Understanding Visual Language:

How Designers Communicate Meaning

Introduction

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- Marketers
- Developers
- Designers
- Animators
- UI/UX

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What is Visual Language?

Design is not decoration.

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Every choice communicates something to an audience.

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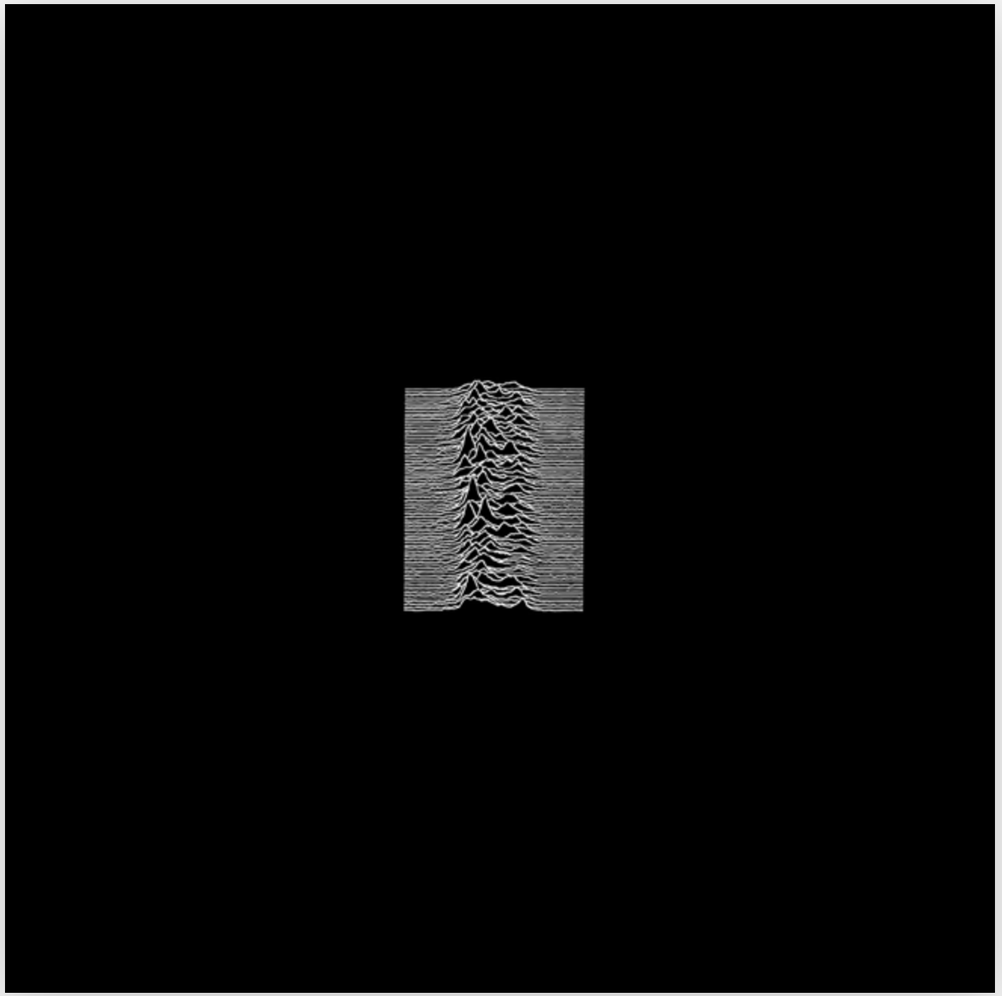
Every choice communicates something
to an audience.

Strong design is intentional and audience-aware.

Visual Language in Practice - Case Study



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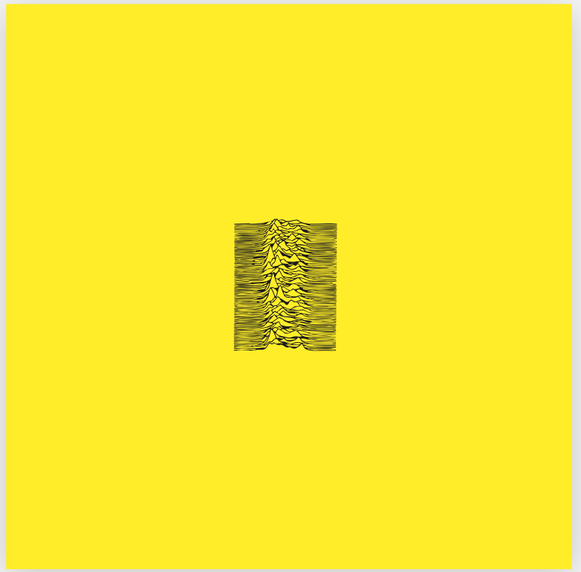
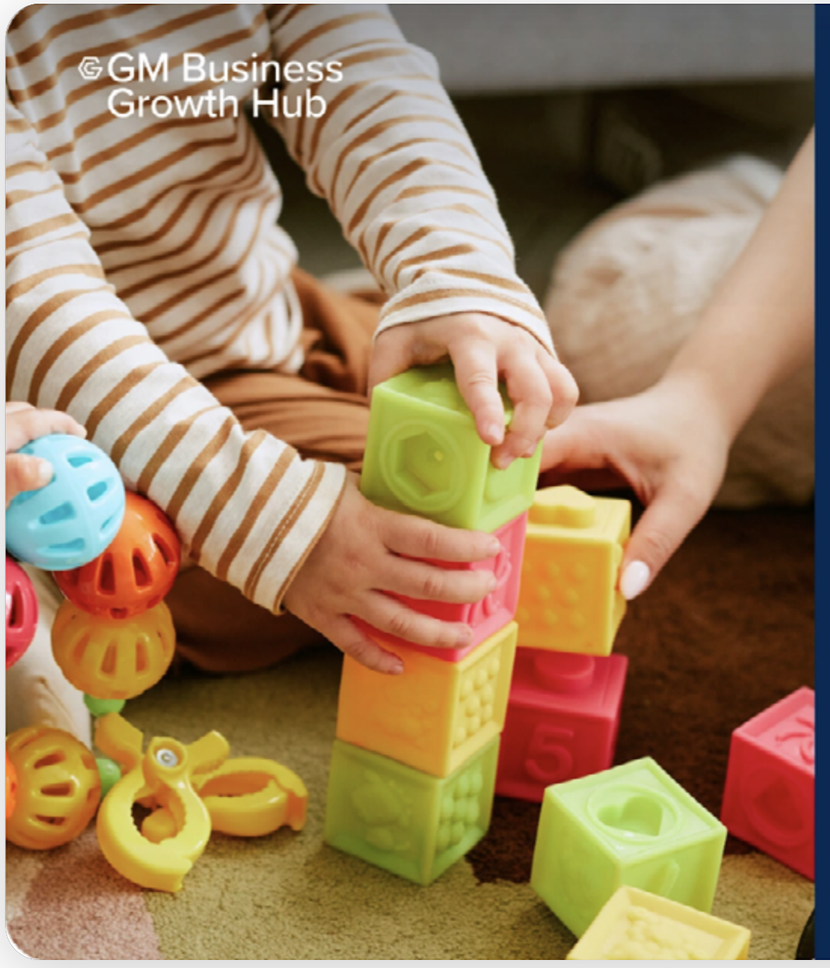


Local Events: Professional



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GREATER MANCHESTER
DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

Local Events: Cultural

A SYMPHONY OF FLESH AND BONES
JULIET ELLIS
A meditative new film and live installation exploring mind, body and the illusion of self
manchester international festival 2025 3-20 Jul
FOOTBALL CITY ART UNITED
ARTISTS
BÁRBARA SÁNCHEZ-KANE
KEIKEN
PAUL PFEIFFER
ROSE WYLIE
RYAN GANDER
SUZANNE LACY
ALVARO BARRINGTON
JILL MULLEADY
JORGE CAMPOS
ELLA TOONE
EDGAR DAVIDS
LOTTE WUBBEN-MOY
ERIC CANTONA
VIVIANNE MIEDEMA
& ALI RILEY
RAÍ
DIEGO MARADONA
11 collaborations between international footballers and artists
Co-curators
JUAN HATA
HANS ULRICH OBRIST
JOSH MILLIGAN
AND NOW I KNOW WHAT LOVE IS
BLACKHAINE
An immersive performance work blending choreography and sound
AND FREE EVENTS
10-13 JUL
AVIVA STUDIOS
4 JUL - 24 AUG
AVIVA STUDIOS
FREE FOR UNDER 16'S
FOOTBALLERS
9-19 JUL
DIECAST
A FESTIVAL OF NEW ART, MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE AND FREE EVENTS

Comparision

Both are Manchester events.

Both are Manchester events.

The audience is different.

Both are Manchester events.

The audience is different.

As a result the visual language changes.

Typography as Visual Language

Typography has a voice.

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Font choice affects tone, mood and meaning.

Typography has a voice.

Font choice affects tone, mood and meaning.

The follwing sentences are exactly the same — only the typography has changed.

You'll always be mine.

YOU'LL ALWAYS BE MINE.

The words haven’t changed.
Only the typography has.
The meaning feels completely different.

The words haven’t changed.
Only the typography has.
The meaning feels completely different.

Typography choices need to be **intentional** and **justified** — they directly affect meaning and audience interpretation.

Visual Hierarchy

Visual hierarchy is how designers **guide attention.**

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It helps an audience understand **what to look at first, second and last.**

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It helps an audience understand **what to look at first, second and last.**

Hierarchy is created through **size, contrast, placement and spacing.**

You will read this first.

AND YOU'LL MOST LIKELY LEAVE THIS FOR LAST.

And then you'll probably read this immediately afterwards.

Why?

Strong hierarchy helps an audience:
- Understand information quickly
- Know what is most important
- Navigate a design with confidence

Hierarchy supports **clarity, intention** and **audience awareness.**

Colour and Visual Meaning

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Colour influences how an audience feels before they even read anything.

Colour influences emotion, mood and perception.

Red is highly visible and creates energy and urgency, which is why designers use it when they want to grab attention or prompt action.

Yellow is warm and optimistic. It’s often used to attract attention quickly and communicate positivity, especially for younger audiences, but it needs to be used carefully because it can be overwhelming.

Blue has a calming effect and is strongly associated with trust, reliability and professionalism. Designers often choose blue when they want an audience to feel secure and confident.

Orange combines the energy of red with the friendliness of yellow. It feels confident, energetic and approachable, which is why it’s common in for younger audiences and sports branding.

Green is closely linked to nature, health and growth. Designers might use green to suggest freshness, wellbeing and environmental awareness.

Black is neutral and powerful. It’s often used to create contrast and clarity, and is associated with quality, control and sophistication.

Colour choices should always be **intentional.**
As designers we need to think about **audience**, **purpose** and **message**, and be able to **explain** and **justify** our decisions as part of the creative process.

*disclaimer

While there will always be designers who challenge or break conventions, strong work is still grounded in **intentional decision-making.**

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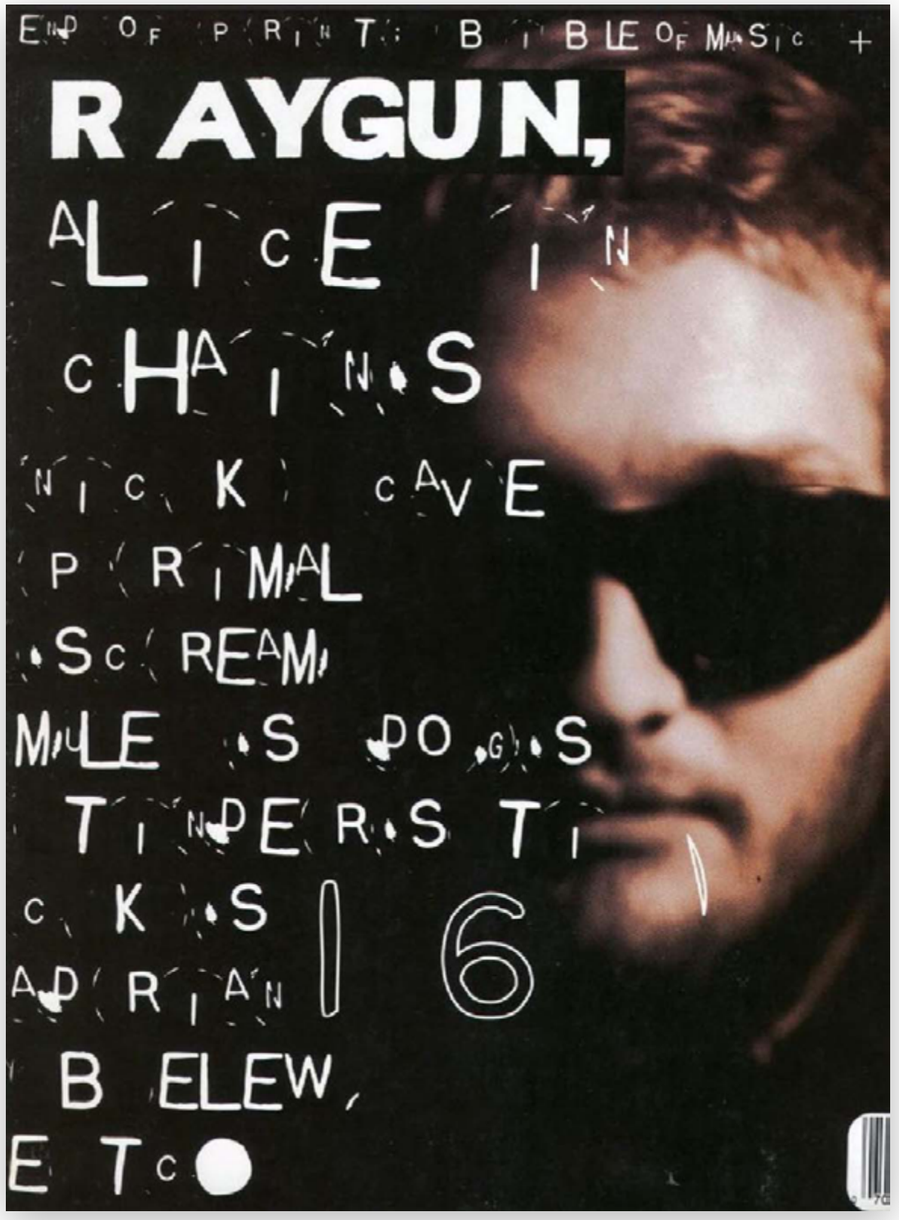
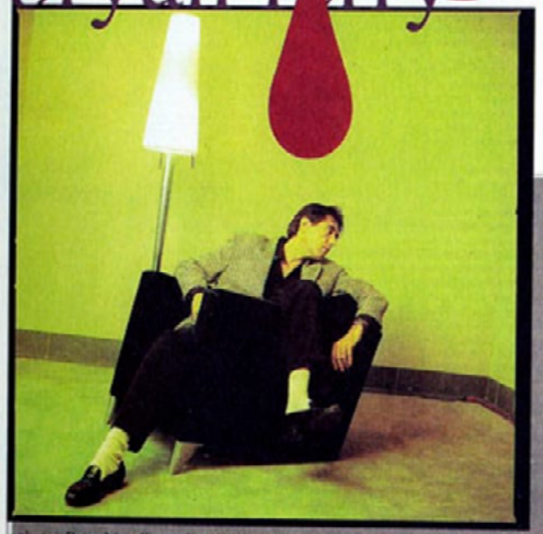
Even rule-breaking choices need to be **thought through**, **justified** and **reflected on.**


END OF PRINT: BIBLE OF MUSIC +
RAYGUN,
ALICE IN CHAINS
NICK CAVE
PRIMAL SCREAM
MULE SPOGS
TINDERSTICKS
ADRIAN BELEW,
ETC
16



photos:Peter Morello stylist: Jill Spector

Practical

Design a Manchester event poster.
The event stays the same — the audience changes.

Choose one option:

Option A: Business & Professional Event
Audience: business owners, managers, educators
Tone: professional, clear, trustworthy

Option B: Cultural & Creative Event
Audience: general public, creatives, festival-goers
Tone: expressive, energetic, engaging

Event: Stronger Together: Ideas, Culture & Growth
Date: Thursday 18 July 2026
Location: HOME Manchester

Short description:
A one-day event bringing people together to share ideas, inspire creativity, and explore how different perspectives drive progress.

Option A: Business & Professional Event
Audience: business owners, managers, educators
Tone: professional, clear, trustworthy

Strapline: A focused event exploring leadership, collaboration & growth.

Option B: Cultural & Creative Event
Audience: general public, creatives, festival-goers
Tone: expressive, energetic, engaging

Strapline: A celebration of ideas, creativity and collective energy.

Sharing & Reflection

Wrap-up

Typography introduces **voice**

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Hierarchy introduces **attention**

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Hierarchy introduces **attention**

Colour reinforces **mood** and **meaning**

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Strong design decisions consider **audience, purpose and message**, and can be **explained and justified.**

There are no fixed rules — but effective visual language is always **thoughtful, purposeful and reflective.**

Thank you.