Since 2001 that he founded his own studio, up to the present, Iban Ramón has carried out quite a number of projects related to exhibition graphics, for organisations both public and private. In the present text he shows his gratitude to his teachers, among them Manuel Granell and Paco Bascuñán. He details his work method, which, to use his own words, aims at generating a visual identity, encouraging the communication and promotion during the period of exhibition, and to allow the exhibition to stay as a brand, which holds the memories of the exhibition afterwards.

Desde que creara su propio estudio en 2001 hasta el momento presente Ibán Ramón ha realizado un buen número de trabajos relacionados con la gráfica expositiva para instituciones públicas y privadas. En el presente texto, donde agradece a maestros como Manuel Granell o Paco Bascuñán sus enseñanzas, desgrana su método de trabajo que, en sus propias palabras, lo que persigue es generar una identidad visual, que además de favorecer la comunicación y promoción de la exposición durante el tiempo de su existencia, perdure más allá como una imagen de marca, en la que se deposite el recuerdo de la muestra.

Key words
Exhibition Graphics, Design, Poster, Signage.

Palabras clave
Gráfica Expositiva, Diseño, Cartel, Señalética.

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Among the types of commissions I have most frequently received is that of creating the image of exhibitions. In general, my interest in everything related to institutional image and cultural events started when I began working, even before. The posters by Artur Heras or Jordi Ballester, among others, caught my attention as a teenager.

When I began my professional activity I discovered the work that Manuel Granell and Paco Bascuñán had done for exhibitions. Their catalogues and posters for the IVAM, Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno (Valencian Institute of Modern Art) and other museums: the banners that, for years, Bascuñán designed for the façade of the IVAM itself. I had a close relationship with both, even collaborated in some work, such as in the identity of the exhibition Brasil 1920-1950 de la antropofagia a Brasilia 1920-1950 (Brazil: from canibalism to Brasilia) (IVAM, October 2000) and some monographic books by the same museum on Chillida and Sean Scully. I was lucky to learn some of what I know on this subject from Garnell, a master designing catalogues and art books, and naturally, their posters for the museum exhibitions, as a great many works carried out by the IVAM bear out. We can see these in the book Los carteles del IVAM 2002 (The IVAM Posters 2002). As time passed, I ended up working on a lot of projects of this kind. I don’t know if I have developed a specific way of doing this type of work, but I think that what I do through the posters, the catalogues and other supports is, basically, to generate a visual identity, which in turn enhances communication and promotion of the exhibition during the time it is running and prolongs it as a brand image by which the exhibition is remembered.

Individual exhibitions have, up front, a simpler solution. The image of one of the artist’s works, or a detail close-up, is usually the main element in the communication. The difficulty lies in choosing the element whose formal characteristics fits better. Not just any image has the technical characteristics to function adequately, for example, as a poster. Areas which do not have excessive detail are needed because it would difficult its use as background for texts, that may require masses of solid colour to contain them. The image chosen must be sufficiently synthetic and at the same time, representative of the exhibition. The choice of the font can be approached from different stances, the time frame of the author or date of the referenced work, the style, the general idea or the concept of the exhibition.

Nearly always it is about creating an identity of an exhibition without any other vinculation but, on occasions, the exhibition is part of a line of exhibitions, which must be reflected in its image in some way. This is the case of the Bienal Martinez Guerricabettia (Biennial Martínez Guerricabeitia). The first time I designed the image of the Biennial was for its 5th edition in 1999. Since them I have also done the editions of 2001 (6th), 2004 (7th), 2005 (8th), 2010 (10th), 2014 (12th) and 2016 (13th). The complexity of its design resides on the fact that, besides being collective exhibitions, the works shown compete among themselves to be selected by a jury and be acquired, reason why it is not possible to highlight any one using its image. Finally the solution, from the first edition I worked on, is based on an exclusively typographic design, nearly always applied on white background, trying to refer to the theme of each edition. This solution, always typographic, consolidates the identity of the biennials through time. In this manner, the crowded composition and the dramatic use of typography is the proposal of “Violencies” (Aggresions) (7th edition), the upside down texts inverted on black background in “Contranaturna” (Against Nature) (10th edition) or the yellow paper and the placement of fragmented texts simulating a stairway, in “Supersticions i manipulaciones” (Superstitions and Manipulations) (13th edition).

Any of the above mentioned projects or of those I will mention later, have required different quite different periods of time for conceptualisation and development which were quite different. In any case, it is necessary to meet with the different agents involved in the project. Usually I meet with a representative of the institution that is producing the exhibition and with the curators, besides meeting the artist, if it is a solo show.

I need several meetings to gather sufficient information from each participant to be able to conceptualise the proposal with sufficient guarantee of success. The intention and the discourse of each part is fundamental, usually coincident, but sometimes having nuances that must be taken into account.

Normally I develop the projects with my studio team, except some specific aspects, such as the installation design; for which the client often proposes a professional who is exclusively dedicated to this area. Even though the projects are quite large, I am usually personally involved in the entire project, my study is purposely small, we take on few projects at a time, and this allows me to spend little time in management and coordination of the work and devote myself to what interests me which is the graphic work. For example, I usually approach important books on my own, once the
Graphic image for the exhibition Josep Renau: Compromís i cultura (Josep Renau: Commitment and culture)
global concept is set, the cover and page models defined, someone of my team joins the project. It is a work model that does not allow growing much from the entrepreneurial or business point of view, but I like it that way. However, I always rely on other professionals or teams to carry out some tasks in which I am not a specialist: animations, web, industrial photography, etc.

Production is another of the aspects that must be specially considered. For example, I try to exercise maximum control on the pre-printing processes of the catalogues, making all the proofs needed. If the chosen printer affords me certain guarantees, having had good mutual previous experiences, less visits to the printer are required; practically three or four will suffice. But it is the client who decides on the printer, and it is not always possible to choose and so one can suffer a lot and be very concerned until the book is finished. Sometimes, although this seldom happens, the printer is so far from Valencia that I cannot visit, not a single time, and the proofs are sent to me by messenger. Whenever I can, I propose a printer I can trust to guarantee maximum quality.

Josep Renau: Compromís i cultura (Josep Renau: Commitment and culture)

Occasionally the complexity and dimension of the exhibit leads to making some decisions that must be thought out very well. The image of the exhibition “Josep Renau: Commitment and culture”, (2007) finally served as a manner of signage. Although there was a main image extracted from one of his works, a number of illustrations based on Renau’s posters and murals were made specifically, trying to maintain a visual coherence with the image of the fist used on the poster and the cover of the catalogue. The idea was to indicate the different halls of the building of La Nau of the University of Valencia that held the works divided in stages, but also other halls in other sites, such as Centre Cultural Octubre (October Culture Centre). The outdoor banners and the access walls to the halls were labeled with these illustrations, identifying the time to which each hall referred, functioning also as a variation of the powerful visual identification system of the entire exhibit. The typographic code combined a modern, rod font sharing certain characteristics of the Republican era and the other, created for the occasion, based on Renau’s own caligraphy. The main illustration refers to the political activism of the Valencian author, which is one of the discourses of the exhibition. The title of the exhibition functioned also as a logo and was applied in merchandising and on numerous leaflets and ads.

On this occasion there were a number of circumstances that made the work quite particular. The curator, Jaime Brihuega, lives in Madrid. After a couple of meetings in Valencia and several visits to his home, it became clear that daily telephone conversations would be required to afford good monitoring and development. Some of the spin offs of the exhibit which ended up travelling to different countries, involved other institutions such as the Sociedad Estatal para la Acción Cultural Exterior (State Society for Exterior Cultural Action) of the Ministry of Culture. For this reason I also had to meet with them several times in Madrid to prepare the exhibition in Mexico. In this exhibition there was greater presence of Renau’s work done during the years he lived in that country and more detailed studies on his murals in the North American country. Thus it had a specific catalogue with different contents and exclusive graphics. That work lasted several years, at least four versions of the catalogue have been printed with small variations or translations of language, besides the new book that was published on the occasion of the Mexican exhibition.

Tot està per fer. València Capital de la República, 1936-1937 (All is yet to be done. Valencia Capital of the Republic, 1936-1937)

The image created for the great exhibition of 2016 in La Nau is based on typographic trends in Valencia at the historic moment to which the exhibition refers, from a contemporary perspective, referring to the signage most used by anarchist sindicates of the time on their logos and posters, in which simple geometric shapes substitute typographical elements. The chromatism is related to the colours favoured by the anarchists and the republic. As it happened with the Renau exhibition, a new and powerful visual identity was created, avoiding the use of any of the many images available as a main element, to create its own particular identity, which will make it possible to recall, in the future, the exhibition as a whole and not only for its important content.

What was special on this occasion was that three people shared the curatorship. One of them was Mireia Ferrer, with whom I have later worked
on other projects. In this case there were also many meetings, before and after having the image I proposed approved. Each curator had a very differentiated participation on the project, each one in charge of different aspects of the exhibition, reason why the meetings, after the first ones, were separate with each one of them. The curators made constant visits to the studio, even to my home, which, I think, besides my participation as “lender” of many pieces that were exhibited, led to a very good understanding among all, something which always favours good results.

Memòria de la modernitat (Statement of modernity)

This exhibition in one of the last projects carried out by the study. It is a great itinerant exhibition which started in 2017, that carries the collection of the patrimony of the regional government of Valencia to the different counties of the province along two years. This project posed a new consideration collection’s contents from a contemporary stance. The image selects details of some pieces, showing the different styles and covering the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The faces that were chosen to establish a visual dialogue among them and the paintings appear under a colour filter that refers to modernity, the new vision of the collection presented in the exhibition. The multiple image speaks of the importance of the exhibition. The type of solution was specifically determined by new use given to the image with important presence of totems and banners in the streets. The multiple image helps communicate the heterogeneous content of the exhibition, besides its importance due to its meaning, dimension and the importance of the works shown.

In most exhibitions, besides the poster and the catalogue, the image must be applied to a variety of supports: leaflets, hand-outs, signage in the hall, promotional objects, etc. The great variety of formats and sizes makes it necessary to understand the project as a system of varied visual identity, in which the different elements that make up the image are not always applied in the same manner, but rather flexible codes are created to develop the different pieces.

Another recurring characteristic in these projects is my intention of keeping a contemporary treatment of
Poster of the exhibition València, Capital de la República (Valencia Capital of the Republic).
Memòria de la modernitat

La col·lecció patrimonial de la Diputació de València
Ibán Ramón Rodríguez

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typography, beside the time (era) to which each exhibit refers, and to facilitate as much as possible access to the contents and their understanding.

Finally, as always in design, it is about paying attention to the specific use the imagine will be given and understanding the materials of the publishing work as well as of the natural resources (paper, textures, printing techniques, binding systems); through which translations of the themes are made. Beyond communicating the content, a visual identity that shapes the project must be generated, and an efficient tool for the specific characteristic and circumstances must be designed for each case. This is why it is fundamental to identify and define these characteristics.

On this occasion I met again with Mireia Ferrer who was the curator, together with Rafa Gil, Ester Alba, María José López and Felipe Jerez. The fact that I had previously worked with Mireia Ferrer and Rafa Gil made the initial part of the process much easier. It is important that the curators of the exhibition and the representatives of the institution have confidence and trust the designer. This is why it is always much easier if there has been a previous understanding.

The initial meetings were quite participative and took place in Dean’s offices of the Faculty of History. Besides the five curators, the meetings were attended by representatives of the Presidency of the Regional Government, whose initiative started this project, and of the Section of broadcasting and Patrimony of the Regional Government. With these last two I continue to work with each new change of site, that happens quarterly. Once the image and general lines are approved by all, the meetings concern fewer people.