



Batsirai has over 11 years of experience as a design professional with a focus on digital executions. His Bachelor in Computer Science degree coupled with a lifelong passion for design and fine arts manifests into a best of both worlds approach to digital product design. He is currently with Memac Ogilvy, Dubai as an Experience Design Lead, having spent a year at one of the largest banking groups in the Middle East, Emirates NBD, as its Design Systems Lead. It was there he oversaw the implementation of scalable, best-in-class product design methodologies for the whole banking group including retail and wholesale banking platforms, Liv Digital Bank, and E20. Digital Business Bank.

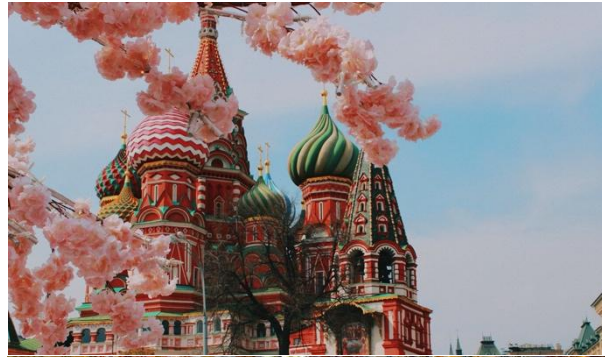
Creating culturally inclusive Design Systems

"Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilisation." – Mahatma Gandhi

I am excited to go on this journey with you into the state of digital design today, and what we can do to shape it into something better tomorrow. Now some of you might be thinking..."better" is relative and at its worst subjective, lacking the gravitas of subjective truth to back it up. Well, you can be rest assured that this series will attempt to do just that - offer a subjective truth that charts a path to a richer, more diverse, and down right spicier digital landscape.

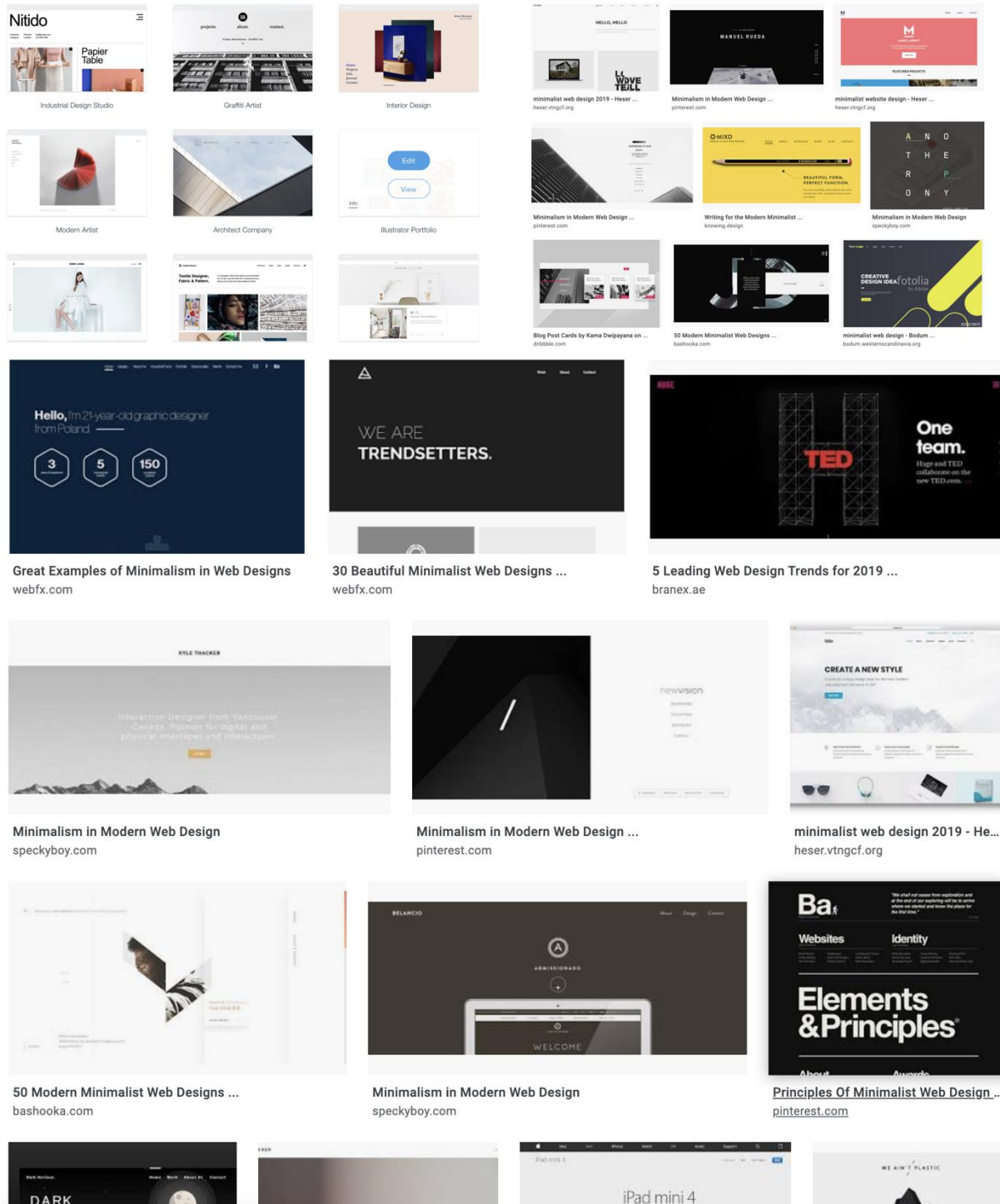
Lets start by going on a visual journey...





This is the world we live in, full of color, texture and vibrant character. Centuries of tradition and creativity have etched out visceral depictions of the different cultures and belief systems around the blue globe we call home.

This is our *physical* world...so how has the state of our *digital* world turned into this?



Where is the color, the texture, the character and more importantly where is the diversity? Words like “clean” and “minimalist” dominate the design world, but I fear in this pursuit of

less is more, we have lost what makes the world an interesting and beautiful place.

"How can you govern a country which has 246 varieties of cheese?" – Charles de Gaulle

And indeed how do you govern a world with possibly millions of cultures? The simple answer is you do not. Diversity is why the human race has flourished as much as it has. I propose instead, that we offer up a set of simple tools, methodologies and examples which encourage free cultural expression as we continue to evolve the digital frontier.

I have begun this journey myself, drawing upon my African heritage as a logical starting point. My hope is to inspire and ignite something within all digital designers, and set them on a path of self discovery that liberates them from the mantra "less is more".

Digital design is evolving, fuelled by the transformation of our societies to becoming digitally native. Designers must be cautious not to lose themselves in the midst of globalization, trends, **Dribbles** and opinions.

Let's discover how using typography and iconography, we can begin to reshape our digital landscape into a richer and more diverse place.

How culture can influence our typography

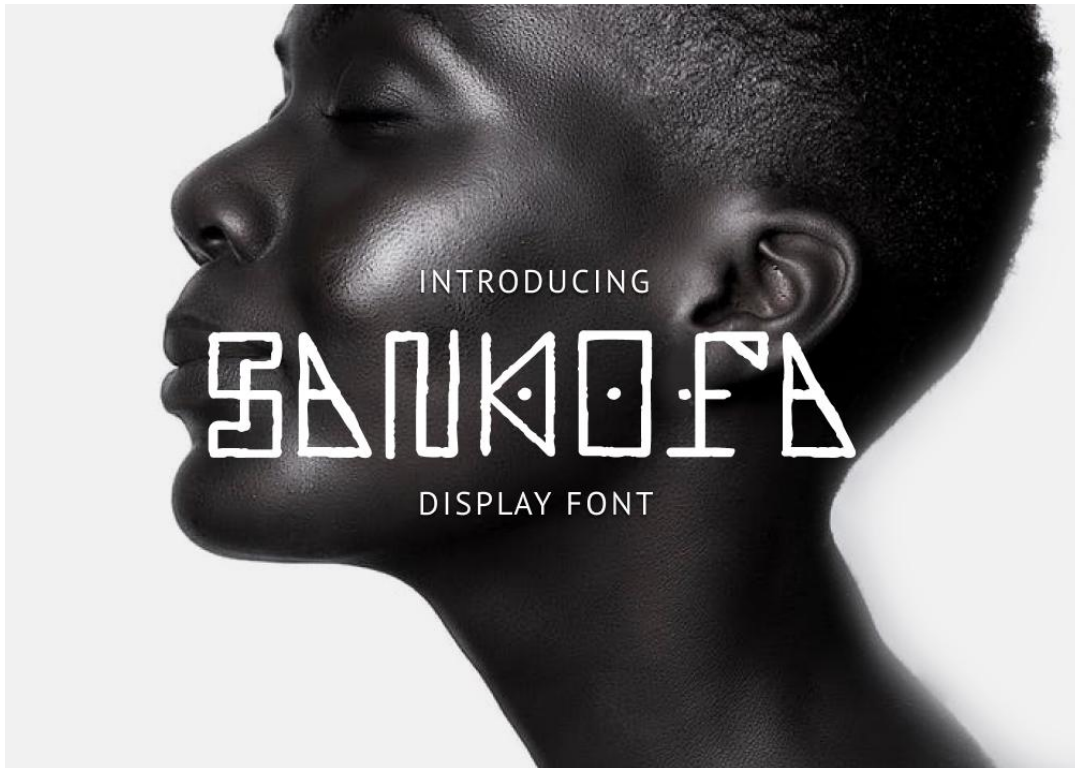
Serif and Sans Serif...to be or not to be?

Typography is such rich art form with longstanding heritage in almost every culture on the planet. Each one with its own character steeped in history and tradition. It is certainly true that function is paramount when it comes to typography in general. Content is how we drive sales and create great user experiences, so our fonts have to be clear, legible and beautiful. I'm looking at you Gotham...

Is there however, a space in design where we can experiment, have fun and express ourselves through type? Yes Display fonts! These group of typefaces are meant for large headline text so they can be more experimental.

Introducing the Sankofa Project

I started the Sankofa project to build design confidence in designers in-order to empower them to champion cultural inclusivity. The flagship display font was created to inject an authentic ethnic style to your designs that will set them apart.



<https://gum.co/yCPuf>



Sankofa icons are designed to give the user interface a more ethnic aesthetic. Their hand drawn look will offer a different look to most other widely used icon sets.



<https://gum.co/DxOdA>

The idea with the Sankofa Design System icon set, is to leverage our traditional rock paintings style and everyday African objects to create a visual language that resonates with the target audience, Africans. Sankofa is itself an Adinkra symbol from Ghana meaning, “Learn from the past”, which is exactly what culturally inclusive design systems aim to do.

But this is not just about Africa...it's about creating a blueprint that other designers can follow to bring their cultural influence into the design space.

Platforms like The Noun Project provide us access to a seemingly limitless supply of icons, but it quickly fails the moment you attempt to diversify the style of your iconography. A simple search for African, or Japanese on Noun leaves much to be desired. How can we improve this? By simply taking ownership and creating iconography that resonates with our cultural diversity as a species.

Some food for thought...

Design Systems can play a big role in making these concepts mainstream. So far we have seen the adoption of design systems at a brand level, but I see an opportunity for cultural adoption of these methodologies.

It has not only been greatly fulfilling, but extremely refreshing to approach product design with fresh eyes, unbridled by the philosophies of minimalism and "less is more". It's a step worth taking and a journey well travelled.