

Sibylla Merian

DESMA 142: Design Systems final presentation script.

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READ BY

Five Voices

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For our design systems course, my team and I spent ten weeks building Sibylla Merian — a fictional fashion heritage house whose entire design language is drawn from insect morphology. As verbal identity lead, I was responsible for the brand's tone of voice and everything it puts in writing, including the script that follows: performed across five voices at our pitch deck based final presentation.

01 — PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy

SL. 04-10

D I N A

- 04 Sibylla Merian begins with looking closely.
- 05 Nature is the oldest, most accomplished author of beauty. For generations, it has been selecting for visual desirability longer than culture has had a word for it, with a pressure and patience that no other design process has matched. Consider what it has produced.
- i. The iridescent scales of a morpho wing.
 - ii. A jewel beetle's enamelled shell.
 - iii. The geometer moth's delicate antenna.
- 08 The body is itself a completed work of art. And at Sibylla Merian, we do not seek to improve nor reinterpret it. Our job is simply to pass it on.

02 — POSITIONING

Positioning

SL. 11–15

DINA

- 10 When engaging with our audience, Sibylla Merian does not attempt to sell. It simply states what is already there and invites the reader to do the same. The voice of the house is built on a single assumption: that the person reading already has the capacity to recognise beauty, they simply need to be shown where to look.

PRINCIPLE ONE

Persuasion through observation

Observed detail is presented as already significant. In that, the reader finds themselves agreeing before they have been asked to. The writing earns its authority through the quality of its attention. Rhetorical devices are kept minimal; the reader is led to see beauty because the writing communicates it.

PRINCIPLE TWO

Composure

The house writes in a calm and even register, regardless of the complexity of what it is describing. Details may feel overwhelming, so the writing must meet them without flinching. Composure is what keeps the reader inside the observation rather than spurned by it.

PRINCIPLE THREE

Scientific language

Entomological terminology is used when ordinary vocabulary would be less accurate. Once introduced, it is treated as part of the sentence's normal descriptive work. The language is an invitation, and the reader who follows from context — as they would in any serious text — is to be counted as someone capable of receiving it.

03 — DESIGN STRATEGY

Design Strategy

SL. 16–20

DINA

- 17 Our philosophy also demanded a design strategy equal to it. We call it the specimen standard — the principle that everything should receive the same degree of attention, care, and precision that nature invests in the forms it generates; the expectation that no component is incidental or roughly treated but formed with intentionality comparable to that found in a natural specimen. In practice, this mainly means two things:
- 18 Richness of colour. Our palette draws from the full chromatic intensity of insect morphology.
- 19 Hierarchical scaling. In any given composition, the model is the largest and most prominent feature, even if the scaling is not true-to-life.
- 20 Together, these principles return every compositional decision to the same origin: the specimen under close light.

04 — VISUAL IDENTITY

Visual Identity

SL. 21–51

MICKY

21 Our visual identity is the backbone of our design system.

Logo

SL. 22–28 · MICKY

23 The Sibylla Merian logo in full.

24 Our symbol is a monogram — S and M for Sibylla Merian — drawn into a single form that reads as a butterfly. It is meant to function first and foremost as an image. Only under sustained observation should the letterforms become clear.

25 Our wordmark, set in our house serif. The high contrast between its thick and thin strokes gives it a structure that holds at every scale, the chiselled serifs anchoring it, while the lachrymal terminals on the Y, R, and A echo the symbol's own, keeping it from reading as purely utilitarian.

26 The symbol and wordmark together form the primary version of the logo, used whenever the brand is being introduced or established. The symbol alone is reserved for contexts where the house is already known: a label, an embossed surface, a digital favicon. The wordmark never appears without the symbol.

27 The high contrast between the thick and thin strokes ensures legibility at even the smallest sizes. As such, there is no mandated minimum. However, past a certain point (typically 250px width), switch to symbol use, as the wordmark becomes visual noise.

28 When using our logo, do not:

- × use a different font setting for the wordmark
- × change the alignment of the lockup
- × stack the lockup horizontally
- × rotate it
- × use incongruous colours that are not typically found in nature
- × stretch, squash, or change the proportions of the lockup
- × add a drop shadow
- × mask it over a pattern

Colour

SL. 29–35 · SANA

30 Nature does not work from a fixed palette. Sibylla Merian does not either, as a curated selection of approved colours would place an artificial limit on a system whose richness is drawn directly from its source material.

31 Instead, colour in the house's work is pulled from the specific insect being referenced, or from the full chromatic range of entomological morphology.

Deep, jewel-toned, fully saturated.

- 33 Never reduced to greyscale or diluted for the sake of easy coordination. Where neutrals are needed, the house uses cream for lights and charcoal for darks. Pure black and white are absent from the system entirely.
- 34 High contrast should be prioritised throughout. Elements are differentiated either by value and saturation within the same hue, or by hue outright.
- 35 And gradients should be minimal, as the richness and visual interest comes from the colour itself.

Typography

SL. 36–38 · MICKY

- 37 The house sets everything in Ibarra Real Nova. Originally cut by Gerónimo Gil in the late eighteenth century for the Royal Spanish Academy's edition of Don Quixote, it is a typeface built for the weight of a canonical text, for sustained reading and formal dignity. We believe it is a typeface that rewards close attention, making it the perfect fit for Sibylla Merian.
- 38 Ibarra Real Nova is used at a single weight throughout — medium, always. Hierarchy is achieved entirely through scale and spacing, with no variation in weight or style to distinguish one level of information from another. Headlines are set at whatever size commands the appropriate attention for the application they appear in. From there, the system is proportional: subtitles at half the headline size, subheadings at a third, and body copy at a fifth — or a quarter where subheadings are absent. Text is left-justified as the default, with centred alignment reserved for compositions where the text is the main visual weight of the page.

Graphic Devices

SL. 39–42 · ASH

- 40 The antenna is a single flagellum extracted from the SM symbol — the same curving line that forms the upper arch of the M, isolated and repurposed as a standalone motif. It may appear across all applications, but only in small roles — a drawer handle, a pin, a section divider in text. The form is distinctive enough that it carries the brand's recognition into contexts where the full logo would be inappropriate or unnecessary — so that an object as discrete as even a box reads, immediately, as Sibylla Merian.
- 41 The fig. label is borrowed directly from the conventions of natural history illustration, where specimens are numbered and captioned. In the house's work, it is a handwritten, vectorised annotation — with two variations of the abbreviated inscription for variability, and individual numbers for insertion. It is used wherever the brand needs to acknowledge that what is being shown has been studied and found worth recording — captions, posters, displays.
- 42 The icon tile is the SM symbol repeated in an interlocked, continuous pattern, aligned with a slight overlap so that adjacent symbols touch at their uppermost points — replicating the way an insect's feelers make contact with others like it. At the scale of the full pattern, this produces a dense texture that takes extra attention before it resolves into the mark it is made from. It is the mark at its most unrecognisable — designed for negative spaces that need to be filled with something that registers immediately as Sibylla Merian long before the eye understands why.

Imagery

SL. 43–48 · AUGUST

- 44 To build a collage, each element must first be looked at closely enough to determine whether it is worth isolating. That labour of extraction is the same act as the naturalist's — deciding that this specimen, specifically, deserves to be seen — and it is the image-making equivalent of the specimen standard. Everything is held to the same idea that what nature has created is already worth the attention. The insect sits at the centre of that arrangement, always, surrounded by the fullness of the natural world it belongs to, yet never subsumed by it.
- 45 When constructing a collage, the quality of the source material determines the quality of the attention the composition can give its subject. As such, image sources are always high resolution and well lit, with a high depth of field so that the full structure of the insect is in sharp focus. The model should be as fully displayed as possible, its whole body legible, with nothing of consequence lost to shadow.
- 46 Crop out excess content from images. The full source image should never be used.
- 47 The model occupies the dominant position in the frame, scaled to reflect its primacy as subject. Supporting elements such as foliage and fruit are subordinate in scale and placement.
- 48 Because elements are drawn from different sources, colour balance must be edited across the composition, so everything reads as belonging to the same light.

Motion

SL. 49–51 · AUGUST

- 50 For motion, the reference is the insect itself in movement: quick, segmented, and highly articulated. Because the body is divided into rigid sections connected by flexible joints, motion often manifests as a sequence of small mechanical adjustments.
- 51 Stop-frame animation reproduces that quality faithfully. It also pays homage to the way insects have historically been documented — in timelapses. Smoothed, eased motion would belong to a different sensibility entirely. As such, there is no interpolation between one state and the next for any of our branded motion.

05 — APPLICATIONS

Applications

SL. 52-74

Campaign Posters

SL. 53-54 · AUGUST

- 54 Company style was the tradition of natural history painting created for the East India Company in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in which artists illustrated exotic fauna with a fidelity to colour and detail that had no precedent, surrounding their subjects with the full abundance of the natural world they belonged to. It looked at beauty with a devotion that transposed the act of rendering into a form of reverence in and of itself.
- 54 The house saw that philosophy reflected in its own and sought to carry that tradition forward into something luxurious and contemporary. This campaign applies the specimen standard unflinchingly, the modelling insect commanding the frame at a scale that reflects its status, set against richly coloured backdrops.

Campaign Video

SL. 55-56 · AUGUST

- 56 The campaign video realises our motion principles in their fullest expression. A chrysalis writhes in stop-frame — shifting and adjusting with the budding, interior quality of a specimen working toward its own promise. The transformation is depicted in cohesion with nature, with the ethos that each recipient of nature's movement dances in complimentary rhythm. As we at Sibylla Merian believe metamorphosis is the process of attaining perfection.

Store

SL. 57-65 · MICKY

- 58 Our store seeks to translate the logic of insect preservation and collection into the retail environment, so that moving through the space commands the same quality of attention as moving through a gallery. This is the specimen standard at architectural scale.
- 59 The space is geometrically designed for dynamic navigation. Materials were selected to keep colour as the primary experience of the space, never to compete with the objects on display. Two washes of wood — a lighter birch and a richer, darker grain — establish warmth as the base register.
- 60 While the wall colour, a dark teal, functions as a neutral counterbalance, with indentions set into it for editorial displays.
- 61 Copper is used for all metallic elements, running through the space in the pins and handles, as well as the rims of the magnifying glasses that are used both decoratively and as lids throughout. Signage is copper as well.
- 63 A decorative chandelier, modelled after the microscope, hangs in the centre of the store. It represents Sibylla Merian's core philosophy — that is, the act of looking closely.
- 64 Cocooned in the space between it and ceiling, the sales counter is located in the most intimate part of the room.

- 65 Display cushions are an off-white paper texture. The lounge setting is red silk, slotted into open box frames that mirror the way our specimens are mounted. Even sitting idle in our store, the customer takes part in its beauty.

Packaging

SL. 66-72 · ASH

- 67 Crafted to be an experience, Sibylla Merian's packaging is a continuation of the brand's world.
- 68 Using the same material language as the store — the same visuals as our system — the garment arrives already belonging to the environment it came from.
- 69 The box clasp uses the antenna motif.
- 70 So too do the bag handles, where our symbol is placed in accordance to the three dimensionality of the object.
- 71 The thank you cards apply the collage at its most airy, lending the brand's voice room to be heard.
- 72 The icon tile is printed onto the tissue paper, so that the logo is present at every stage of unwrapping as the primary point of recognition. Each layer reveals something worth looking at — placed there with the understanding that the person receiving it already retains the ability to appreciate it.

Website Prototype

SL. 73-74 · SANA

- 74 A gridded, catalogued website would imply a transactional relationship with the visitor. Our website assumes that the person who arrives is there to embody the same awe and contemplation as one would feel walking amongst nature. To that end, it is designed to feel like a garden digitally reimaged. Colours are at full saturation and contrast, with collaged elements scaled and layered at drastic differences in our branded hierarchical trademark. As the user scrolls, the fixed elements adopt our motion rules — moving in the same staccato rhythm as the insects depicted. Everything culminates in an end screen where the logo mimics a microscope lens, recalling the same visual device used throughout the store. Together these qualities produce an environment that is abundant, complex and rewarding to move through slowly.

06 — CONCLUSION

Conclusion

SL. 75-77

DINA

- 76 Sibylla Merian was founded on the belief that beauty — accumulated across generations, exemplified by bodies that often pass without appreciation — deserves a stage equal to its complexity. Our system was designed to impress that conviction consistently across every area it covers, and to make it legible to anyone who contributes to the brand.
- 76 What comes next will be built from these foundations, always to the same standard.

Thank you.

Sibylla Merian is a fictional brand created for a design systems course.

Verbal identity, tone of voice, and this script were led by Dina Alkhateeb.

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