

## **Abstract:**

Everything looks familiar. Spanning from ikea furniture to indoor plants are making interior spaces more and more alike. The homogenisation of interior spaces has led to plants being perfected and packaged to be sold as aesthetic furniture. **Have you ever wondered how a plant that grows in the jungles of Africa reaches inside London apartments and offices?**

Imagine living in London, working for one of the big four, you call your friends over for brunch in your contemporary apartment in Hackney. What are the things that you decorate your house with? Open kitchen with crockery neatly placed in see through shelves, a vintage record player with a niche collection of vinyls, ikea lamps and many many houseplants. It's not hard to imagine that this apartment also could exist in tokyo, new york, germany, mumbai and so on. Everyone globally is working towards a homogenous taste. What is taste really, and is it political? Like Kyle Chakya quotes "they have all independently decided to adopt the same faux-artisanal aesthetic". "Living art" is a term that refers to installations that use living materials, such as plants or microbial communities, to grow and change over time and you will find "plant corners" in homes. People are attempting to create instagram museums of their homes by curating this taste that is globally available. My project considers how houseplants operate as signs of taste, wellness, productivity, and identity within modern domestic environments.

Nature is stripped of ecological context and reduced to a controllable, aesthetic unit. This reflects a capitalist logic: what cannot be controlled, replicated, and sold has no value. Nature is packaged and sold in the form of house plants.

A major factor could be hyperindependence seen in the last few generations where algorithmic living and self optimisation. This has created a way for a human to live in a small apartment in a big city and yet replicate the feeling of living in a large home. Everything has scaled down to fit this apartment. Large window lights that diffused in a space are replaced by placing diffused warm lights in multiple places of a home. Similarly, big trees in the backyard and a garden have been scaled down to small pots that can be carried up to the 11th floor of your apartment and placed anywhere. This tension between life and control became central to the studio practice.

I have been going to Columbia Flower Market every weekend since I moved to London. I asked some of the plant sellers where the plants came from and how they got their names. I found out that plants are mass-produced in global nurseries. Bioengineered to look most aesthetic (indoor pot proportions). They are engineered to survive low light, neglect, and transport, less water, easy care. This brings with it a new range of environmental concerns - Water usage, plastic usage, international transportation, fertiliser and pesticide use, and not least, the extraction of peat for use as a growing medium. Yet, **the public image of houseplants remains largely intact.**

This raises multiple questions like, why are we buying plants to keep indoors? What does owning a plant signal about our aesthetic choices? How many people do you know who own indoor plants know where they come from or actually care about them?

How can I use packaging material to communicate the packaged/massproduced condition of these plants?

My enquiry explores how nature is commodified and bioengineered to be packaged in small pots. Instead of experiencing nature at ground level, we find these pots displayed for micro consumption at all places. By subverting the function of bubblewrap packaging and cardboards, I used it as a surface to place a plant on it. I wanted to visually illustrate the plant but in its packaged condition. By recreating a life-sized Monstera plant and placing it within a domestic context, the work replaces the living plant with its packaged simulation, highlighting the systems that enable its circulation. Additional printed works explore repetition, flattening, and standardisation, reinforcing the idea of nature as inventory.

Inside graphic communication design, it touches on visual systems like packaging, branding, and instruction, the ways we mediate objects. Outside the field, it speaks to anyone into domestic consumption, interior aesthetics, and plant culture, especially in cities where nature is a controlled, decorative presence.

### **Context (min. 600 words)**

**What specific practices and discourses are key reference points for this work? What specific systems or networks is this enquiry situated within? What are the specific practical, theoretical, or professional conditions of this work?**

### **What specific practices and discourses are key reference points for this work?**

It is easy to imagine how global chains like IKEA or Amazon heavily influence the homogeneity of interior spaces which can be seen in the mid-century **millennial obsessed with modernism**. But there is no global chain known to be distributing the same plants, the houseplant decor unit could just be the newly universally adopted way to bring nature into our home. Previously backyard gardens, rugs, still life painting, opulent flower vase, floral tiles were ways to do it. There is no way to categorise these Monstera plant pots to a certain price range or to even plot them on a scale of bougie to basic branding. This exists not only indoors but you will also find non-native trees in many places like the cherry blossom frequently planted in parks and residential streets across London for seasonal visual impact.

A key reference point for this work is **Kyle Chayka's essay *Welcome to AirSpace* (2016)**. Chayka identifies recurring visual signifiers such as minimalist furniture, reclaimed wood, neutral palettes, and curated greenery, arguing that these spaces create a "harmonization of tastes"

(Chayka, 2016). This became particularly relevant to my inquiry because houseplants repeatedly appear within these interiors and they look wildly different from their natural habitat, and most houseplants being non native, they can be found all over the world making spaces look even more alike. Plants become stripped from their ecological context and instead operate as decor objects. The implications of this homogenous society showcases how we are increasingly getting away from individuality.

The work is also informed by critical discussions surrounding flattening and simplification within graphic culture itself. [Silvio Lorusso's essay \*Serif Populism\*](#), *Hyperpolitics and the Diminishing Returns of Graphic Design Culture* critiques the flattening within contemporary graphic design like logos and fonts. "Take something disgusting and attempt – through sheer force of branding – to make it cute and fun" (Lorusso, 2026). This reference became important in understanding how branding can aestheticise and soften systems of control through approachable visual tools. My project intentionally adopts a lifestyle branded packaging aesthetic to critique its visual appeal.

The project also draws from [Nick Sousanis's graphic novel \*Unflattening\* \(2015\)](#), particularly its non-linear ways of seeing just like in Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (Berger, 1972). Sousanis argues that flattened systems of thought restrict perception and complexity. This became significant in relation to my houseplants vs Sousanis's humans in his drawings as both being boxed in, modified, mass produced and set for one purpose. By printing plants onto bubble wrap and cardboard packaging structures, the work attempts to expose the tension between living ecological systems and their reduction into controllable aesthetic products.

[Cultural theorists](#) such as the Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells were already describing how globalisation breeds sameness and monotony, and charting the declining importance of physical geography. Similarly, Thomas Friedman argues in [The World is Flat](#) that globalisation compresses geographical and cultural distance through accelerated flows of goods, labour, and information. Within this flattened landscape, the houseplant becomes a highly reproducible decorative object.

### **What specific systems or networks is this enquiry situated within?**

Concepts such as the [Anthropocene and Capitalocene](#) reposition plants within histories of extraction, transportation, and capitalist expansion. References to [botanical imperialism](#) reveal how plants have historically been collected, classified, transported, and commercialised through colonial systems. The contemporary houseplant can therefore be understood not only as décor but also as part of a longer history of human control over plant life. Like Pio Abad's drawings for the [Notes on Decomposition](#) project maps neoliberal fantasy through auction objects found in his home, and I am attempting to do the same through domestic décor. These objects act as evidence of history and similarly help me think about homogenised plant pots as evidence of globalised production networks, performative wellness culture, "manageable" versions of life and flattening of interior aesthetics. Situated within graphic communication design, this project expands illustration and packaging into spatial installation and material experimentation.

## What are the specific **practical, theoretical, or professional** conditions of this work?

Materially, the project explores **bubble wrap, cardboard boxes, fragile tape, barcodes, inventory labels, and instruction manuals** as conceptual tools. These materials expose the infrastructural systems hidden behind the soft imagery of interior plants. Printing a Monstera directly onto bubble wrap transformed the plant into a translucent simulation highlighting its plastic quality. Installed at real scale within domestic spaces, the work occupied the position of a real houseplant while visibly refusing biological authenticity. Audience responses became significant to the development of the project. During informal discussions at a flower market, viewers described the work as calming and aesthetically pleasing, while simultaneously recognising the hidden systems of packaging and control represented within it. Some suggested they would purchase the printed work instead of a real plant, reinforcing the project's connection to simulation and replacement.

**Manually mixing screen printing** inks to find the perfect shade serves as a direct metaphor for the bioengineering of houseplants. The *Ficus elastica* 'Ruby' (or 'Belize', USPP16374P2) is a patented greenhouse mutation originating in the Netherlands, far removed from its Southeast Asian roots. Recreating its distinct hue by blending orange, pink, and yellow into a white base mirrors this artificial modification. Just as these plants undergo rigorous laboratory manipulation and mass replication, the screen printing process identically multiplies them, visually highlighting the sterile nature of commercial plant mass production.

To complement this concept, the packaging labels adopted a lifestyle branding language that frames plants as "object decor units." The label's type is set **Instrument Serif**, a condensed, soft typeface that Silvio Lorusso notes is used by modern branding to evoke a calculated and fake sense of being "unflat." This mirrors the plants themselves, which consumers use to project a performative, "unflat" sense of care. The accompanying illustrations intentionally adopt the flat, Corporate Memphis style depicting homogenized people stripped of cultural context and race to emphasize the themes of a sterile, mass-market consumer lifestyle.

## Projected contribution (min. 200 words)

**What is the significance of this question to graphic communication design (practically, theoretically, or professionally)? How will this project contribute to your practice beyond the limits of the course?**

Graphic design has actively taken part in the homogeneity of aesthetics and one of the reasons might be to evoke familiarity as function. This relates closely to Murrell's idea of "the age of average" (Murrell, 2023) where familiar is safe and safe is what sells. From fonts going from serifs to sans serif, logos looking the same, branding projects from all over the globe following

the same trends of design. Globalisation, access to the internet, trying to captivate this chronically online and globally exposed audience has led to everything looking the same. This has led to the demand for products that are then made available globally. This could be looked at as homogenisation of graphic design stripping unique culture or as it creating a new more global, equal culture. A tropical plant originally rooted within a specific ecosystem can now be infinitely replicated across apartments, offices, cafés, and retail spaces worldwide.

As designers we talk about having “good taste” a lot. What is “taste”? And how does one categorize someone as having good or bad taste? Is having houseplants having good taste in interior decor? If so, then why? Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital helped frame houseplants as objects tied to identity, taste, and self-fashioning (Bourdieu, 1984). We use many signifiers in our life to hint at our taste or express it. It involves heavy curating and in that process we lose a sense of reason. I have personally believed that good design is always backed with good reason. Design involves controlling how something looks, we can apply the same logic to nature. Nature has inherent rules and in some way they are called wild. The mere definition of wild is uncontrolled or untamed. To even tame nature so as it suits our indoor needs, stripped off its wild qualities to adhere to apartment aesthetics. Having an indoor jungle in your house signifies good taste, but reverse the logic - living outdoors in the jungle with nature not so much to do with taste. There is a millennial aspiration towards modernisation, seemingly aligned with progressive aims of virtuous consumption. As quoted by Silvio Iorosso, “perfect Millennial cocktail: “The hipster was Vice; the millennial is virtue, or at least virtuous consumption.”

By printing houseplants directly onto packaging materials and positioning them within domestic environments, it closes the gap between object and container, nature and product, living organism and display furniture. Jean Baudrillard’s concept of simulation, particularly the idea that representations can replace reality itself (Baudrillard, 1994). Having worked in the packaging industry, I became aware of the power that beautifully designed packaging holds in communicating a certain lifestyle and leveraged it to use as a vessel to communicate this lifestyle. Beyond this, I would use graphic communication design, specifically image making and branding as a form of critical observation: revealing hidden structures through familiar materials and aesthetics.