the website

Creative Vision

What we faced

- Creative and digital teams presented different visions for the style of the exhibit brand identity.
- Creative team prioritized an eccentric identity optimized for the in-person experience, while digital preferred a subtler, cleaner identity that prioritized screen legibility and content-first design

How we resolved it

- Creative team ensured that digital input was collected during the development of the brand
- Digital team was given liberty to alter/optimize the brand for web as was seen fit, while still remaining true to the core identity

UI / UX

Designing for Dynamic Content

What we faced

- When designing for template pages, we needed to account for a large number of variables. This included varying amounts of written content and metadata as well as variance in things like name length

How we resolved it

- We went through many rounds of iterations in Figma, and used content samples on different ends of the variable spectrums

Constraints

Constraints

Cross-Functional Dependencies

Considering our website relied on a brand direction, we couldn't proceed with designing and developing the site without these assets.

Compressed Timeline

The time we had to curate the website was very limited due to the length of the school term, team dependencies, and other student responsibilities.

Technical Skills

Not enough members on our team possessed the required skills to develop the website. Due to this, the design had to account for these technical abilities, and fewer skilled members had to carry a heavier workload in order to build and launch the site in time.

What We Learned

What We Learned

Inter-Teams

Operating as an Agency

Collaboration, Communication & Timelines

Our team learned how cross-functional collaboration works, and how our efforts contributed to the operations of other teams and to the success of the show.

We learned how to understand and maximize each team member's strengths in a short timeframe. With cross-functional dependencies, we learned the importance of strong communication and the urgency of meeting deadlines.

UI / UX

Designing for Dynamic Content

Making New Design Decisions

During the design process, we were faced with obstacles around designing for dynamic content. Since we couldn't always design for best-case scenarios, we had to make design decisions that would account for variations.

Thank You!