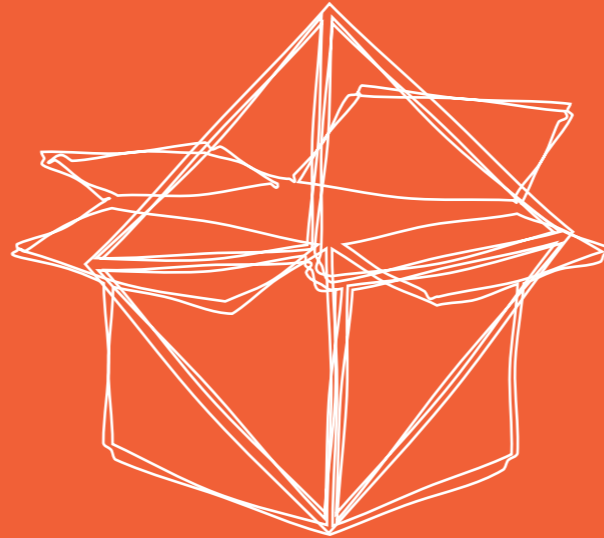


Thank you Tomi, Marc, COP 08, Mike, Helen from letterpress, Anna from digital print, Paul from printmaking, my flatmates Channelle and Tracy, Hance, my titos and titas, my family and the number 9.



*Sending home to love and
love to home.*

SD02 Brief

THE BRIEF

This project will explore how design can foster cultural empathy, using the lived realities of Filipino immigrant families as a central point of inquiry. It will examine themes of migration, identity, emotional labour, and the enduring act of giving, particularly through the cultural lens of the Balikbayan — a term referring to someone who returns home, and the symbolic balikbayan box used to send goods and love across borders.

Through auto-ethnography and participatory design, this work will gather stories from the Filipino community to understand how intergenerational values, sacrifice, and memory are preserved through everyday gestures and objects. It will treat these narratives not just as content, but as co-authored knowledge that will shape both form and process.

This project will be visualised through crafted outcomes — such as physical artefacts, publications, and exhibition components — which will aim to reimagine traditional storytelling formats. Material methods will be used to translate emotional connections into tangible design.

Positioned at the intersection of personal reflection and wider cultural dialogue, this project will speak to both Filipino and non-Filipino audiences. It will invite viewers to reflect on the quieter, often invisible forms of labour that shape diasporic identity — and will consider how design can act as a bridge between generations, homes, and histories.

Ultimately, this work will serve as a love letter: not just to the families who migrate, but to the rituals of care and resilience that hold them together.

* References are shown in the following pages of 'enquiry' maps

WHAT

- How can I transform mundane objects into a medium for emotional expression? What do they tell us about sacrifice and cultural identity?
- What emotional and cultural weight do balikbayan boxes carry in the Filipino diaspora?
- How can storytelling formats challenge design norms and foster empathy?

WHY

- **Cultural Empathy & Visibility:** This project should humanise the immigrant experience and “archives” often overlooked emotional labour.
- **Designer as Observer:** Taking a non-extractive, curatorial approach, the designer amplifies rather than authors stories.
- **Form as Message:** The format should mirror the ways stories and affection are delivered across borders.
- **Design for Love:** Make it personal. Celebrate the hustle, sacrifice, and resilience of immigrant parents. It’s not just about communication — it’s about care.

HOW: MEDIUM + METHODS

- **Sensory Design:** Playing with tactility, texture, and material storytelling (e.g., cardboard, textiles, packaging tape).
- **Surrealist influence:** De-familiarisation, layering, and abstraction to transform everyday objects into cultural symbols.

Project Statement



How can graphic communication design communicate the Filipino diaspora experience through the lens of the Balikbayan box tradition?

“Sending Love to Home and Home to Love” uses letters as a vehicle to tell the story of first-generation immigrants in the UK, particularly in Southampton. It consists of two things: An intimate letter, written by myself curated on cardboard, the second being a collection of 9 boxes encasing handwritten letters and translations. Each box uses straw marquetry with branded logos, corresponding to the key items within the letter, revealing the emotional significance behind each carefully selected item they send.

The Balikbayan box (Balikbayan meaning “a Filipino visiting or returning to the Philippines”) is a cherished tradition that began in the 1970s, when Filipino diaspora worldwide started sending large cardboard boxes filled with essentials and gifts to their homeland. These boxes emerged as the Philippine government actively encouraged citizens to work overseas through the 1974 Labor Code. What started as a practical way to send gifts home has become a powerful symbol of love and sacrifice in Filipino culture. These boxes are lifelines connecting families across oceans. While supporting extended family from abroad can be challenging, it remains a source of pride and purpose for many overseas Filipinos, who see their efforts as a way to give their loved ones a sweeter life.

The title “Sending Love to Home and Home to Love” carries a dual meaning: the Filipino diaspora sends love through objects and while sharing pieces of their new home with loved ones.

This group of cultural artefacts are designed to be experienced in public spaces such as ‘The Museum of Home’ and ‘The Migration Museum’, an opportunity for non-diasporic/ non-Filipino audience to understand the complexities of migration, themes of sacrifice, and how immigrants maintain their connections to home and family. Through graphic communication design, I act as a cultural documentarian, amplifying Filipino immigrant

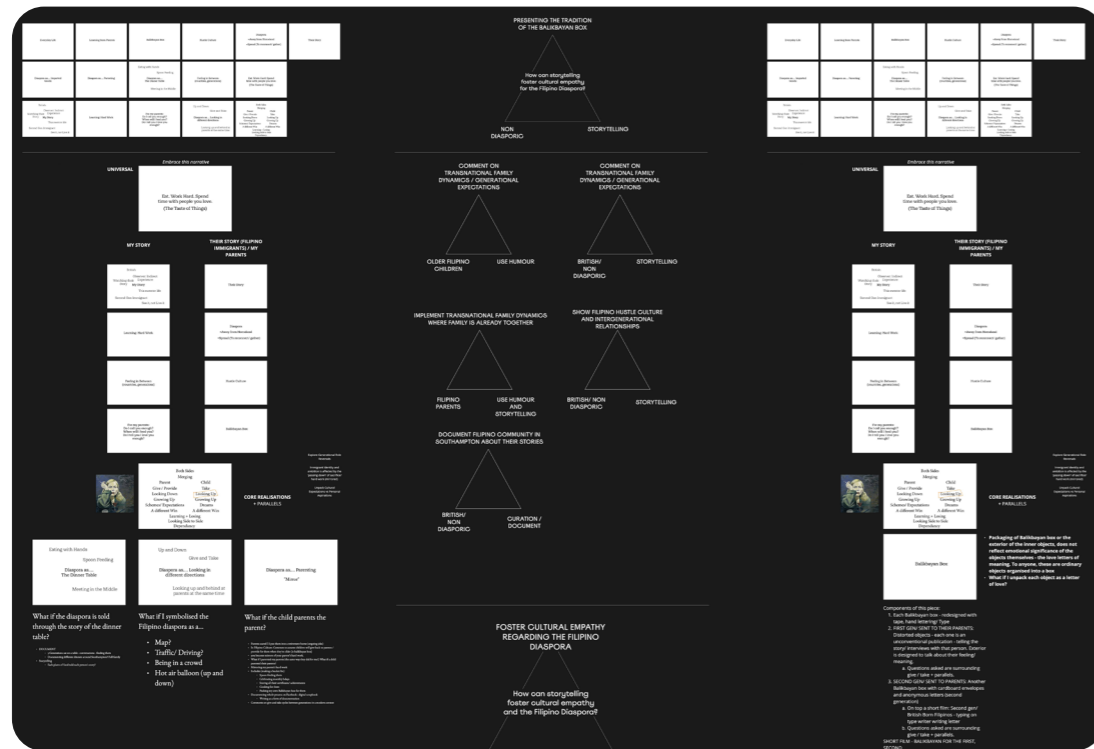
voices while preserving their authentic narratives. Drawing from personal experience - from sitting on top boxes as my parents sealed them with tape - this project reveals the hidden emotional labor in diasporic family life and highlights how immigrant parents balance caring for their immediate family while supporting relatives back home. My perspective as an observer and second-generation immigrant is conveyed in my reflective letter, “This Sweet Life,” which uses storytelling to document my mother’s journey—from a child craving imported luxuries in the Philippines to becoming an immigrant in the UK who can provide these items for her family.

Celebrating this tradition by exploring cultural memory through handwritten letters and object design, I bring together the experience of a box and envelope, ignited by Keith Smith’s approach of defamiliarisation. Drawing inspiration from Kristian Hansen’s practice, reviving craft was an essential component of this project. My designs deliberately incorporate Filipino visual language and material culture to resist Western-imposed approaches. Referencing jeepneys, shop signage, and weaving crafts— this incorporates signwriting, straw marquetry, and experiments with postage symbols. In addition, I embrace cardboard and packaging tape to reflect the two essential components of the Balikbayan box. The playful combination of straw marquetry (traditional Filipino handcraft treatment) with global and modern brands show that love transform the most commercial objects. Diaspora identity here is interpreted as blending cultural heritage with modern influences.

This project not only documents a vital Filipino cultural practice, but celebrates the persistence of love across oceans. Sending love 6,864 miles away.



Forming a Strategy



CONTINUOUS ITERATIONS TO REFINE THE STRATEGY TRIANGLE AND ALIGN PROJECT INTENTIONS

EXPLORING STRATEGY TRIANGLES

Building on these insights, I developed a series of strategy triangles to create a deliberate and intentional foundation for my project. These triangles served as critical anchors, ensuring that each design decision was guided by a deeper understanding of the cultural and emotional complexities at play. By using this structured approach, I was able to move beyond surface-level observations and engage with broader questions of identity, heritage, and belonging. Reflecting on my prototype review, I realised I needed to redefine the audience (whether it was FOR Filipinos or ABOUT them).

Through my research, initial ideas, and key insights gathered from conversations with my community, I synthesised such themes into a cohesive framework using linear mapping. This process revealed underlying universal truths—such as “Eat. Work Hard. Love.”—while also distinguishing between “my story” and “their story.” By analysing these narratives, I identified a cyclical relationship between parent and child, reflecting the intergenerational dynamics within diasporic experiences.



Primary: First-generation Filipino immigrants, OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers), maintaining Balikbayan traditions

Secondary: Second-gen diaspora (like me, the designer), exploring their cultural roots

Tertiary: Broader audiences, including museum visitors, to foster empathy and dialogue about migration and diaspora

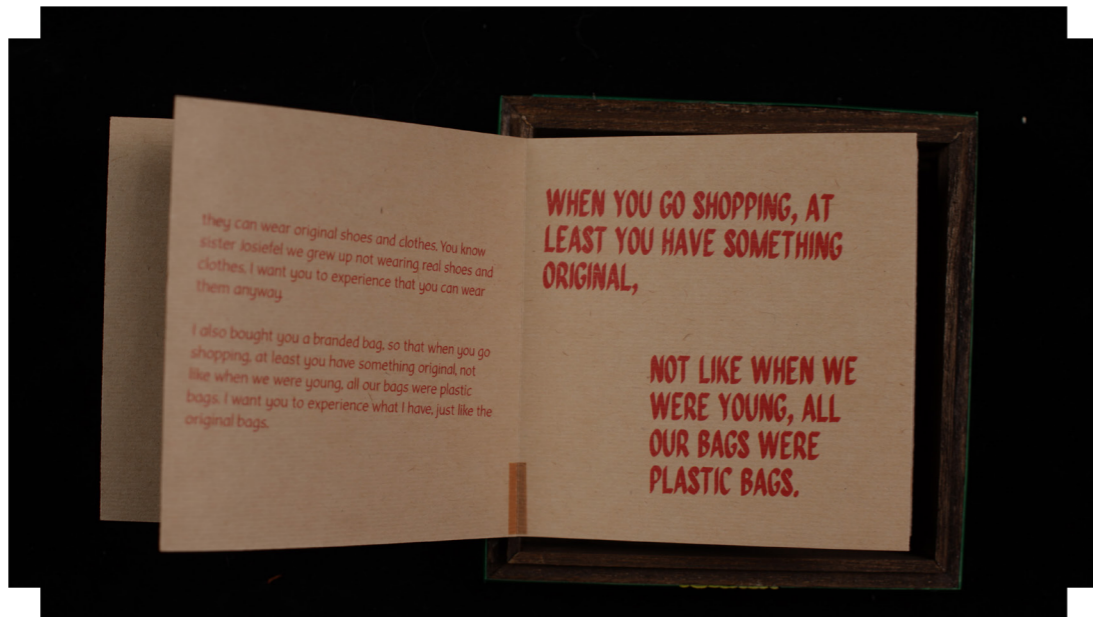
Contributors: Filipino families from the UK/ my own community — whose stories and acts of giving inspired the project.



* *The curated boxes I designed with its letters, alongside their original authors (first generation Filipino immigrants in Southampton)*



* A screen-printed letter on cardboard and packaging tape, written by me, connecting my mother's story and the context of migration and the balikbayan box



* Inside pages of concertina, translating the letters



* Color-coded tabs on the sides of straw marquetry boxes indicate the correct orientation for aligning the lid with the base.

The outcome, unpacked.



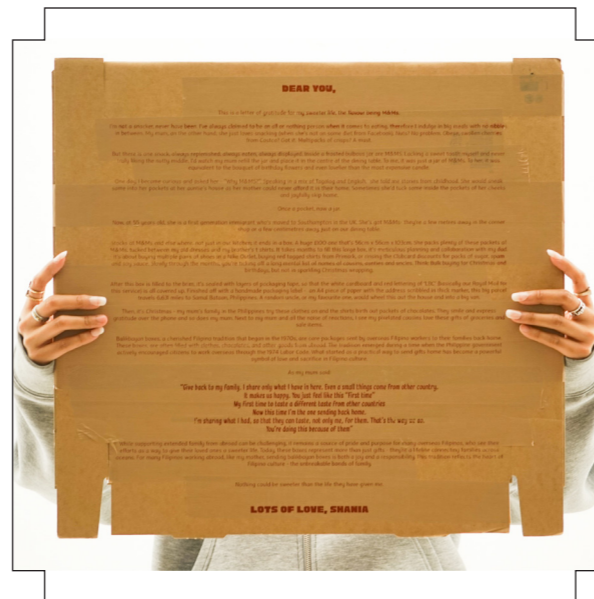
(1)



(2)



(3)



(4)

Components

EXPLANATION

(1) *Inner Concertinas curating letters*

The inner concertinas use cardboard like paper, to fit inside boxes and contain letters from Southampton's Filipino community with translations. Alternating between original text and translations through color-coding, the letters incorporate scanned packaging tape textures and imagery in their design.

(2) *Straw Marquetry Exterior*

The majority of the boxes' exteriors use straw veneer to decorate boxes, displaying logos of items commonly sent in balikbayan boxes, transforming them into emotionally resonant, culturally inspired designs.

(3) *Signwriting on the other side of boxes*

Inspired by the vibrant typography and cultural identity of Philippine Jeepney signs, the sign writing unifies individual boxes into a collective narrative while presenting the title.

(4) *Screenprinted Letter*

A screen-printed letter on cardboard and packaging tape, written by me, connecting my mother's story and the context of migration and the balikbayan box.

In the following pages, I will break down and explore the process behind each project component. Each section will detail the prototype development and user testing, along with a thorough analysis of final design decisions.

Letter Writing Workshop



Unit 9 Feedback - Increase audience engagement:
 Incorporate more audience testing and engagement throughout the design process, particularly during development stages.

ENGAGING
 WITH MY
 AUDIENCE

Collecting and curating letters from first-generation immigrants within my Southampton community proved to be a deeply authentic method for examining and communicating the diaspora experience. These letters offered raw, personal insights that revealed the emotional, cultural, and historical layers of migration.

This approach not only amplified underrepresented voices but also challenged conventional methods of storytelling by prioritising lived experiences over abstract generalisations.

After the workshop, I received 9 complete letters.

Hello my favourite titos and titas!

Thank you so much for being part of my final project at university exhibition! My project is a community project collecting letters from Filipinos in Southampton to their families in the Philippines, using the theme of the Balikbayan Box. Later, it will form an archive. Instructions are below:

- The Rules & Task**
 - This is your chance to write a letter to your loved ones back home.
 - Please use your handwriting and try and make it as neat as possible.
 - Avoid using Google or grammarly - It doesn't matter if your English is grammatically incorrect.
 - You can write in Tagalog, English, or a mix of both—whatever feels most natural to you.
 - Use your own A4 paper to make the letter feel truly yours. You can type or handwrite it—whatever makes you most comfortable.
- The Beginning: Start with a greeting: Dear [Name]**
- The Balikbayan Box Tradition**
 - What is your family's full address in the Philippines? (This helps us map the love being sent back home.)
 - What is one item you always love sending? Why does this item matter to you?
- Prompts to answer for the other person. Write me your perspective.**
 - How do you feel when packing a Balikbayan box?
 - How do you feel about sending things home? Has this changed over time?
 - What does "home" mean to you now?
 - What does it mean to you to support your family, both here and in the Philippines?
 - What do you want your family to know or remember about you?
 - What hopes or dreams do you have for them?
- Sign off your letter however you usually would: E.g Love from [Your Name] *it can be anonymous**

Thank you BFF! Lots of love, Shania

FIRST VERSION OF WORKSHEET GUIDE

Option	Pros	Cons
1. Send Letters (Prepaid Templates)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows people to write in private, leading to deeper, more thoughtful reflections. Gives participants time to process their thoughts, which could result in richer responses. Physical letters feel authentic & archival, reinforcing the nostalgic nature of balikbayan boxes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have less control over what they write (some might rush it or leave answers incomplete). Some people might not return the letter, causing delays. No visual element—responses stay text-based unless you later scan or photograph them.
2. Live Typing + Filming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Captures raw, unfiltered emotion in the moment. Adds a cinematic, documentary-like element—seeing people type on a typewriter in their own homes has a strong visual & nostalgic feel. More interactive & intimate, as you're guiding them through the process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Answers may be less structured—people might freeze, ramble, or struggle to put thoughts into words on the spot. Only one take means no room for edits. Some might feel pressure being filmed and not express themselves as freely.

COMPARING OPTIONS
 OF DOCUMENTATION:
 LETTERS OR LIVE
 TYPEWRITER

Hello my favourite titos and titas!

Thank you so much for being part of my final project at university exhibition! My project is a community project collecting letters from Filipinos in Southampton to their families in the Philippines, using the theme of the Balikbayan Box. Later, it will form an archive. Instructions are below:

- The Rules & Task**
 - This is your chance to write a letter to your loved ones back home.
 - Please use your handwriting and try and make it as neat as possible.
 - You can write in Tagalog, English, or a mix of both—whatever feels most natural to you. You can type or handwrite it—whatever makes you most comfortable.
 - Avoid using Google or grammarly - It doesn't matter if your English is grammatically incorrect.
 - Use your own A4 paper to make the letter feel truly yours.
- The Balikbayan Box Tradition**
 - What is your family's full address in the Philippines? (This helps us map the love being sent back home.)
 - What is one item you always love sending? Why does this item matter to you?
- The Beginning: Start with a greeting: Dear [Name]**
- Prompts to answer for the other person. Write me your perspective.**
 - How do you feel when packing a Balikbayan box?
 - How do you feel about sending things home? Has this changed over time?
 - What does "home" mean to you now?
 - What does it mean to you to support your family, both here and in the Philippines?
 - What do you want your family to know or remember about you?
 - What hopes or dreams do you have for them?
- Sign off your letter however you usually would: E.g Love from [Your Name] *it can be anonymous**

Example Structure

WHAT IS ONE ITEM YOU ALWAYS LOVE SENDING (IN BALIKBAYAN BOX)? WHY DOES THIS ITEM MATTER TO YOU?

YOUR NAME
 YOUR ADDRESS
 THE DATE

LETTER DESTINATION ADDRESS:
 NUMBER + STREET
 CITY/ PROVINCE ETC
 POST CODE/ AREA CODE

DEAR (NAME OF FAMILY / FAMILY MEMBER)

LETTER WRITTEN USING THE PROMPTS ABOVE. THIS PROJECT FOCUSES ON THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE OF FILIPINOS LIVING IN THE UK/ SOUTHAMPTON. BE HONEST, BE LOVING, BE FREE WITH YOUR WRITING.

(MAKE THIS AS LONG AS YOU'D LIKE)

CLOSING AND SIGN E.G LOVE FROM XXXX

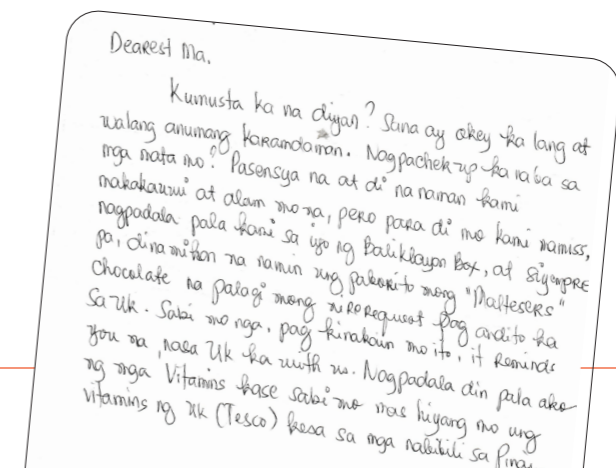
THIS CAN BE MULTIPLE PAGES - PLEASE DO NOT TRY TO PUT IT ALL IN ONE PAGE

SECTION VERSION OF WORKSHEET GUIDE AFTER USER TESTING

I wanted to give participants flexibility in how they write (Tagalog, English, mixed) to capture authentic emotion. Just like in my first project of unit 9, I avoided altering grammar, imperfect translation being another expression of authentic Filipino experience in the diaspora.

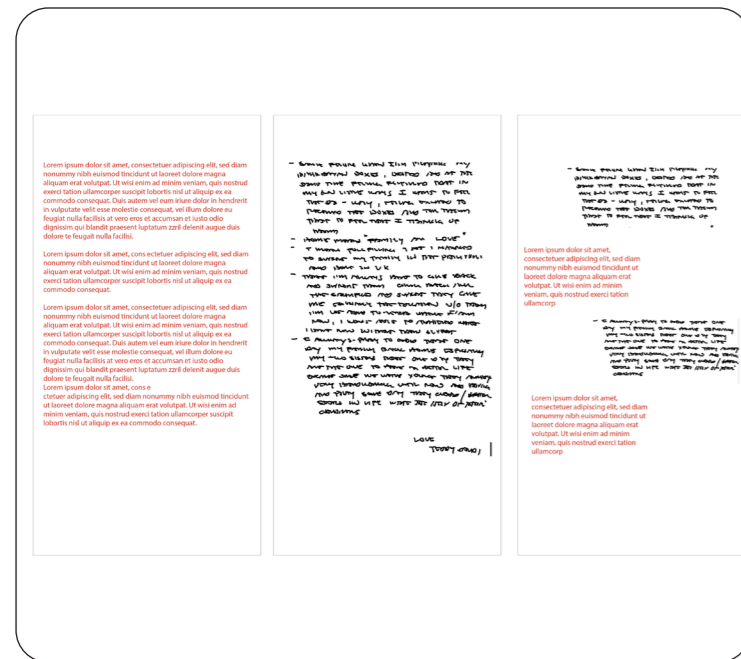
Second round of User testing on the community: Encouraged freedom, prompted structure without being too rigid and balanced guidance with openness. It was much easier for them to start writing.

First Round of User testing with GCD: Key strengths was its warm tone, clear organization, authenticity through language options, and effective prompts. Areas to improve: add project context, address privacy concerns, include emotional prompts, and adjust closing tone for all participants.



Inner Concertina

INITIAL PROTOTYPES



IMPLEMENTING SOLOMON'S COLOUR CODING SYSTEM AND COMPOSITION

Inspired by Solomon's publication, I experimented with alternating compositions and color schemes while translating the letter's text.

Based on feedback that the alternating layout of colours and translations was confusing, I restructured the concertina into two distinct sections: the first shows scans of the handwritten letter, followed by a section dedicated to translations.



TESTING TEXT AND PAGE SIZING PROTOTYPES

I continuously tested different prints of the concertina to ensure the perfect fit—snug but still loose enough to slide out of the box.

During mock-up testing, I discovered that too tight a fit made the pages difficult to open up and read. This led me to reduce both page size and text size for better readability. The final text ended up slightly smaller than 10pt—a lesson learned that larger boxes would have been better for future projects.

REFINED PROTOTYPE



2 ROUNDS DIGITAL PRINTING, TESTING 2 DIFFERENT GSM

To print these, I cut my large paper into 5 strips (70mm × 1000mm) and hand-fed them into the printer. After scoring the concertina, I folded it up.

I completed two rounds of printing—one with higher GSM paper. Though I initially thought thicker paper would provide better structure, these thicker concertinas (with more pages) struggled to fit into the smaller boxes. In the end, I opted for the thinner paper.

* Design analysis

CONCERTINA / BINDING STYLES

I chose the concertina binding form as its flow complements the continuous role of packaging tape. After user testing, to emphasise the handcrafted feel and maintain a consistent identity, I added tape accents between the creases.

COMPOSITIONS

Originally, I centered all elements and maintained a strict grid system. However, after user testing, I enhanced the personal feel by intentionally misaligning text and breaking the grid to mirror the natural qualities of handwriting. As the concertina unfolds, it creates an embedded rhythm—like taking a journey!

PACKAGING TAPE IMAGERY: STAMPS & OBJECTS

For both portraits and objects, I created a tape transfer effect. For the portraits, I imitated postal stamps, with the “1st” accent subtly symbolising first-generation immigrants.

Below you can see the process of an edited photograph becoming scanned tape imagery.



SYMBOL

The illustrated symbol combines the forms of a box and envelope, linking to how I transform the tradition into love letters. The purposefully wavering drawing style enhances the handmade aesthetic.



HANDWRITING SCANS

Alternating between original handwritten text and translations through color-coding, the letters incorporate scanned packaging tape textures in their design.

Handwritten letters possess a unique visual storytelling power. Rather than presenting a polished, edited narrative, the raw quality of handwriting reveals the author’s emotional process as they reflect deeply on the box tradition.

I drew inspiration from **Sophie Calle’s “Take Care of Yourself”** and its emphasis on handwriting’s emotional resonance, which guided my decision to present the letters in their authentic states.

GF SMITH: GMUND NO COLOUR NO BLEACH

All design decisions aim to incorporate packaging tape and cardboard, subtly or loudly. I chose this paper for its similarity to cardboard’s ridges. After testing, the text remained readable on the textured surface. Based on feedback, this proved to be an effective choice.



A TABLE TESTING DIFFERENT PAPER SAMPLES AND THEIR EFFECTS

Straw Marquetry Boxes

INITIAL PROTOTYPES

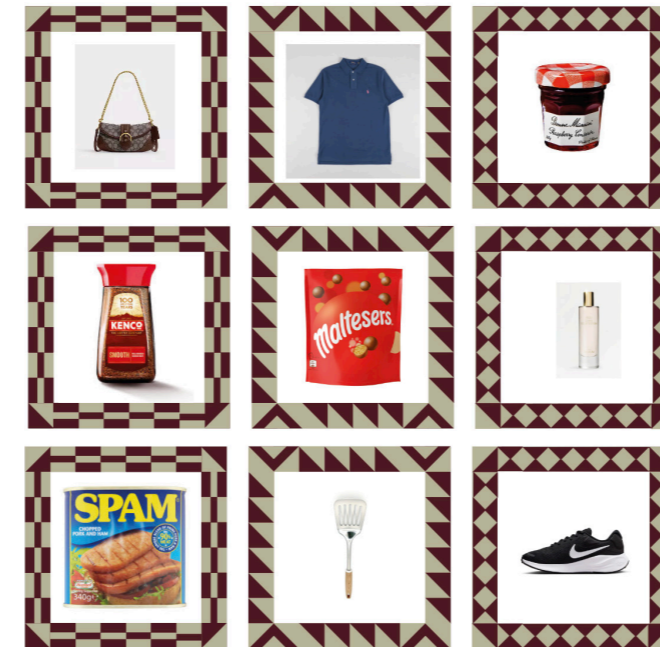


SOMERSET HOUSE MATERIAL METAMORPHOSIS WORKSHOP

Initial box prototype: During the Easter holidays, I learned from Antoinette Vandy about incorporating wheat straw—the UK’s most abundant crop waste—into sustainable art. Reflecting on themes of identity, I created a personal marquetry piece inspired by the walls (the Filipino broom).

The box as a time capsule:

I planned to create a single large box decorated with straw marquetry to archive all the envelopes. However, Mike suggested I should continue the above and create individual decorated boxes for each letter.



STRAW MARQUETRY PLAN: RECREATING THE OBJECTS

In my initial plan for the straw marquetry, each branded object corresponds to a key item mentioned in the letter. I wanted to recreate these items, surrounding them with borders inspired by traditional Filipino weaving patterns.

Feedback indicated that this design would be too complex for the small surface area, making the objects difficult to identify.

REFINED PROTOTYPE



FINAL COLOUR SCHEME AND DESIGN FOCUSING ON LOGOS

After feedback, I revised the straw marquetry design to focus on logos. This approach using straw marquetry with well-known brands represents migration and demonstrates how everyday objects become cultural artefacts.

Based on feedback, this design proved more feasible, especially with a limited color scheme using naturally dyed straws. From an audience perspective, the logos effectively connect the balikbayan box to the letters’ contents.

* Making process



A challenge I faced was the intricate lettering. Instead of cutting individual pieces, I glued strips together and traced the letters on top. This sturdier base made it easier to create smaller details.



After staining the boxes a darker colour, I started with the centre square design, then completed the borders, then sides. For more intricate tight lettering, I hand-painted the text to connect with the signwriting on the sides of the boxes.

* Design analysis



COLOUR CODED TABS

Markings on the sides of the straw marquetry boxes help users align the lid with the base correctly—a feature added after user testing revealed people were opening the concertinas in the wrong direction.

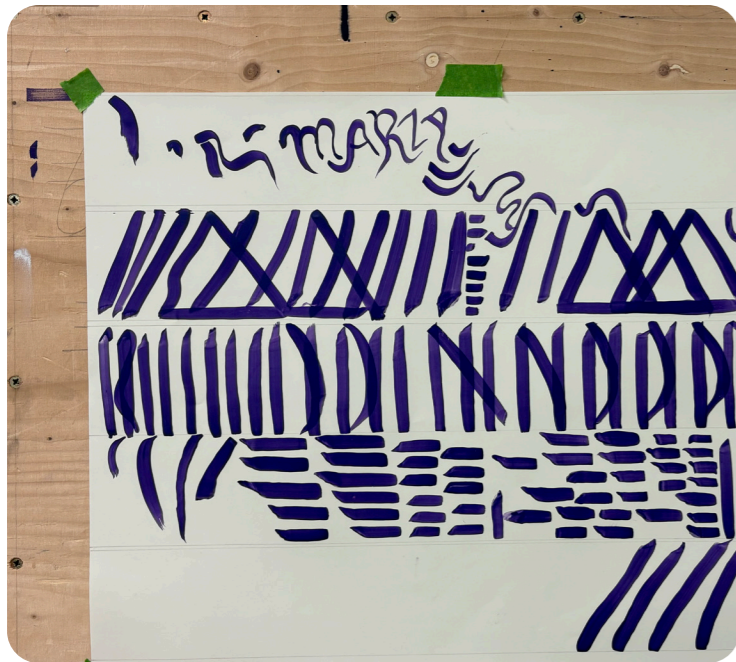
THE BORDERS

Due to time constraints and technical limitations with detailed work, I simplified the patterns. This turned out to be beneficial, as feedback showed that the simpler borders kept the logos as the main focus without distraction.

Signwriting

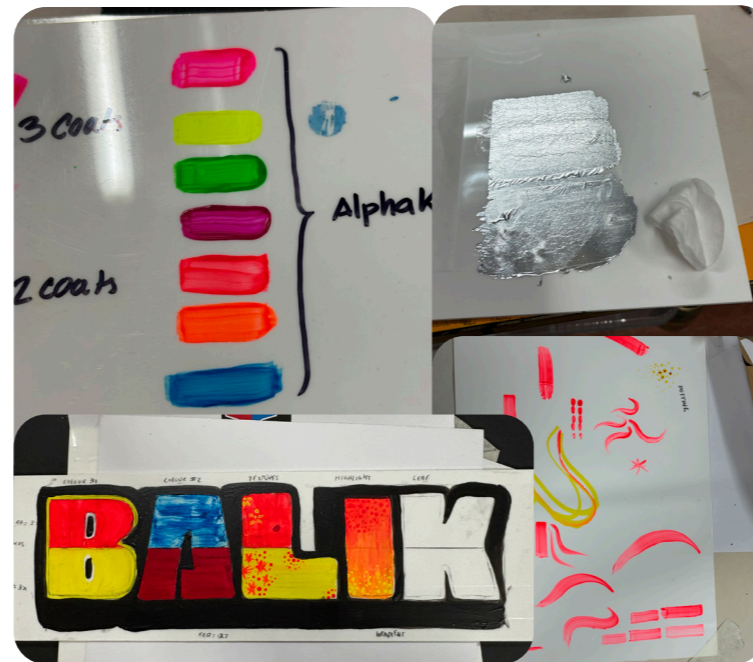
* Embracing a maximalist approach that celebrates complexity and local narratives.

INITIAL PROTOTYPES



PRACTICING SIGN WRITING SKILLS WITH INDIVIDUAL STROKES

During the sign writing process, I learned to embrace the imperfect edges as an integral part of the work. Rather than focusing solely on the outcome, I appreciated the craft and beauty of handmade creation.

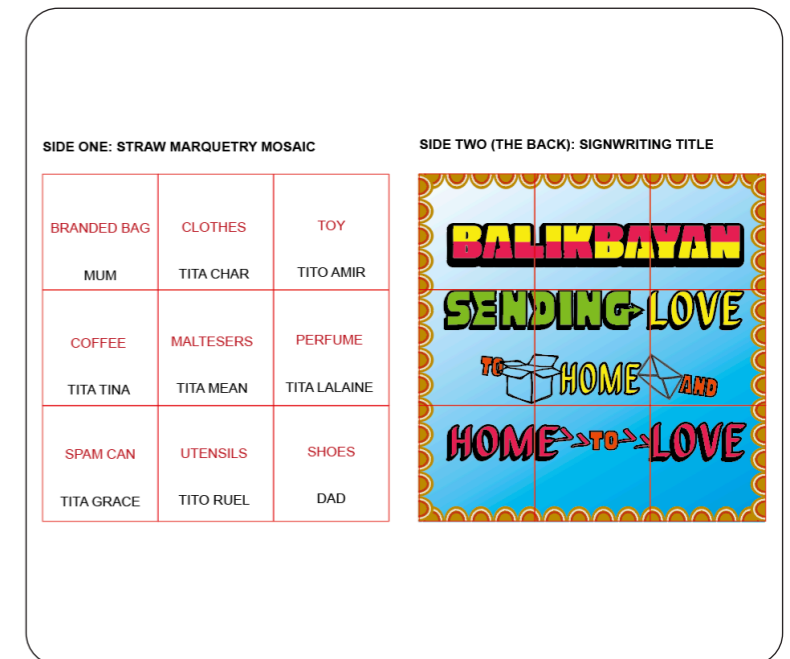


EXPLORING DIFFERENT SURFACES AND COLOURS

Next I tested:

- Foiling techniques with different tones
- Different colour combinations
- Additional patterns and textures
- Painting on plastic vs metal vs wood

REFINED PROTOTYPE



REFINING FINAL REFERENCE

I added black outlines and adjusted the lettering hierarchy, making smaller letters less thick to improve clarity and emphasise the primary message. Rather than using blue, I decided to embrace the natural dark wood surface!

Positive feedback: The bold colors and eclectic aesthetics of jeepneys challenge minimalist design norms.

Testing this on wood, the vibrant neon colors felt more authentic to jeepneys and provided better contrast. However, adding black outlines would make the letters pop and create a floating effect against the wood.

I received overwhelmingly positive feedback, especially from the Filipino community. The design effectively communicates Filipino visual language—particularly reminiscent of typography found in the environment, as one recent visitor noted.

* Further developments and iterations, using lessons from “Type” practice block

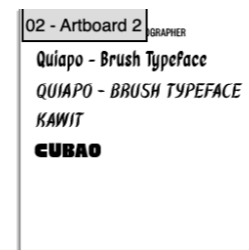
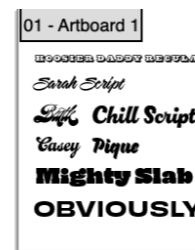
TYPOGRAPHIC INTENTIONS

In these explorations, I focused on balancing readability with the jeepney aesthetic. Through practicing typography, I learned to create meaningful relationships between text elements using different fonts.

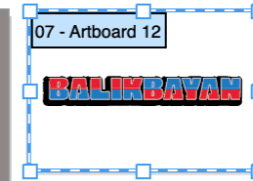
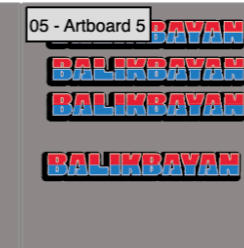
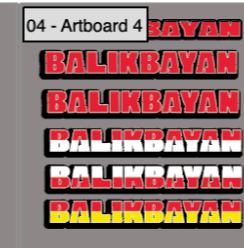
These were some key changes after user testing:

- Improved readability by making the composition more regular
- Limited font usage to two typefaces to establish clear meaning, rather than using three for variety
- Enhanced precision by matching edges and correcting sizing
- Reduced the size of “to” and “and” to emphasize more significant words
- Added rotations to create rhythm
- Incorporated wavy elements to match the fluid typography
- Added unique typographic elements:
- Letter E styled as an envelope flap
- Arrows to indicate movement

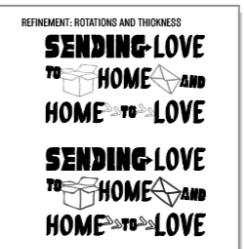
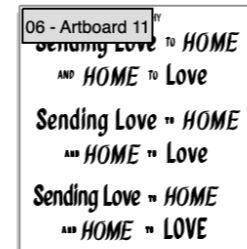
ADDING UNIQUE TWISTS TO THE TYPE



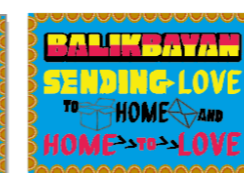
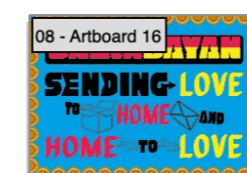
EXPLORING DIFFERENT FILIPINO INSPIRED TYPEFACES



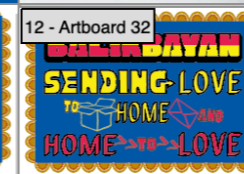
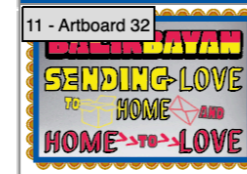
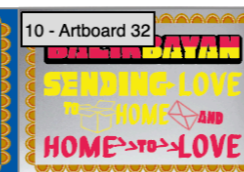
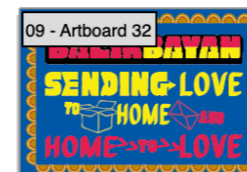
TESTING DIFFERENT COLOUR PAIRINGS AND COMPOSITIONS



REFINEMENT OF GRID STRUCTURE



EXPLORING BACKGROUND COLOURS



* Design analysis



VISUAL INSPO: JEEPNEYS

Jeepneys are a quintessential symbol of Filipino ingenuity and culture, originating from repurposed U.S. military jeeps left after World War II. These vehicles were transformed into vibrant public transportation, reflecting the resilience and creativity of the Filipino people.

The distinctive hand-painted designs and signwriting on jeepneys are more than mere decoration; they serve as expressions of personal and cultural identity. Each jeepney often features religious symbols, family names, and vivid patterns, turning the vehicle into a moving canvas that narrates individual stories and collective heritage.



STAMP BORDER

The border features a stamp pattern inspired by Helen's workshop, connecting it to the project's epistolary theme. The perforations also reflect the 'Wallis' color scheme.



COMMUNITY PUZZLE

The boxes are arranged to distribute the straw colors evenly. When flipped, they reveal a connecting signwriting piece on the back, representing the ties between Filipino communities.

COLOURS

The bicolor system represents two locations—two homes. This design choice creates cohesion and establishes a relationship between the text elements, emphasizing the symbolism of the title. While the language clearly demonstrates the bidirectional relationship between two places, perhaps colour is needed to fully understand the Balikbayan box concept.

TYPEFACES

Just like jeepneys, I use multiple typefaces while ensuring they maintain a relationship with each other. Here I used Aaron Amar's "Cubao," "Kawit," and "Quiapo" fonts, capturing an essential aspect of Filipino street culture. I not only appreciate using a Filipino type designer's work but also admire their dedication to Filipino sign makers, jeepney drivers, and daily commuters.

In the previous page, I expand deeper into my typographic explorations

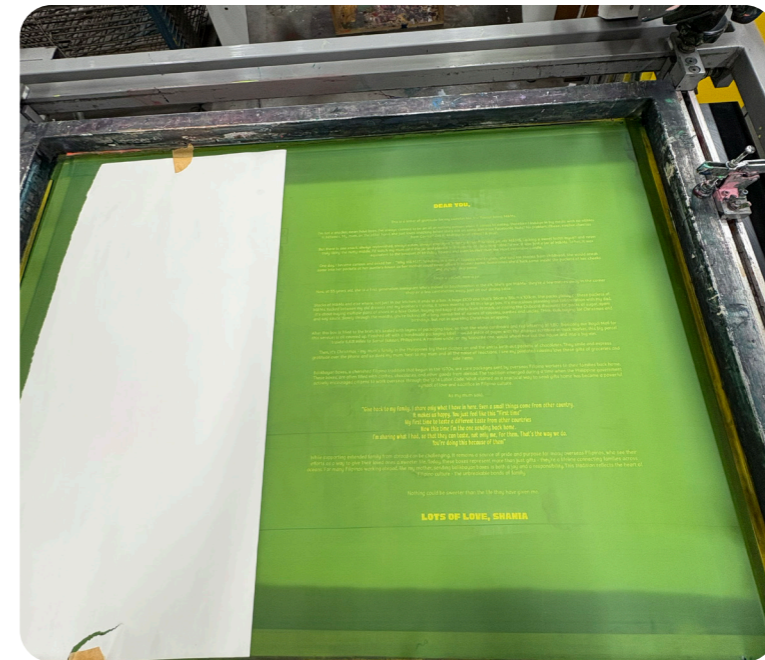
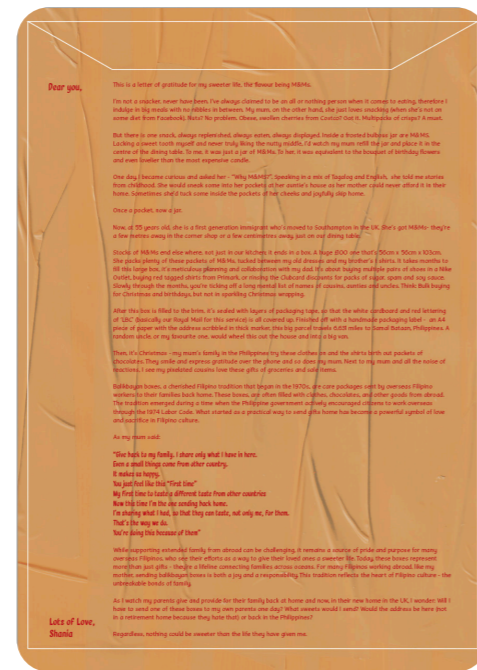


The Cardboard Letter

Through auto-ethnography, my personal experiences inform the project's cultural lens. The writing in my initial prototype evolved to create a clearer balance between personal narrative and universal themes. This foundation became the anchor for my entire project. By exploring letter-based design, I sought to develop tools for cultural preservation that connect with both Filipino immigrants and Western audiences.

INITIAL PROTOTYPES

REFINED PROTOTYPE



PRINTING ON SUGAR PACKAGING?

I explored many ways to curate this piece of writing, from creating images on envelopes to printing on sugar pack paper—a common item in a balikbayan box that also connects to the idea of “this sweet life.”

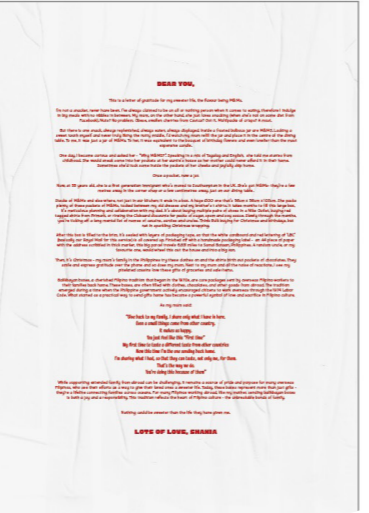
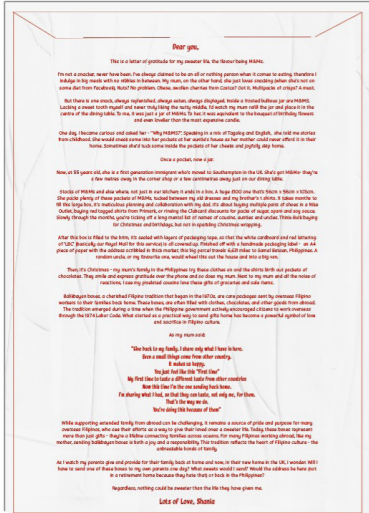
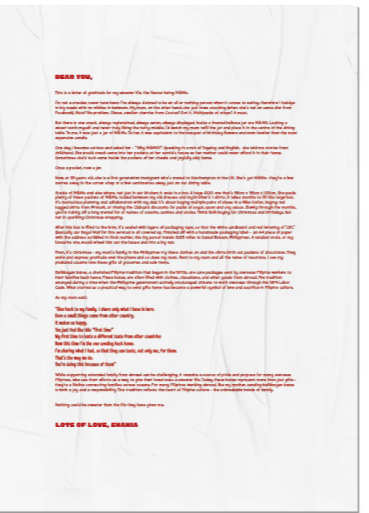
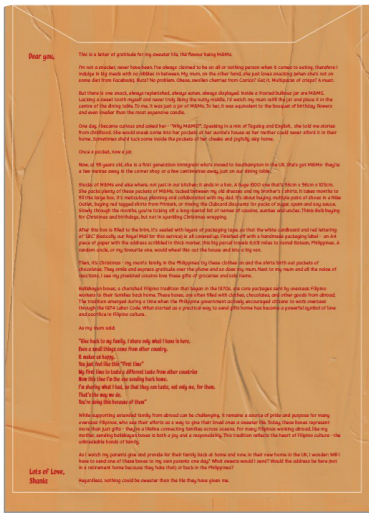
Feedback. User Testing and Refinements on the following page!

EXPERIMENTING WITH COMPOSITIONS AND DIGITAL TEXTURES

My initial explorations involved creating digital versions of cardboard and tape textures. I examined the structural elements of manila envelopes—their folds, crevices, and flaps—with particular attention to their distinctive features. The brown colour of manila envelopes perfectly echoes the tones of packaging tape. Manila envelopes serve as a powerful symbol, representing not just modern record-keeping but also the complex history of global trade, war, and colonialism. Through extensive experimentation, I developed various compositions until I felt I had achieved the right balance.

SCREENPRINTING ON CARDBOARD AND TAPE

My final plan was to screenprint directly onto a flattened cardboard box (which matched the square aesthetic of my work)—an intentional choice over regular paper. I needed to decide whether to include packaging tape. I completed the final prints in a dark reddish-brown color with a packaging tape overlay, which created a clearer print on the uneven surface. Though I initially worried the tape would make the ink rub off and add unnecessary distractions, testing revealed it actually solved the problem of cardboard's textured ridges. Without the tape, the text would have been illegible.



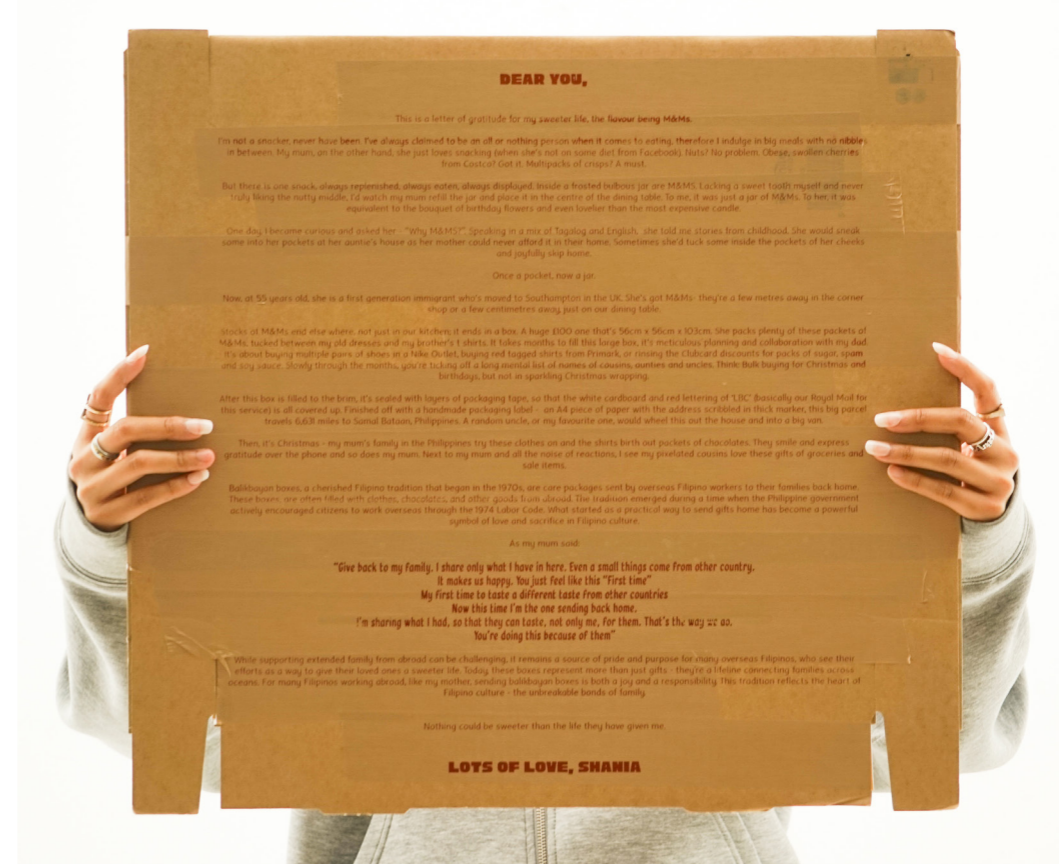
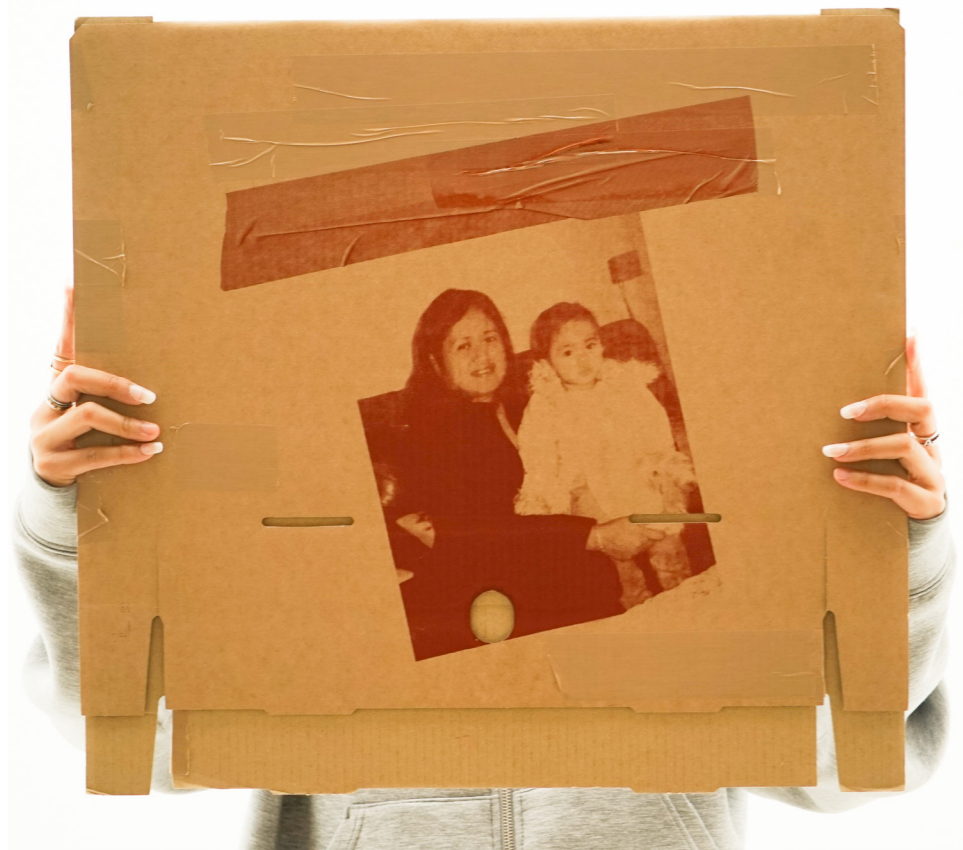
REVIEW 1: REFINING TEXT, COLOUR AND TEXTURES

- More careful consideration of text size is needed to balance between filling the page and not overwhelming readers at AI size.
- The packaging tape texture is particularly effective when used subtly. The tape textures and marks should be used sparingly, as they are strong enough on their own to convey the concept of a letter and packaging without overwhelming the design.
- The relationship between background and text must be carefully balanced for readability. The subtle design elements—like tape strips—complement the red color scheme well. The letter format emerges naturally from the content itself (with “dear” and “lots of love”), making additional envelope markers unnecessary. These choices create a cleaner and more engaging design.

REVIEW 2: REFINING IMAGERY

During user testing, I included a small image of my mum and me at the bottom of the box. However, feedback revealed that the image appeared too small and lacked intentionality, undermining its impact. To address this, I opted to screenprint a larger version on the side of the flattened box. This not only ensured the image was more visually prominent, but also utilised the available space more effectively.

* Design analysis



MATERIALITY: SCREENPRINTING ON CARDBOARD AND PACKAGING TAPE

Rather than confining the text to a simple printed page, I wanted to create an experience by incorporating the physical nature of the balikbayan box. This approach transformed the writing process itself.

I had planned to add an LBC logo image transfer to provide context for the UK Filipino diaspora, but time constraints prevented this final step.

TYPOGRAPHIC CHOICES

I chose not to use my handwriting and prioritised legibility for the person experiencing my work. I felt that the cardboard and packaging tape still brought the messy intimacy of the Balikbayan box. The main typeface I chose was 'Mabuhay' by Clara Cayosa. The other two are designed by Aaron Amar, using 'Quiapo' to distinguish my mum's voice.

In retrospect, I should have used fewer typefaces and chosen a bolder font for better readability, though the large size ultimately helped compensate for this.

"The Mabuhay font family is designed for legibility and adaptability on digital applications, without compromising what makes it 'Filipino'."

- Type West Class of 2023

* *Writing is and has a body of typography. Writing needs graphic design. It's designwriting. Give it a second life - make it experienced.*
- Ellen Lupton

Practice 01: Type

Performance Design & Practice Laboratories / Black Labs

General Overview of Space: PDP Section

Double Function Space: External "practice" space / Show Reel Space/Hiding Notice Board

Brand Kit

MILIK

PDP

Link to: Curtains/ Show/ Theatre

Performance Design & Practice Laboratories

J001-10 & J001 Mezz.

Signage boards inspired by seats in a theatre

Initial Ideas in Sketches



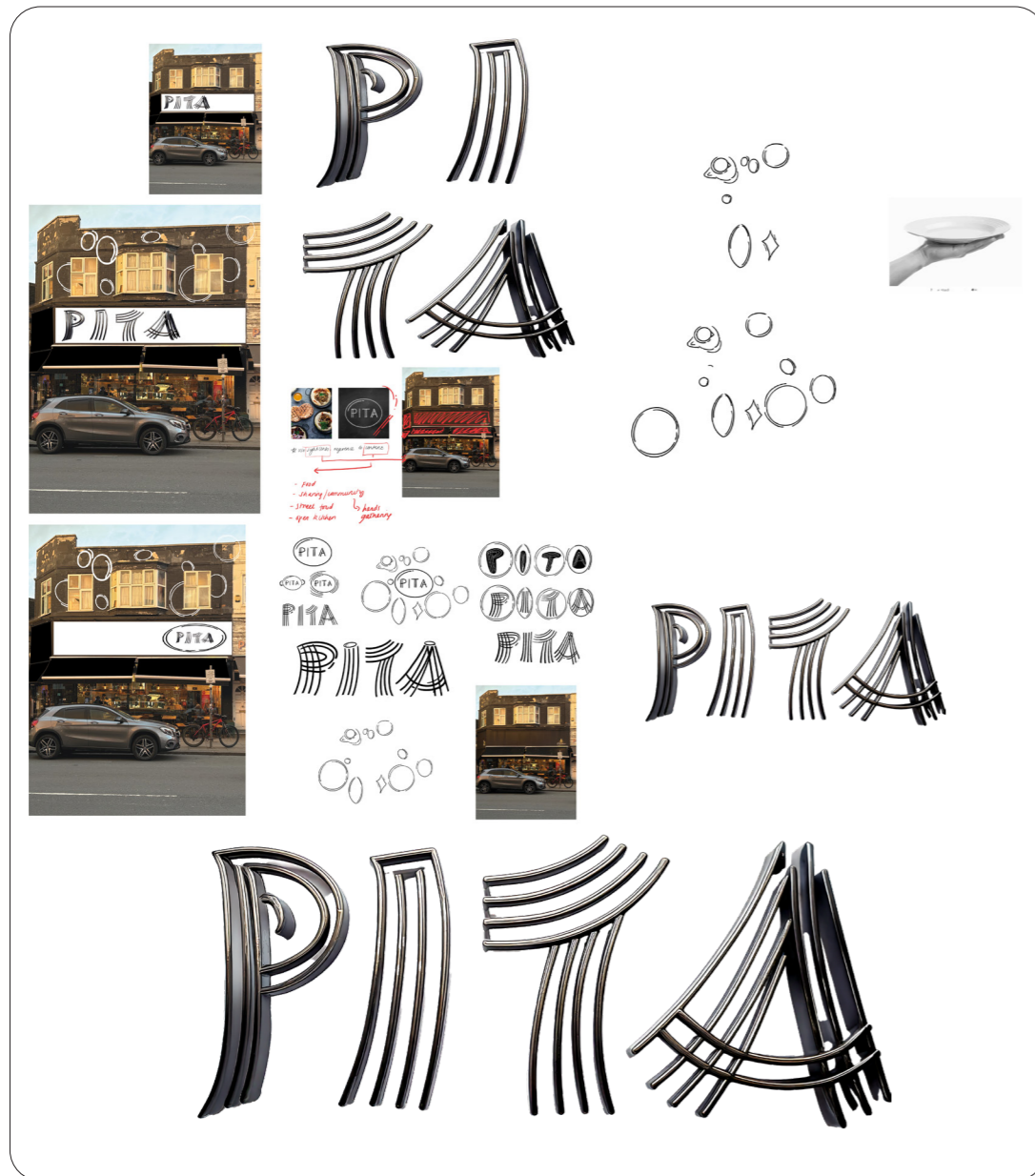
WEEK 1: FINDING YOUR WAY (DESIGN SPRINT)

- * *Experiential Design: Text can be shaped and manipulated to create a physical experience for the reader, transforming words into tactile encounters*
- * *Site-specific design is crucial. Take inspiration from the functionality of the space to influence its materiality. Let the history of place guide typographic choices*
- * *With scale: Make sure you adjust to it (simplify things or make it more detailed)*
- * *Create a sense of presence through light, shadows, and relief elements*

WEEK 2: LETTERING WALK

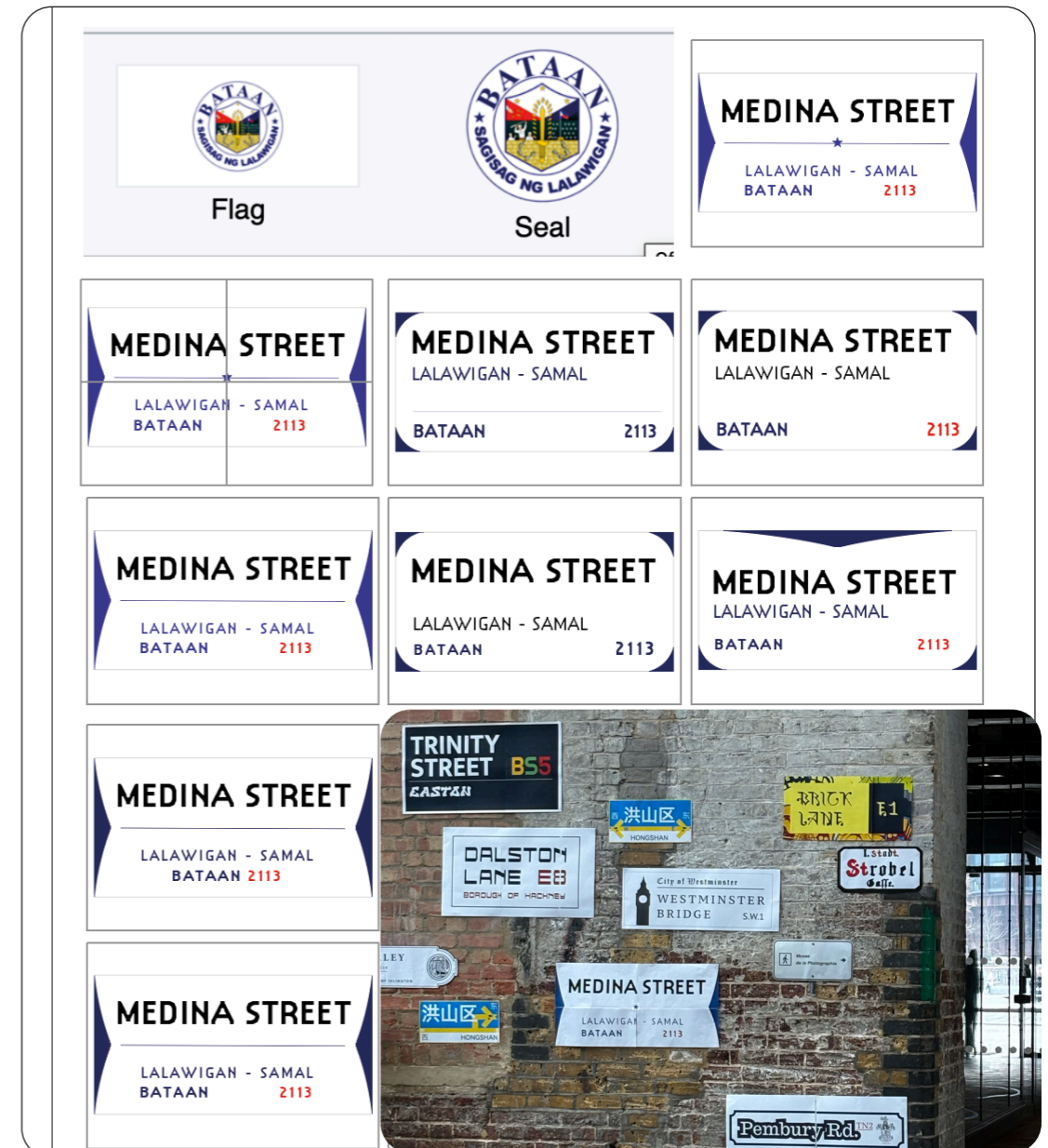
Reflecting on the last four weeks, refining my typography skills has deepened my understanding of how type can transcend functionality to evoke cultural identity and emotional resonance, effectively connecting both place and audience.

Moving forward, I will continue to explore how typography can create immersive, tactile experiences (that reflect cultural narratives) by focusing on the small details that eventually form the nuanced foundation of a typeface; you are never starting from 0.



WEEK 3: REDESINGING LETTERS ON BUILDINGS

- * Focus type language on connectivity and familiarity
- * Compare design approaches and notice how successful designs achieve balance while integrating with their architectural surroundings.



WEEK 4: SIGNING THE CITY

- * Typefaces should balance cultural representation with clarity - the project chose Citizen OT Bold to connect with traditional Filipino script (Baybayin) while maintaining readability.
- * Color and hierarchy in typography can create differentiation and identity - using specific colors helps organise information while establishing a unique visual system.

Lino-flag Experiment

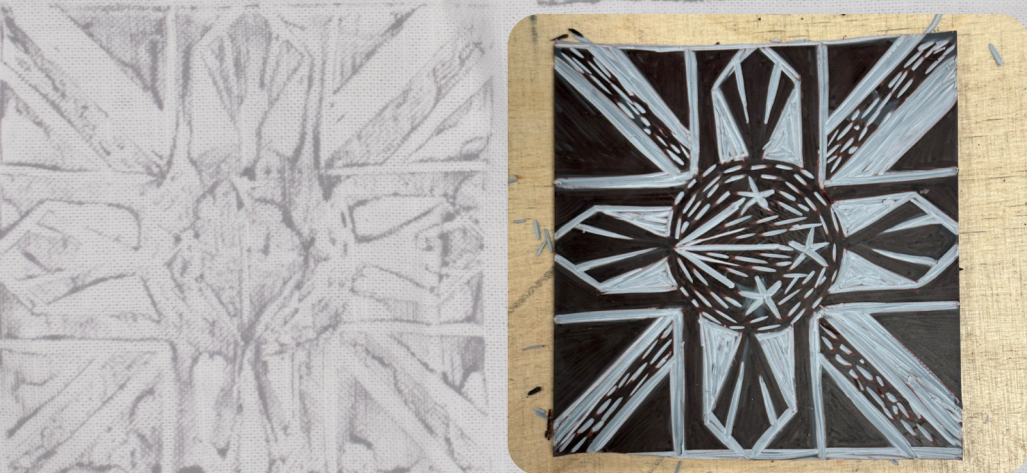
MAKING FLAGS WORKSHOP

In Somerset Houses' Material Metamorphosis "Making Flags Workshop", I explored cultural identity through block printing techniques. The process began with sketching symbols that represented my heritage - incorporating elements from both the Filipino flag's sun and the UK's Union Jack to symbolise the immigrant experience of having two homes.

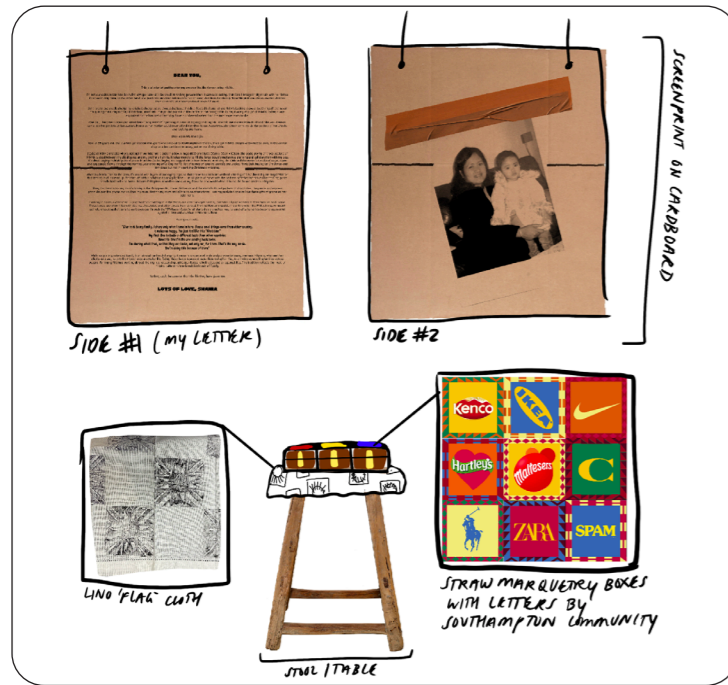
I transferred these meaningful designs onto linocut sheets. For printing, I experimented with traditional botanical dyes and sustainable materials including living ink (a black pigment made from discarded algae cells) and carrot-derived dye, demonstrating how contemporary eco-friendly alternatives can replace petroleum-based colours.



I was inspired by BAGCD's alumni Alisha Kruse who used her mother's Sari to recreate the England flag.



Curation + Situating in Museums



CURATION SKETCH

POST VIVA /CHOSEN MUSEUMS

These cultural artefacts are designed for exhibition in public spaces like the Museum of Home and the Migration Museum. Following my viva presentation, I visited the Museum of Home to photograph and situate my work. The museum allowed me to curate my boxes on an interactive table display. This setting was particularly fitting since the Balikbayan box represents an object curated in one home and sent to another—embodying the immigrant experience.

By situating my work in these places, they offer non-diasporic and non-Filipino audiences an opportunity to understand migration's complexities, sacrifice, and how immigrants maintain connections to their homes and families.



VISITING THE MUSEUM OF THE HOME TO CURATE MY WORK



CONTACTING THE MIGRATION MUSEUM

Furthermore, I leveraged my previous freelance work with the Migration Museum to pitch my final project as an exploration of migration narratives that aligns with their mission of engaging audiences with diasporic experiences. I hope it will become part of their reopening in a new exhibition space.