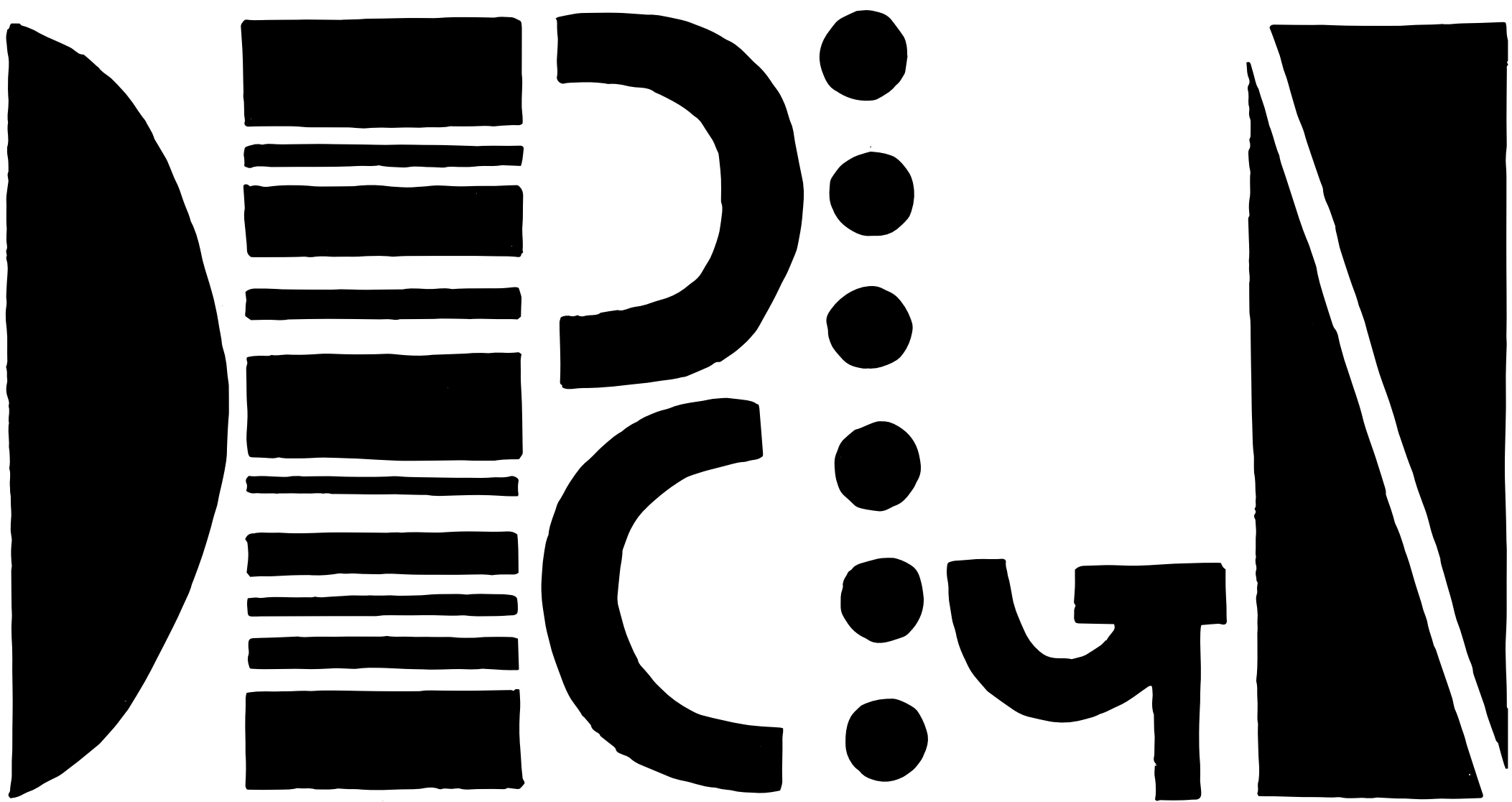


Design Without Bias

Sochetha Meng

New Zealand is far from being a multicultural country contrary to popular belief. How are we multicultural if we ignore racism towards our migrant, Maori, and Pasifika community? As Taika Waititi said, *“the only thing that can keep racism alive and help it grow is feeding it. nurturing it”*¹. These insensitive actions manifest into comments that grow to become permanent scars. I’ve experienced a handful myself and still face them today. Before we design for others, the wider community, and the general public, we need to *“see each other as humans and less as stereotypes based on fear and ignorance”*².

Designers and the industry are deeply responsible for cultivating the problem of implicitly perpetuating European design aesthetics as if it’s the only existing design style. Not only are diverse cultures severely underrepresented in companies and classrooms, but the media, films, and advertisements reinforcing racial stereotypes. We’re always taught that the Europeans were always the ‘firsts’ although it’s not always the case. The design industry needs to use its platform to celebrate all cultures with equality and respect instead of promoting false racial stigmas.

The biases and prejudices we hold start and end with us. Perhaps, it was through the way we were taught, raised, our observations, and surroundings. These bleed into our daily lives, work, most importantly our design, and possibly reveal themselves in good or, ugly ways.

So, how do we then design without biases and prejudices?

1 (NZ Humans Rights Commission, 2017)

2 (Foon, 2020)

We need to address our prejudices before we design further. Everyone has biases. It's human nature. But we as designers need to look within ourselves to see our stance. Recognize the stereotypes and discrimination in your surroundings and put a stop to it. We've been caught in the trap of becoming desensitized to worldly issues. This must stop.

Set your intentions clear. What message are you trying to relay with your design?

Design with your mind as a blank canvas. Do not go into a project thinking you know everything. Adjust your perspective and worldview lens before beginning new projects. Start fresh and expand your current knowledge.

Design for the collective, not individuals. Ask yourself, is your design targeted to a specific group of people? Is your design accessible to everyone?

Put an end to design practices based on ancient Eurocentric, Western colonial ideas. Why are we always taught that European designers, movements, and influences are the standard? Explore design styles and practices beyond Eurocentric precedents shown in lectures. Embrace your culture and identity or uncover perspectives outside your lived experiences.

Design institutions need to be held accountable for ensuring diversity and inclusivity — not just for marketing purposes. It's no longer enough for the entire design industry to preach about inclusivity when the work is only done on a surface level. Just because a promotional poster includes a POC doesn't mean they're inclusive. Your work is a reflection of who you are.

I am Sochetha Meng, a second-generation Cambodian New Zealander designer that pledges to design without bias.

Sources

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