Freedom to create.

How the oldest artist residency program in the country brought its image into the 21st century.
CELEBRATING 100 YEARS

In 2007 The MacDowell Colony marked its centennial as the country’s first artist residency program. Since its founding MacDowell has awarded thousands of Fellowships, ranging from two weeks to two months, to artists of exceptional talent. Many Colony Fellows have become pivotal figures in American culture, their works among our treasured icons.*

To help commemorate this milestone and underscore the influence it continues to exert on the arts and culture, MacDowell chose the Bernhardt Fudyma Design Group to create a distinctive new imprimatur that would invigorate the look of the Colony’s many communication materials and present a more contemporary and dynamic depiction of the organization and its mission for the centennial year - and beyond.

* The following are a few of the artists and the projects they worked on at the Colony:
James Baldwin Giovanni’s Room • Leonard Bernstein Mass • Aaron Copland Billy the Kid • E.L. Doctorow Billy Bathgate Spalding Gray Impossible Vacation • Benny Andrews various paintings • DuBose and Dorothy Heyward Porgy and Bess Oscar Hijuelos The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love • Alice Sebold The Lovely Bones • Studs Terkel Division Street Wendy Wasserstein Third • Thornton Wilder Our Town
Previously, the MacDowell Colony used different staff members and outside design consultants to produce their various materials when the need arose. With no established graphic identity, other than a standard typesetting of their logo, the result was a visually unrelated array of newsletters, annual reports, brochures, announcements and fund raising appeals with no branding consistency.

Upon review of these materials and their multivariate characteristics, it became clear that our approach would have to focus on developing a new branding system that was flexible enough to accommodate numerous formats and features, and enable any single component to function as a stand-alone entity. At the same time, that component had to maintain sufficient genetic similarity to work in combination with all of the Colony’s other materials to reinforce a cohesive brand image.

Our solution was an elegant combination of typography, imagery and a simple protocol for their arrangement.
We also developed an icon that was to embellish the new wordmark - and their existing logo - for the centennial year, but could be eliminated in the future without creating visual imbalance.

The tagline also evolved slightly beyond the anniversary.

In our initial discussions with the Colony’s directors, communications team and other stakeholders we noticed that, instead of using the Colony’s full name, everyone referred to it simply as ‘MacDowell’. Using this appellation, we created a bold, graphic wordmark which became the visual keystone for all future communications.

The MacDowell Colony
EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY

All imagery used on brochure covers, posters, advertising, press kits, invitations and the like was to consist of the 3 subjects that symbolize what makes MacDowell the remarkable organization that it is:

1. Scenes of the Colony environs, its details or characteristics

2. Colony artists at work

3. Representations of the creative output produced at the Colony
A simple, scalable underlying grid, based on the proportions of the MacDowell wordmark, became the armature for governing page delineations and placement of graphics, and provided the overall organizing principle of the new branding system.

The MacDowell wordmark can be placed in numerous positions in either horizontal or vertical orientations.
When possible, components with wrap-around covers that used the horizontal wordmark were to utilize the grid to feature one of each type of image. Other items with a vertically oriented wordmark would consist of only 2 images (or an image and a clear field).

We also suggested listing all of the disciplines supported by the Colony on each component, which helped MacDowell clarify and reinforce its mission:

ARCHITECTS | COMPOSERS | FILMMAKERS | INTERDISCIPLINARY ARTISTS | PLAYWRIGHTS | VISUAL ARTISTS | WRITERS
With the graphic system parameters established, we began to produce components for immediate use in their centennial year. The goal was to create a ‘critical mass’ of items that would illustrate various applications of the new brand identity and its potential for adaptation and extrapolation.
Materials were also created to demonstrate how the underlying grid could be used to inform the physical structure of components such as press kits, or accommodate different types and volumes of content throughout the interiors of documents.

Compatible font families were specified for all text but no specific color palette was defined, as accent colors were to be chosen to complement those in the photographs being used.

"The best things in life are not things but transformative ideas and emotions — the very currency of art and the amazing output of The MacDowell Colony."

— filmmaker and MacDowell board member Ken Burns
TRANSFORMING THE NEWSLETTER

To energize the impact of their bi-annual newsletter, we redesigned it from a standard 8.5” x 11” magazine format to a tabloid size newspaper that enabled more dramatic page layouts and larger images.
The ultimate goal was to turn over the design of all Colony communications to their staff who could then direct the creation of future materials more consistently - no matter who produced them.
THE RESULT

"The work of MacDowell is not always easy to explain, which can make it challenging to gain support for
our organization and mission. Bernhardt Fudyma listened closely to what we were saying about ourselves
and updated our look with beautiful and compelling new materials that convey what we do and why it
matters. Their breadth of experience and professionalism was invaluable and there was no question we
were getting the best advice and talent."

Cheryl Young
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
WHAT ABOUT YOU

The Bernhardt Fudyma Design Group creates branding and graphic solutions for organizations in transition – whether due to acquisitions or mergers, expansion into new markets, or the need for increased visibility or differentiation in existing markets. Each brand identity project we’ve encountered has inspired the client to move beyond business as usual and the results can be invigorating.

We look forward to helping you do the same.

To learn more about this and other brand positioning and identity systems created by Bernhardt Fudyma, contact Craig Bernhardt:

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