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Taino Revival

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TAINO REVIVAL:
A REBRAND OF MUSEO DEL HOMBRE DOMINICANO
BY CARLA ZORRILLA

THESIS STATEMENT

The Taino people were the first known inhabitants of La Hispaniola. They started a foundation of culture for the Dominican Republic that currently lives in the museum, El Museo del Hombre Dominicano. This museum is one of the most important promoters of our identity to the world, which means that how it looks and what is in it is ultimately how we present ourselves to the rest of the world. Which is why, as an effort to protect our identity and heritage, I propose this revamp and rebrand.
PROJECT GOALS AND BACKGROUND

The Tainos are among the first inhabitants of La Hispaniola. They traveled North from South America and lived in the island for more than 5,000 years before they were discovered by the Spanish settlers. Some of the early chroniclers who recorded the encounter described them as good and peaceful people with rich cultures and extensive belief systems. In fact, the word ‘taino’ in their language (the Arawakan language) means “good” and “noble”. Even though around 100 years after Christopher Columbus arrived 95% of their population had died off, their culture is so rich that it is still alive and present today through art, religion and in the soul of the Caribbean people.

As Dominicans we seem to have forgotten or overlooked the role that this heritage plays in our lives and it is to the point where there is a widespread belief that being of Taino descent is looked down upon or makes you outdated. Very few people nowadays seem to be interested in maintaining this culture alive but among those who do there is a large portion of artists and historians whose work mostly resides in one of the most important museums in the Caribbean, El Museo del Hombre Dominicano. This museum is one of the most important promoters of our identity to the world, which means that how it looks and what it is in it is ultimately how we present ourselves to the rest of the world. Which is why, as an effort to protect our identity and heritage, I proposed this revamp and rebrand of this museum.

CURRENT IDENTIY
THE NAME CHANGE

The first thing I decided to tackle was the name. The museum has been around for more than 30 years and the name doesn't seem to be specific as to what the museum is about. I didn't want to come up with something irrelevant again so I came up with three main points that I wanted to keep in mind about what the museum does:

1. It holds a record of our history
2. It promotes and stores Dominican art
3. It celebrates Dominican culture

After coming up with about 40 name ideas, I narrowed it down to three and held a poll among 40 Dominicans to see which one was more popular.

The results weren't exactly conclusive but luckily I also asked people “What would you expect to find at a museum with this name?”. I compared all of the answers and eventually came up with El Museo de la Identidad Dominicana.

museo de la identidad
DOMINICANA
VISUAL SOURCES

These are Taino zemis. The zemis were deities or ancestral spirits housed in sculptural forms. The majority of these sculptures were created by carving stones with string.

THE LOGO

The first couple of sketches I was looking for things that looked too similar to Taino aesthetics, and by being too focused on that I ended up with things that looked nothing like Taino but a little more Art Deco. So I moved away from that and started exploring things that felt like Taino style but weren't exactly it. And although these were cool, they weren't exactly what I was looking for. As I sketched and sketched I seemed to be moving farther and farther away from what I wanted. At this point I decided to take a step back, set up some constraints and start over again.

INITIAL SKETCHES
The logo, for me, had to complement the name subtly but reasonably, so I wrote these three things that I wanted it to look like:

1 Taino heritage
2 Current art
3 Future art

So, in a way, the logo had to allude to the past, the present and the future at the same time. As far as the Taino part of it, I started replicating some traditional art making from the Tainos, such as carving and reductive methods. I utilized a lot of different materials to see if each material could yield something new.

As I was experimenting I noticed that as I removed I was also creating new things. I specifically decided to focus on these shapes that were getting created and started coming up with things that looked like these:
And although these had potential I felt like they were still too much like Taino. I kept sketching and eventually refined the shapes to come up with three, one for each letter. Then I designed a wireframe to hold these together; a wireframe that represented the future. These two items combined became a representation of the present, and they complemented each other the same way that our past is a complement of our future.

THE COLORS

The colors were then taken from paintings like these, which are modern reproductions of Taino cave paintings.
THE PATTERNS

As I colored it, I also noticed that when these shapes were repeated over and over they were reminiscent of the patterns found in some of their zemis. And eventually these became a part of the branding as well. I used them to separate the Spanish pieces from the English pieces.
Lastly, I designed a brand book where all the story, research and goals could live. This brand book could serve as a takeaway and explanation for the brand and also a way to spread it.
This rebrand was meant as a way to promote the Taino heritage and culture. I hope that this new image better represents who we are and how rich our culture is. As a part of the rebrand I proposed that the museum opens up the galleries for local artists to showcase their work, and not just limiting it fine art, but also music and literature. Proposing more collaborations with schools to provide more hands on and face to face experience with historical artifacts. Provide several spaces to allow for multiple events to be held within, and provide several hangout spaces for visitors.

Ultimately, I hope for the museum to become more inclusive and provide a space for the arts community to come together, expand and be celebrated. To provide an inviting home for all of the tangible parts of our identity and history, and hopefully encouraging more interest in our heritage among the rest of the country. I eventually want to present this to the ones responsible for the museum and hope that it gets adapted and starts a wave of change in the way we think of our Taino heritage.
SOURCES

Written


Visual


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