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STATEMENT *of* RESEARCH

“Create the World You Want to Live In” has been a driving motto in my life, inspiring my approach as a designer, educator and parent alike. As a creative professional, I strive to embody this philosophy in every aspect of my work at the University of Minnesota Duluth and through my design studio, Likewise. Guided by the values of a welcoming, smart, and sustainable world that values human connection, I relentlessly pursue innovative design-related endeavors with local and global impact. My research exists across the following areas: professional practice, self-initiated creative pursuits, creative mentorship and designing for growing minds.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

With an active client roster with global reach, I am guided by a set of core values that form the foundation of my work. I believe in the power of creativity as a driving force, empowering our design practice, Likewise, to explore innovative solutions and push the boundaries of design. Embracing an interdisciplinary mindset, I seek inspiration from unexpected sources, ensuring my work transcends the limitations of a single medium. Sustainability and social responsibility are integral to our practice, as we are committed to supporting clients who share values aimed at making a positive impact on the world. My dedication to excellence drives me to challenge conventions, experimenting with new ideas to achieve both aesthetic appeal and strategic effectiveness. In every project, I aim to create authentic, meaningful experiences that forge strong connections between brands and their audiences, leaving a lasting impression and contributing to positive change.

I have had the privilege of working with clients boasting national and global influence, for whom I played a pivotal role in designing their brands. Notable among them are Ad Advance, a prominent digital advertising agency; Evsie, a Tween brand by women’s fashion retailer Maurices, which now has dedicated stores across the country; and Wolf Creek Watch Company, a microbrand Swiss-made watch company that garnered recognition in publications like *British GQ*.



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Additionally, Locally Laid Egg Company, a Minnesota-based egg producer, captured the hearts of the nation with its endearing brand. I also led the rebrand of Walker Display, an established, local manufacturer of hanging art systems embraced worldwide by distinguished businesses, galleries, and museums, along with Gays Do the D, a top-tier unofficial Disney podcast with a global LGBTQ+ audience, among others.

SELF-INITIATED CREATIVE PURSUITS

Over time, I've pursued a number of personal projects inspired by branding, typography, and visual culture aimed to challenge conventional thinking. These ventures encompass whimsical one-off experiments, like stitching the alphabet into Saltine crackers, igniting conversations about communication and language. Additionally, I've juxtaposed modern user-interfaces with historical imagery, unveiling thought-provoking narratives that invite contemplation.

A current project titled "Landmark Logos" is an exploration into the emotional resonance and symbolism of landmarks in shaping the visual identities of businesses within their surrounding areas. This ongoing endeavor, both a critique and celebration, delves into the architectural gems that define cities and towns, recognizing the significant emotional connections they hold for local communities. The iconic landmarks evoke cherished memories and a profound sense of belonging in the hearts of the people. Through "Landmark Logos," I continue to analyze how these structures are (over)used as central elements in the visual branding of local businesses, aiming to align with the authenticity and heritage these landmarks represent. Employing these visual icons in branding, businesses aim to evoke emotions and associations that amplify their identity, fostering community pride and trust among their audiences despite conveying little about their actual business offerings. This project continuously provides invaluable insights into the power of visual storytelling, shedding light on design's potential to tap into the essence of a place's culture and history, fostering meaningful connections between people and their surroundings.



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CREATIVE MENTORSHIP

The third area where my research thrives is creative mentorship, an integral part of my broader commitment to service and community engagement. For the past three years, I've had the privilege of leading a summer art camp—for kids 8-12 years old—in partnership with the University of Minnesota Duluth. This experience allows me to ignite the imaginations of young minds, guiding them through a variety of projects and exercises and encouraging them to explore their creative potential.

I also nurture collaborations with organizations such as Islands of Brilliance, a non-profit in Milwaukee, Wisconsin that uses creativity to empower children with autism. By organizing and co-leading workshops, as well as extending my creative expertise, I actively contribute to their mission of fostering self-expression and confidence in these young individuals, recognizing the transformative power of art as a form of communication and confidence.

I highly value my professional network and use it to enhance our students' experiences. Organizing guest lectures, panel discussions, and internships, I foster connections between our students and industry experts. By facilitating internships in both Duluth and the Twin Cities, I help provide invaluable real-world experiences for students to apply their creative talents in professional settings. This commitment to creative mentorship enriches students' lives and strengthens our academic institution's bond with the community, emphasizing a collective dedication to nurturing creativity and cultivating the next generation of designers.

DESIGNING FOR GROWING MINDS

Being a father to three inspiring children is a significant aspect of my life, seamlessly intertwined with my creative skillsets. I take great joy in using my expertise to enrich their lives, whether through everyday activities or engaging



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in thoughtful design projects. From crafting a mud kitchen and gravel pit in our backyard to building an interactive chalkboard in our basement, I constantly seek to create spaces that enhance their imagination and development. Furthermore, I've designed an organized mudroom in our entryway, tailored to stimulate their growth and learning in diverse ways. These endeavors exemplify how my creative passion extends beyond my professional pursuits, playing an integral role in nurturing my children's curiosity and providing them with opportunities for exploration and inspiration.

CONCLUSION

My research embodies a diverse spectrum of creative endeavors, all united by the common thread of *"Create the World You Want to Live In."* Through my role as a designer, educator, and parent, I strive to infuse every aspect of my work with this guiding philosophy. I am driven to make a positive impact through innovative design and storytelling, engaging in professional practice with global clients, fostering creative mentorship, and enriching my children's lives with thoughtfully designed spaces and experiences. This holistic approach to creativity drives my research, motivating me to continually explore the limitless potential of design in shaping a brighter and more inspired world for everyone.