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# HOW TO BRAND A CULTURAL INSTITUTION

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**MYLES GAYTHWAITE**

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**Project Projects**

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**Rob Giampietro, designer, educator, critic, and principal in the design firm Project Projects, discusses crafting the identity for SALT, a cultural institution in Istanbul, Turkey.**



**When Vasif Kortun, SALT's director, first approached you, what did he want to accomplish?**

The idea was that three institutions would be joining together under one umbrella: the Garanti Gallery, which focuses on contemporary art; Platform Garanti, which focuses on architectural and cultural projects; and the Ottoman Bank Archive and Research Center, which is part of the Ottoman Bank Museum. Those three entities coming together under one roof presented a very different kind of cultural institution.

**In what way?**

One of the things that stood out was that Vasif and his colleagues talked about SALT being an exhibiting and researching institution, rather than a collecting institution. The emphasis was not on having materials hidden away in an archive collecting dust. Instead, the focus was on creating exhibitions and nurturing public discourse. As a result, the institution would always be changing, always experimenting. So the question for us was, "How can we approach that kind of problem?"

**Thoughtful evocations  
of identities influx**

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### And what was your initial approach?

We went to Istanbul and talked about different ways of thinking about this problem, and we discussed how identity projects had been approached in the past. After we were awarded the project, we outlined some specific design directions, each of which played off the idea of fluidity and change. One touchstone was MTV's identity from the 1980s, which constantly adapted for different on-air situations and contexts. We were interested in this idea of something that is consistent but also mutable. And yet even as it's constantly changing, it's also perpetually becoming more itself—no one ever mistook MTV for something else.

### Why this idea of “perpetually becoming”?

We felt that because SALT was so active, it was an institution that was defined by its present and its future, rather than its past. It seemed appropriate that the identity was always going to be in a state of flux—it was always going to be developing layers upon layers, rather than being fixed at a certain point.

Another reference for us was Matthew Carter's Walker typeface, which was designed for the Walker Art Center in the 1990s. Carter took the institutional typeface model—where an organization would have this one proprietary typeface—and made it more dynamic. Even though Walker was a proprietary typeface, that typeface didn't have a singular look. So we thought, “Well, what would a contemporary approach to this kind of typographic solution be?”

We started experimenting with an alphabet, and we decided to alter the letters *S*, *A*, *L*, and *T*, almost like DNA code. Those four letters are different from the others, while the rest of the letters have a typographic consistency. But the letters for *SALT* would

A Á BC Ç DE FG Ğ HI İ J KL  
M NO Ö P QR S Ş T U Ü V W X Y Z  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0  
1/4 1/2 3/4 0/00 1 2 3 ! " # \$ % & ' ( ) \* + , -  
. / : ; < = > ± ? @ [ \ ] ^ \_ ` { | } ~ ¡ ¢ €  
£ ¥ « » — — † ‡ • … ‹ › / ™ © ®  
À Â Ã Ä Å Æ È É Ê Ë Ì Í Î Ñ  
Ò Ó Ô Õ Ø Ù Ú Û Ü Ý Æ Š

#### ABOVE:

Kraliçe, a custom geometric sans serif typeface, designed to work within the new identity for SALT, a new institution in Istanbul.

#### BELOW:

Speculative future versions of Kraliçe by other invited designers.

DAĞITIK İŞ  
DISTRIBUTED  
WORK

SUBTRACTING OF ZERGES  
MILADEN STIVINOVIĆ  
BEYOĞLU  
İSTIKLAL CADDESİ NO. 115A  
İSTANBUL

UB R. C. ING OF ZEROE  
M. DEN STIVINOVIĆ  
BEYOĞLU  
İSTIKLAL CADDESİ NO. 115A  
İSTANBUL

"DISCIPLINERÖTESİ"  
KONFERANS DİZİSİ-1:  
MARCOS NOVAK  
"TRANSDISCIPLINES"  
LECTURE SERIES-1:  
MARCOS NOVAK

always stand out. Early on, SALT referred to itself informally as an “institute of difference.” So we like that the identity of the institution would always itself be changing—even if it’s embedded in this more specific context of the organization itself.

### **What other typographic influences did you consider?**

When we went to Istanbul, we noticed the typeface DIN a lot, and we became interested in how to use DIN without using DIN—we thought we would tweak it a little. We were also really interested in the typefaces that were used for playing cards because cards are a mutable, shiftable set of items with gamelike, multiplayer qualities. It turned out that a typographer friend—Timo Gaessner in Berlin—was working on 123Queen, a typeface that was based on playing card numerals and letters with echoes of DIN. We took the name “Queen” and translated it into Turkish, which is “Kraliçe,” and that typeface forms the basis of the alphabet. The letters *S*, *A*, *L*, and *T* will be redesigned by different designers over time as the institution goes forward. So, in a way, the design becomes a curatorial program, an institutional typeface, and a solution to the identity problem.

### **Different designers will be changing the SALT letterforms over time—how is that going to work?**

SALT is interested in finding ways to bring new creative people to Istanbul and generating new conversations as a result of that interaction. We thought that it was an interesting idea to invite contemporary typographers, designers, and artists to Istanbul to give a talk about their work at SALT and then—as a way of paying it forward—they would then be invited to change the Kraliçe typeface.

How future designers will approach the typeface is up to them. It’s up to us as curators to ask designers to give the face a different perspective, but we’re still figuring out who we’ll approach. As these different versions of the typeface are used, they’ll start to layer on top of one another, in a sense.

### **What are the different considerations you have for designing a cultural identity as opposed to a more commercial enterprise?**

With a cultural institution, the public is a third term. It’s important that the public is considered during the design process, and that there’s some way of engaging them—or even representing their contribution to that institution—within the identity itself. With SALT, we were very conscious of the public—there’s Garanti, there’s SALT, and there’s the public. The shifting relationships between these three groups allowed us to frame this particular design intervention.

### **Place and time had an influence on this project.**

Yes. I think the best ideas are always strongly contextual, even site specific. Some identities emerge from interesting conversations with interesting clients. It’s an iterative process: We have an idea, that idea gets refined, and so we change it. Then, it gets changed some more. Out of that back and forth comes something that neither we nor the client would have conceived initially. When that happens, the identity represents a melding of our two viewpoints.



**ABOVE AND RIGHT:** The typeface applied to the overall brand identity, including posters, the website, signage, bags, and T-shirts

SALT GÖRSEL VE MADDİ KÜLTÜRDE KRİTİK KONULARI DEĞERLENDİRİR;  
YENİLİKÇİ PROGRAMLARI, DENEYSEL DÜŞÜNCEYİ VE ARAŞTIRMAYI DESTEKLER.



A screenshot of a website interface. The browser address bar shows "http://www.saltonline.org". The main content area features a large text block: "DISTRIBUTED WORK: KAREN VERSCHOOREN, EMEL KURMA, HASAN YALÇINKAYA". To the right, there is a "NEW VIDEO" section with a video player showing a person in a pink costume. Below that, there is a "New Summer Hours!" section with a blue background and text: "Gallery: 11am-6pm", "Shop: 11am-6pm", "Coffee Bar: 11am-4pm". There are also navigation buttons like "Home", "About", and "Contact".



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