

EPIISODE 079

TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Meg Jannott, Scorpion Rose Studio

Paolo Catalla, Semi:Formal

AND

Gary Gonya + Alyson Krajewski, Toledo Museum of Art

INTRODUCTION Welcome to The Follow-up, a weekly podcast that goes in depth into projects recently reviewed on Brand New featuring conversations with the designers, and sometimes their clients, uncovering the context, background and design decisions behind the work.

ARMIN VIT Hi, this is Armin Vit and welcome to episode number 79 of The Follow-up. Once more apologies for the brief delay in getting this episode out but we have the best excuse! We needed the full week — AND the weekends on opposite sides of the week — to finish the new look for Brand New, which has a slick new logo we did with Rob Clarke, animations by Mat Voyce, and tone of voice by Ragged Edge. We also had to set up a whole bunch of social media templates, set up a merch store, and update nooks and crannies of the website we hadn't revisited in some years. If you haven't checked it out you can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/brandnewversionsix all one word, all spelled out in letters, no numbers. We hope you dig it.

This week we are following up on Toledo Museum of Art that, as its name implies, is an art museum located in Toledo, OH, that was founded by glassmaker Edward Drummond Libbey, who is regarded as the father of the glass industry in Toledo. The museum has a collection of more than 30,000 objects that include treasures from ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome; paintings by Old Masters like El Greco, Rubens, Rembrandt, Gainsborough and Turner; decorative arts, African and Asian art; and works by modern masters as Matisse, Picasso, Hopper,

and Nevelson. The museum also holds one of the principal collections of glass art and glassware in the world. With six buildings on nearly 40 acres, the museum features 45 galleries, providing over 280,000 square feet of gallery space. Thanks to the the museum's founders and member support, the museum is a privately endowed, non-profit institution that is open to the public, free of charge.

The project, designed by Detroit, MI-based Scorpion Rose Studio and Ferndale, MI-based Semi:Formal, was posted on Brand New on February 19, 2024. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast079 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast079, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Meg Jannott, Head of Design at Scorpion Rose Studio; Paolo Catalla, Founder and Principal Creative of Semi:Formal; Gary Gonya, Director of Brand Strategy at Toledo Museum of Art; and Alyson Krajewski, Designer at Toledo Museum of Art.

In this conversation we hear on yet another case of the pandemic making an organization take a deep look at themselves and figure out how to best serve both the community and themselves in the new, post-pandemic reality. We learn about the secret ingredient that got Scorpion Rose Studio the job as it competed against other well-known firms and it wasn't their qualifications, or previous work, or fee structure — although I am sure those played a role — but the chemistry between them and the client. Always a good reminder to work with people you can see yourself working with for an extended period of time. Even better is when you have a client that wants to push boundaries, as Gary explains as he also talks about going into the process with a high degree of risk tolerance which led to a collaboration between the museum's in-house team, Scorpion Rose Studio, and Semi:Formal that resulted in a transformation from a static, one-dimensional identity to an adaptive and literally multi-dimensional identity.

Now, let's listen in as Bryony follows up with Meg, Paolo, Gary, and Alyson.

BRYONY GOMEZ-PALACIO Personally, I am always fascinated by hidden gems in unexpected places. Such is the case with the Toledo Museum of Art that includes 280,000-square-feet of gallery space full of outstanding historical pieces of art in the Midwest. While the previous identity was pretty great—and seemed almost untouchable—I am eager to see how this rebrand will move them forward. Paolo, Gary, Allison and Meg, welcome to the Follow-Up.

MEG Thank you for having me.

GARY Thank you.

BRYONY Now, we do have a large group today, so let's take a minute to share your names and where you're coming from in terms of client or creative so that we can start to understand whose role was what.

MEG JANNOTT I'm Meg Jannott and I lead the design team at Lafayette American, and inside of Lafayette American we have Scorpion Rose Studio, which is our brand design studio.

GARY GONYA My name is Gary Gonya and I'm the Director of Brand Strategy at the Toledo Museum of Art. I oversee all things related to our brand experience, and marketing, how you get welcomed into the museum, retail, and all hospitality aspects of what we do.

ALY KRAJEWSKI I'm Aly Krajewski. I'm a designer on staff at the Toledo Museum of Art. I'm an armature of a much larger team that encompasses brand, design, marketing, and public relations.

PAOLO CATALLA And I'm Paolo Catalla, I am Founder and Principal Designer at Semi:Formal, and I was brought in as a design partner by Meg at Scorpion Row Studio.

BRYONY Wonderful. So I think it's always important to start the conversation by establishing the context of the client. So let's take a minute here

to describe what the origins of the Toledo Museum of Art are and its current role within the community, given its longstanding participation.

ALY The Toledo Museum of Art is... surprise! an art museum in Toledo, Ohio. We're about an hour south of Detroit, Michigan. We encompass multiple museum buildings, a sculpture garden, a satellite center for the city's university arts programs, a library, a 1,700 seat concert hall, and professional development spaces. So TMA's campus extends well beyond the average mid-size museum in a city of our size. TMA was founded in 1901 by Edward Drummond Libbey, pivotal player in the 20th century glass industry, and his wife Florence Scott Libbey was additionally crucial in the development and continuing success of the museum, during Edward's life and after his death. The Libbey's dictated in their will that the museum needed to be free and open to the public whenever possible. So with the aid of the Libbey endowment, TMA has been free and open to the public since 1920. And the museum's original mission to house art of all kinds, to promote knowledge, and to maintain an arts education academy still rings true today in our strategic mission, which is to integrate art into the lives of people.

And from a community perspective, the museum is a fixture of Toledo in many ways. In addition to an expansive art collection spanning I think 6,000 years of art, we host wide ranging educational offerings and creative outreach programs for all ages. Our glass pavilion is home to a glass hot shop with multi-award winning experience glass techs and artists—they give demonstrations every day that we're open to the public. We host several programs that invite artists to TMA's campus for long and short-term residencies in all artistic disciplines. Our community gallery allows local artists, gives them the platform to showcase their works with the same prestige as the rest of our collection. In addition to innumerable community events, the museum throws a banger of a block party every year closing down the roads to get together and celebrate what really makes the museum great: our community. And that's the short list of what TMA does [laughter].

BRYONY You are busy without a doubt. What led Toledo, and the team within it to consider a rebrand in this particular moment?

GARY Given the rich history that we have at the Toledo Museum of Art, we and so many other cultural institutions came face-to-face with the social disruptions of 2020. When that occurred, we took a hard look at ourselves and made a couple of key changes in that moment. One of them by choice, one of them sort of somewhat happenstance; we switched directors, which was a tough job for a director to come in April of 2020. But in doing so, it allowed us to really create a strategic plan that harnessed the social ambitions of the moment. Toledo Museum of Art is the most beloved institution in the city. Everybody loves us, everybody knows this. We have zero awareness problems [chuckle]. We haven't always been welcoming to the full range of diversity that's been a city of Toledo. The museum itself is surrounded principally by African American neighborhoods, some Hispanic neighborhoods too, and then sort of a more traditional downtown area and a very beautiful Victorian neighborhood from the industrial era.

So the context for visual change was in the context of a bigger strategic change for the museum. Our identity system, as you said, really solid, wonderful piece of modern design by a great designer [Steff Geissbuhler] didn't really represent the fact that we were trying to be more dynamic, and welcoming, and inclusive. In some ways, you know I'm trained as an architect and I look at it as a plan and it looks a little bit like fortress. It looks like it excludes, versus inviting. So we needed to find a way to create a symbol that was far more dynamic, far more inviting, and importantly would allow us to participate in a digital-first era. The design, as familiar as it was, was not really easy to work with in a more digital context. I would say other part of this, very honestly is that our website was far out of date, so the project really initiated from the fact that we urgently needed to redo our website and in order to do the website we had to really rethink the overall brand identity. So it was a little bit of cart leading the horse, but I think we took that dynamic mix and it gave us a chance to reinvent more profoundly.

BRYONY Megan, Paolo, how did you two get involved and what was the nature of your partnership?

MEG Lafayette American, we're a creative and design agency in Detroit and we've been doing incredible work for brands across industries and categories for the past six years. Our birthday is this month, which is exciting. We became aware of the project initially through Gary. We were coming right off of our Detroit Opera work, which we had just completed a full rebrand and also renaming of the organization—quite the undertaking. We were on Gary's radar. That's where we started the conversation. As Gary mentioned, they had been thinking about the rebrand and we were honored to be considered in the mix. I think that the Detroit Opera work proved that we knew the arts and culture space really well, and also we knew that TMA was an ambitious project and that we were in the mix with incredible agencies and studios, but we also knew this was an incredible opportunity to prove our ambition and lean in really hard.

After initially meeting with Gary and Adam, Adam the museum director, we could really feel their ambition. You know people feel like there's tension in the room, but the tension was the ambition [laughter]. We could feel the ambition in the room and we knew that we could truly create something differentiated in this space. There was this desire to transform the TMA identity into a future facing brand, bring it into the digital age, while also continuing to honor the legacy and that piece of it was really, really intriguing to us. And then we had worked with Paolo actually, in the past on previous projects. Long story short, he also was a full-time employee of ours back in the day before he decided to start his unique design practice Semi:Formal, and we also had worked with him on the Detroit Opera work. We knew that it would be such a great partnership to bring him onto this project as well.

GARY We did speak with some of the top design firms that we all know very well. I've had a chance to work with a lot of great design firms over the last few decades. Spoke to people who I knew and trusted. At the end

of the day what was really interesting is that the team from Lafayette American had the best chemistry with us at the Toledo Museum of Art, and they truly understood the unique character of the city of Toledo, and the uniqueness of who we are as a museum and it felt like at the end of the day, we were going to be able to really do something special together. The choice was obvious, even though if you consider all the other options we had on the table, it seemed like a tough choice, but ultimately it wasn't.

PAOLO Riffing off the trust and chemistry. Meg and I also go way back, graduated from the same school 12 years ago.

BRYONY So you know each other, and you have the chemistry, and you have the inner workings worked out, you know how everybody approaches the projects, but it is very interesting what the competitive edge can be when the client's looking at RFQs and looking at all of the different teams. The gut instinct can play a big, big role and it just comes down to the people.

In order to get the project started, what was the initial approach in gathering that information so that you could eventually start to develop the creative?

MEG We could do a full podcast just on all of the findings and strategic research that we did leading up to the round one presentation, so that's an episode for another day. But I'm going to sort of walk through just quickly what initially got us to that round one design review. Before we began the project, the TMA team had such great strategic work already in place, so we dove into their TMA strategic plan as a foundation for our work, and then from there we conducted 20+ one-on-one interviews with staff members across departments—a really good mix of everyone that works with TMA and works at TMA. And then we also gathered numerous survey responses from outside of the employees as well. And all of that research fed into what we then used strategically. What we do at Lafayette American and Scorpion Row

Studios, before we design, we do mood boards and we also define strategic territories that inform the mood board.

From all the rounds of research we ultimately landed on the strategic territory of “The transformative power of art for all of Toledo”. And that was really then where we latched everything else onto. Then we began to design. We had such incredible working sessions with Aly and Mark who was the other designer on the TMA team, and Crystal who managed the project from the TMA side. We invited Aly, and Mark, and Crystal to come to Detroit and work with us, and have workshops with them, and dig into: how do they use the brand now? What are the applications? Where are the pain points? How are the colors being used? What are their hopes and dreams? Aly, I remember you really specifically saying color was a big piece for you. You really wanted us to explore color and think through that strategically for the brand. While they were very fun, [laughter] they were also very informative, and set a really strong foundation for us getting into the design work, which then also allowed the TMA team to not feel necessarily surprised by what they were seeing, but more so they could see those informed choices within the design and their feedback really taken into account—set the tone for the strategic and also very realistic applications that we were about to propose as well.

ALY As a person who’s been on both sides of the table from an agency perspective in my career so far, it can be very easy, I know, for agencies to assume responsibility on projects in the way that maybe feels like they’re the leaders for their client, which is always great when they need it. To consider this a true partnership between in-house and agency, I think that’s a very rare combination that you can find in projects of this size and of this type. But it truly was a collaboration in every sense of the word. Getting to have the team come down to Toledo to spend so much time pouring through our historic archives with our wonderful archivist, Julia McMaster. Not only was it logical to refer to a 100+ years worth of institutional history and visual assets, but we also know that the community is very protective over its historic pillars.

So we wanted to honor that and Lafayette American, Scorpion Rose, and Semi:Formal did an amazing job of incorporating that in a very beautiful way. Beyond that, getting to go up to Detroit, and I'm not kidding, just see walls and walls of mood boards. I mean they pinned everything that you can pin to a wall was pinned to a wall... but truly to be immersed in both archival pieces, jumping off points, and then also pieces of inspiration for where we could go. It was the best kind of immersive, and they asked the right questions to get our team thinking about how we wanted to use this system because if it's beautiful, that's a wonderful thing, but if it's not functional, it's kind of a disappointment, and it makes my job harder. It was a great conversation between how do we make this as wonderful as possible visually and how do we make this as useful as possible functionally.

MEG One more point I would add too is from an internal TMA standpoint is Gary was so instrumental in getting us involved in the TMA community and bringing us up to speed on again the strategic plan, but also immersing us in TMA as a brand. I remember many trips to the museum and Gary, you were very strategically showing us very specific pieces of the museum, the history behind it, and then also the employees bringing 'em up to speed on it, so they did also truly feel a part of the brand as well.

BRYONY Paolo, of all of this research, and immersion, and workshopping, what were the main things that you took into that first round of creative?

PAOLO One of the unique things was when we were getting immersed in looking through the TMA archives up until the latest rebrand, which was in the early two thousands, there was really not that much visual consistency. Knowing that Gary also pushed us to "the sky's the limit", there's not really that much visual history that we need to really anchor ourselves to. So it was a mix of maybe just being a little disappointed there wasn't something we could latch onto, but really just accelerated the process and didn't limit us. Being immersed in

the physical environment, doing workshops, meeting the community, I think we really understood the pillars of what TMA is all about and although we're not anchored to anything visually, we were able to really understand what the goals of the museum are in terms of making community a priority, the learning aspect of it, and not only the art. The entire process was a rare one because from the design creative side, we don't typically work with other talented creatives, so it was something that really accelerated the process for us.

BRYONY From there, to that first round presentation, I would love to know a little bit of how it was structured and we don't need to go into too much detail. I want to focus most of our time on the brand assets that you developed, but it's always important to understand how the work was presented.

MEG In the first round we presented four unique concepts that all uniquely aligned to the strategic territory—truly that idea of transformation, and also the Toledo community. As we're going through the strategic research process, we're thinking through how much do we weight community, how much do we weight transformation, and we essentially decided that there is equal weight on both, so how do we truly design an identity that represents both. Quite an order! [laughter] And we'll get into it a little bit, but I also really remember Gary telling us “we want it to be a hard decision”. So he truly pushed us as designers, there's always one that you love the most and maybe one that you might think, oh, if they don't pick this one, that'll be okay. But Gary truly pushed us to say we want each one for you to be thrilled with. That's what we did and it truly was a hard decision even internally because before we present to a client, we're like, okay, which one do we say is our suggestion. To Paolo's point about clients we love when a client does that, so thank you Gary [laughter] for doing that, and empowering us in that way.

So we presented the four different concepts in Detroit, which was excellent, and to Aly's point, we had all the boards up, we could point

to things as we were presenting, we were turning around boards. We had the TV situated near the boards, the big screens that we could present the work, but also immersed in the work, which was really cool. Then we also showcased applications. We always like to say it's not just the logo and I think actually when you look at the full system that phrase truly is truth. For this round we presented applications for each concept that included logo, typography system, color palette, and motion was a huge piece of this. So each concept really showed a lot of motion to Gary's initial point, like how do we bring TMA into the digital age? We took that to heart and in some cases did motion first and some of the options as well.

And then for the deliverables of course we always include stationary, such a great test to see how color and type work together. We did mockups of digital screens in the space, so we actually shot photos of the current TMA campus and then mocked up big screens to show aspirationally how the system come to life into big screens, which ultimately I think moved the TMA team toward getting some bigger screens on the campus, which was exciting. And then from there we also did some out-of-home examples and visitors guides, a couple of more tactile examples so that the team could get a sense of, again, real life scenarios, how does this come to life?

BRYONY And Gary, what was the outcome and the experience of that meeting? How did you make the choice?

GARY I'll speak to two choices, actually three choices that were made because I think each one of them were crucial. Meg referred to the fact that we started with strategy. I think it was a very strategically grounded process and we had very strong strategic options, but I think our attitude towards the whole process was that we were going to always push for the boundaries. We wanted to make sure that we were staying true to a level of risk tolerance and innovation that we had committed to upfront. We chose the strategic territory that was going to push us the furthest into the potential for real change And then that

led towards initial round of looking at design concepts and Meg is right, I think the phrase was like, “I always wanted these to be impossible choices” where you really feel like you can’t choose, but ultimately you have to.

When we first saw those initial choices from a design side of things, there was that sense of conflicted desires of where to go, but I do feel like ultimately we were able to find two designs that were really going to feel like it would not just break new territory but could stand the test of time. Because I do think one of the other things we haven’t talked about yet was that though we wanted this commitment to innovation, we didn’t want to do something that was also going to wear out too fast. How do you anticipate that? How do you really get a sense for that? The previous logo had lasted for a good generations worth of time, so we wanted to feel into which of these would have that lasting quality yet have a capacity to keep giving over time.

BRYONY That makes a lot of sense because that logo will never be exactly the same over and over again and it gives you a lot of bandwidth towards the future to keep morphing it, changing it a little bit. So let’s start there. The development of the logo from the very basic thinking, which is based on the strategic information that we’ve already covered. How did you end up choosing the footprint of the museum to turn it into a T, to take it into a 3D, to add the letters and chop a little bit of the “A” just enough to give that 3D effect? Walk me through that.

PAOLO Obviously art and viewing art, there’s no rules. Every time you look at a piece of art, it’s not the same The second time you look at it, it’s just very experiential and emotional. It’s not 2D, you view a painting even though a painting’s 2D, you view it in different angles. So we really wanted to capture the experience of viewing art in a physical space. That’s why we brought it into 3D. Obviously “T” represents Toledo at its simplest form, but then luckily also the “T” is made up of these three arms that can support the acronym of TMA,. Achitecturally, like you mentioned, it echoes the shape of the museum building itself.

Geographically, it represents the footprint of the museum and then there's also this metaphorical symbolism there too of this intersection of the letter forms where our community, and the past, and future all meet at a center point. All of these things just deserved to jump out of the screen and be a tangible 3D thing. The motion part of it is where it really gets interesting. So like you mentioned that little cutoff "A", the seemingly 2D object, but when you start seeing it rotate, you're like, oh, that's cool, but then when it starts interacting with art is where it gets really cool.

BRYONY And what was the main challenge in transferring this idea from motion graphics, for example, to static signage, or stickers on the walls, things like that? What was the stickiest point?

PAOLO Well, there's so many different things we wanted to communicate and have this logo be able to do, so we did create four different modes of this logo, which gave us the flexibility to apply it to different mediums. So there's the general mode, which is the solid, the hero mark; and then there's this outline mode where it's inverted as an outline, you could see the artwork behind it; then there's this multi-mode which has a communication function to it, so we activate the different planes of the 3D shape, we inject color into it, typography, imagery; and then there's the prism mode which is directly inspired by the glass heritage, so that highlights the artwork by refracting and magnifying the details within it. Expanding to these four different modes is what gave us the ability to apply it across print, signage, and digital platforms.

ALY Anecdotal, interesting to note is, just because there's so much freedom in it being a 360-degree object quote-on-quote was figuring out where to reel it in [laughter]. There are very specific and strategic angle placements and when modes can and should be used on which substrates. It's definitely flexible in all the ways that we want it to be, but it's not letting the horse out of the gate to run wherever it would like.

BRYONY And imagine that is something that you developed down the line [totally!] as you started to constraint all of the ideas.

- ALY** Because substrate also plays a huge part in the brand itself because it's so architecturally referential and its creation made sense to start to think about how it interacts within and without those substrates, and where the applications are, which poses a litany of wonderful challenges to try and figure out.
- MEG** To add to Paolo's point, you can't look at the same painting twice, you don't enter the same art museum twice... and truly for us, it came down to this central idea of "art is never static, it's always dynamic and our perspectives shift as we move from room to room". You can imagine yourself at the campus of TMA, your perspective starts to shift and the new TMA logo is dynamic and it's also a multifaceted, also multi-uses use case scenarios, but truly is a symbol of the continual reframing of the history of art—a symbol that evokes the dynamism of arts emerging future as well.
- GARY** One of the things that this particular approach solved was that we go back to this context of 2020 and some of the social challenges that we were up against. Right before we started this project a few other museums were tackling the same issues, so the National Gallery in DC came out with a brand identity that was responding to a very similar strategic challenge. The Baltimore Museum of Art did a similar thing. The MFA in Boston did a similar thing, so we started to see some different kinds of solutions for that, that were either using a sense of a signature that the human beings were actually creating the logo in Baltimore... that color became the way to demonstrate sort of a more diverse perspectives, and that the notion of belonging became ones that really drove what was happening in Boston. I think what was powerful about this particular solution is that it solved a lot of these other issues of dynamism, and it had this unique relationship to art, but it also sort of allowed us to constantly frame art from a new perspective. So there's not, the curatorial view is the only way to look at art, the western European sort of way to look at art. it's not the only way to interpret art. It allowed a lot of different viewpoints, a lot of different art histories to begin to start to speak, and it allowed a lot of

visitors to say, “my view is just as valid as a millionaire’s view”. Whether people explicitly get that or not, it’s coming through. That was a really, really crucial part of what we invented there.

BRYONY Now one of the... sort of contentious points on Brand New in the conversation about the entire case study was typography. I would love to get a sense of your choices with Suisse Int’l, and Suisse Works, and the reasoning behind those choices. And then, how is it working for you now that you’re implementing them?

ALY Scorpion Rose pitched this family to us pretty early in the process. If it wasn’t already paired with this logo mark at the first round, it was pretty quickly after that it came together. We responded really well as an in-house team to the timeless quality of Suisse Int’l specifically, and the variance in weights was super helpful for the litany of applications that we have to apply things to—from parking signage all the way down to label and didactic copy in gallery. Pairing it with its sister font and Suisse Works for us was not only great because it was built together as a set. I think also there was a lot of interesting reference points to existing archival typography in the museum. For us, it made total sense to find some kind of way to honor the variety of typography that we saw throughout basically the entire 120-year history of the museum through both of these fonts working together.

So far it’s been great! We really have been having a lot of fun, truly, as an in-house team figuring out when to weave in Suisse Works because I think for us, the Int’l weight is doing a lot of the heavy lifting.

BRYONY What was the process like as you expanded the brand across all the various platforms based on the aspirational ones, the fun ones, and then there’s the really practical ones and the mundane assets.

PAOLO Finding back to those four different modes we’ve assigned, which ones are appropriate for what. So for example, the multi-mode was very appropriate for signage and promoting upcoming exhibitions because you can place copy on the planes. Then there’s the general mode,

which is the solid ones are just for representing the brand. The prism mode it's for... I guess the more fun ones where it interacts with the art, injecting the energy that the other ones might not. So I think adding some guidelines on where these are the most appropriate and also considering the physical space of which they're used because it was an interesting approach because we're thinking print, digital, but then also there's digital signage taking into account how people are interacting with it physically.

MEG And I would just add, we know we didn't touch too much on the design choice bringing glass into the system, and that was truly early on something that we knew we wanted to bring into it. Obviously the vast history of Toledo as a city with the history of glass, but as Aly mentioned, the Libbey history as well, and also the Amazing Glass Pavilion, which is a huge piece also of the Toledo Museum of Arts campus, and we really wanted to pay homage to that. To Paolo's point, as we thought about the particular applications, glass worked its way into multiple applications, but you can truly see that come to life online, particularly in the rotating team first when you come on the homepage using that prism mode where it's truly reflecting the art behind it, but also as you scroll, there's really beautiful moments of opacity where it feels like frosted glass behind particular sections within the website. So also just weaving in really beautiful interesting moments like that within the system as well.

GARY The scope of work for the project was for the brand identity system and the website. So I do think there was a way in which some of these digital elements started to get explored very early on because they were certainly going to be crucial to how we not only showed up on the website itself, but we were increasing the number of digital screens, and that's such a truth across museums, but I do think it would give us a chance to really sort of bring the brand to life there.

There's a side when you get into signage and wayfinding, museums are generally complicated. There was some initial thoughts on how to

really use the material pallets of the different buildings on our campus. We've got a Beaux Arts building from 1920s, 1912 and the 1920s. We've got an amazing Frank Garry building. We've got an amazing SANAA [Sejima and Nishizawa and Associates] building. All of those have these different material qualities and I think the examination of how does the system interact with art, but how does it interact with architecture and materiality was really helpful for us because as we move into the next phase where we're doing some architectural re-imagining of the campus, that's allowing us to think through how do we begin to apply this system into the physical architecture and the campus itself and what kind of signage comes out of that.

BRYONY Especially there's signage that is transient as well. There's signage that stays there a whole time and others that you're constantly changing as you move things around. [That's right]. Definitely big challenges that most clients don't have to face. Did I see some augmented reality too?

ALY We're integrating a lot of AR ideas into our upcoming exhibition roster. We're kind of at a point now since 2020 where we're really built back up to something that feels like a full season's worth of exhibitions. Super excited to see how we can start to develop almost a secondary wayfinding opportunity. Quite interesting to integrate as a digital component into what we're doing every day.

GARY That specific thing that we teased in there, we haven't applied that specific one yet, but what we do have is, we're in round two of a digital artist in residency program that we have at the Toledo Museum of Art. And we had an artist come in from Nigeria in the Fall and we have an artist collective coming in from Ethiopia this Summer. And in both cases what we're doing is we're expanding the range at which we explore where traditional art intersects with emerging digital art in Web3 spaces. So I do think there'll be some interesting applications of that down the road with that exhibition, and that particular artist residency in particular. So I can't reveal too much because honestly, I've only just seen things on very, very sketch stage, but this could be pretty cool.

BRYONY I'm going to have to pay attention. I'm within driving distance. [Laughter] I should be able to come down there and see that when it's up and running. As we consider the entire brand, one thing that came up earlier because of Aly was the use of color and the need for a more comprehensive color palette. Let's talk about how you develop that and what are the outlets that are enabling that to happen.

MEG So with the adaptive color palette, it was ambitious and normally we wouldn't propose an adaptive color palette with such a wide range of use-case scenarios, but we felt really confident in Aly, and Mark, and the TMA team. And they actually were the ones that pushed us to do this. And truly the idea behind the adaptive color palette is that the color palette thoughtfully reflects the artwork within view. In the application examples, the artwork and the colors are not competing. It truly allows the artwork to play the hero role and then the color serves more of a complimentary aspect of the brand.

Some small design details here, so when a painting or a piece of artwork is selected within application, you pull two color tones from the artwork, two color fields. And then from there you expand each of those two colors into three saturation options—that's sort of your palette for that particular application. We developed that system with Aly and Mark really closely and figured work through that together, so it was something that was actually useful for them once we handed it off and having been to the museum since all the work has officially launched, and I've seen all the great things that have come out of the TMA design team, I've just been so thrilled, and proud, and honored, [laughter] to have worked on this and have seen all of it come to life so beautifully.

ALY Initially, we had worked through a lot of, we could do this kind of condensed color palette, or we could really reference hero artworks from the collection, and it just really wasn't clicking. To have the luxury of basically every color on the spectrum, as long as we're adhering to contrast standards, it's really helpful. It bolsters the artwork that we're talking about in whatever application it's needed in, and that's the

most important thing for us is are we showing our collection in the best way possible. As a foundation point, it's really, really helpful.

GARY To be honest about the implications when you make choices like this. I think one thing that's been interesting for us to manage internally with our staff is that they went from a system where it was very clear that red was our color. And now we're in this much more complex adaptive system. So I think one of the questions that we still get is that "is our brand color now black?" We need to really coach people through to see that with each iteration, in each application, we're really revealing what our brand color is—truly a full spectrum. That's hard for some people to grasp in a simple way, but I think that will be a sort of ongoing learning as a culture at the museum.

BRYONY And have you developed brand guidelines or some sort of document that allows for this guidance to happen?

MEG We truly believe that the best brand guidelines are created to evolve with the brand. so we're not saying these are the guidelines that you're going to use for the next 10 years, you can't change them. Because then you're going to end up with a brand that eventually starts to feel stale, for lack of a better word, but also it's repetitive. We want, again, this idea of transformation did not call for a brand guidelines like that, so we actually used Standards to build the brand guidelines on and we found it to be incredibly wonderful. We designed the guidelines on there and then ultimately worked with Aly and Mark to hand it over. I'm assuming it's also continually being updated on the TMA side as well, even with tone of voice, with strategy, all the things that as a brand evolves should also evolve with the brand. And as applications are updated, Aly and Mark can easily go in there and update that brand guidelines accordingly.

ALY Standards is fabulous!

PAOLO As far as deliverables go, I think we focused on streamlining a lot of the deliverables. I mean there's a lot of moving parts to this one, but

I think we did a pretty good job at making it easy in a low-tech way. We templated everything from pre-rotated logos for all the static applications to also pre-animated motion applications. We did set up a Adobe Illustrator template that was mapped onto a pre-animated 3D space within After Effects. Really the only thing a designer who would take over this would have to do is edit within Illustrator, which is just a 2D interface and then After Effects would just spit out the final render. We focused on making it easy and manageable for the team as well.

GARY We have tried to free up our full staff to be participants in implementing the design. We've been able to, Aly and Mark, who's the other key designer on our team we keep referring to, developed an internal system that's based on Canva that allows us to create a bunch of templates that people can start to fill in, and implement this system at scale, which I think is beyond the standards and the high level guidelines, I think we've been able to develop these other tools that actually sort of get a ton of stuff done rapidly so that our design talent is focused on higher order challenges.

MEG Going forward, one piece of advice I would give to designers working with in-house teams is to meet early and often throughout the project so that you are working through how is this project set up? How are the motion files set up? Is there a way to work through this program, et cetera, so that there are no surprises at the end of the project.

BRYONY And Gary, what's some of the feedback that you have been receiving from the community, and employees, and everybody at large?

GARY In general, it's been very enthusiastic. The work is pretty powerful, so it speaks for itself and people can't help but smile and kind of really feel like something beautiful and dynamic is happening. It takes the best of what we're doing both as a museum and as an institution and really embodies it, and I think people have played that back to us pretty consistently. I alluded to the fact that where there has been some questions are around just really grasping this notion of multiple colors and that's an easy thing for people to grasp. Some of the other

fair questions that we get is for those who weren't involved with the process intimately, it's like, well, why did we change now? We've had to really tell that strategic story as frequently as we can in order for people to really appreciate the moment of change because as I've seen through a lot of these projects, familiarity really starts to have a really strong pull at the moment that you start to introduce change.

And I think that our previous logo was very mute and no one seemed to be standing up and sort of saying, "I love this, you can't touch this!" [laughter] As soon as you do change it, they're like, "I miss it, why did we change?" You just have to move through those, but honestly, none of those are very deep or challenging, and I think everyone's really embraced where we're going.

BRYONY I have one last question for everybody. I would like to know for each of you, what was the most satisfying or most exciting aspect of this project at a personal level?

MEG The aspirations that Gary, Aly, and the rest of the TMA team had for this work—from the very initial meeting throughout the entire project—was infectious and they empowered us to push boundaries, truly. Ultimately, I believe it shows in the work. We're incredibly proud of the work that we created, truly together underlining [laughter] that word and we're so thankful for the relationships that we've now built. For anyone listening, if you haven't been, what are you waiting for? Get over to the museum.

ALY I'm a lifelong Toledo-an, I ran around this museum as a kid on school field trips. I would come and sit in front of the medieval paintings and I would brood when I was a teen. I taught summer classes when I was a college student. I have rarely lived more than five minutes away from the museum, so by all accounts, I am either a TMA super fan or the biggest critic, depending. But genuinely to be able to see how this all came together as an employee of the museum, as a designer, as a kid

who just loves TMA, I feel nothing but pride and accomplishment, so that is unbelievably satisfying.

GARY I'll say two things. One is that as a process, this gave me what I hoped for in a professional experience, which is something to be really proud of, a beautiful outcome, but something that's really life-giving at the same time. I felt how we treated each other as human beings, as professionals, how we really treated the legacy of a beloved institution. All of it felt like we were sort of giving life and generating more energy, and I think that that was remarkable. In a very soulful way that's the key thing. I think the other key one is that in choosing a partner who is a design firm and an advertising agency, we were able to quickly transition into advertising campaigns that flowed directly out of the system and came up with a beautiful tagline around "See Differently" and how that frame up a launch campaign really sort of allowed this to be not only a design system but a communication system. You can't always pull that off with just a pure design firm.

PAOLO Just seeing the ripple effect of all the work slowly coming to life in the physical space is pretty magical. Seeing work that I didn't personally design but has been adapted by the TMA design team and be executed so beautifully, and correct, and on brand the way we intended it to be is pretty awesome—just because a lot of times that doesn't happen. So seeing that is pretty awesome. This process was almost a year, even a little bit over a year, so I think after that such long amount of time and then finally seeing it grow out of your hands is pretty awesome.

BRYONY Those are all very good takeaways and experiences. You started this in the middle of a pandemic when everything came to a standstill... and a lot of people and a lot of companies started to look inwards, but what I hear is you started to look outwards first. You were looking at your community, you were looking at the art scape, you were looking outwards of yourselves in order to take all of that information inwards, and realize what steps you needed to move forward to grow as an institution—not in more ticket sales—but your presence within the community, this bond that you have with the community, and

the give-and-take that is constantly happening since long before Aly was a kid running around those hallways. And you set out to create something that was dynamic, and welcoming, and inclusive, that would transform not only the museum but the community.

You spoke of "The transformative power of art for all of Toledo", in this case I think there was a transformative power of design for the Toledo Museum of Art that really sets it up for decades to come with an identity that is very dynamic and has so much leeway to keep morphing and growing into whatever it might be in 10 years or 20 years, while still retaining the essence of what was developed now. It is an incredible project and I am antsy to get myself into the car and get down there as soon as I can.

ALY You're welcome anytime!

GARY Wonderful. Sounds good.

BRYONY In the meantime, thank you so much for joining me on The Follow-Up today.

ALY Thank you Bryony.

MEG Thank you, thank you so much.

PAOLO Yes, thanks so much.

GARY Thank you. It was a real pleasure. Hope you have a great day.

ARMIN I would normally try to say something deep and meaningful in these closing notes but Bryony did a fantastic job in summarizing the project's ambitions and results as she wrapped up the conversation. So I will just end with a personal ambition of my own which is to attend the Toledo Museum of Art's next banger of a block party and see all of this great identity in action.

Today, thanks for listening, until next time, we'll be here, we hope you'll be there.