

Building a professional portfolio.

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Thesis report
February 2016



February 16, 2016

Degree programme in Hospitality Management

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Title of report Building a professional portfolio.	Number of report pages and attachment pages 19 + 23
Teacher(s) or supervisor(s) Kristian Sievers	
<p>Building a professional portfolio is a thesis report with buiding a professional portfolio for the author with a background in graphic design and event management with main interest on aesthetics side.</p> <p>This report describes the main process of selecting materials, planning and actually producing the portfolio. In addition to the portfolio there is a chapter with inspection on LinkedIn and other social medias when planning for jobsearch. Altogether it is many channels and a combination of hard work, connections, social skills and previous works in for of a portfolio that will help you on getting the dream job.</p> <p>This thesis report is mainly a report of building a professional portfolio for the author (as in collection of earlier works, not a project portfolio), rather than a large research on portfolios in general.</p>	
Keywords Portfolio, report, aesthetics.	

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1 Introduction

In this report I have written about the working process of my portfolio. I have been needing a proper portfolio for a long time, so thesis gave me a great opportunity to use actually quite a bit of time for the making process. I started with the definition and stating the need for one. I inspected books and benchmarked a lot of portfolios and came into conclusion of a printed and online versions.

I paid close attention to project management stages and I have written a small bit of these, as well as LinkedIn, the best social media platform for job application process. The ending result is a brand new portfolio with two versions – online and printed ones – and this report of the workprocess.

2 Portfolio

Definition of portfolio according to Oxford dictionary: “large, thin, flat case for loose sheets of paper such as drawings or maps” Or “A set of pieces of creative work intended to demonstrate a person’s ability to a potential employer”

(oxforddictionaries.com)

Portfolio is a good way to present many kind of work: artistic, events, experiences and other, tangible or intangible products and services.

As a designer and aesthetics specialist a portfolio is a good way to present one’s projects and earlier works. It is particularly useful in areas where the products and work results are widespread. Portfolio usually consists of written and visual contents. Sometimes portfolio can be an audiovisual combination and contain also interactivity.

2.1 Need for portfolio

For a person who has done a lot of different kind of jobs, mostly concentrating on the visual outlook and aesthetics, portfolio is best way of proofing your professional skills. For the author the need of a portfolio was obvious but this one is the first proper one showcasing wide variety of different jobs. The portfolio made now has an online version and a printed version. The online version is more restricted one and concentrates on the visual work the author has done. Printed version is more penetrative version showcasing the whole variety of his skills and knowledge, varying from events, visual work and photos.

With portfolio it is easier to show your skills and get the opportunity to get into a job interview, where they see if you would be a match for the team. The portfolio contents needs to be accurate, up to date and recent. There is no point in showcasing really old material, as this does not tell anything about your current level of professionalism. Mr. Janda writes in his book “Burn your portfolio” that portfolio is actually a minor actor in the job application process (chapter burn your portfolio....really?). Agreeing with this statement and adding that even Portfolio is really important for job searching,

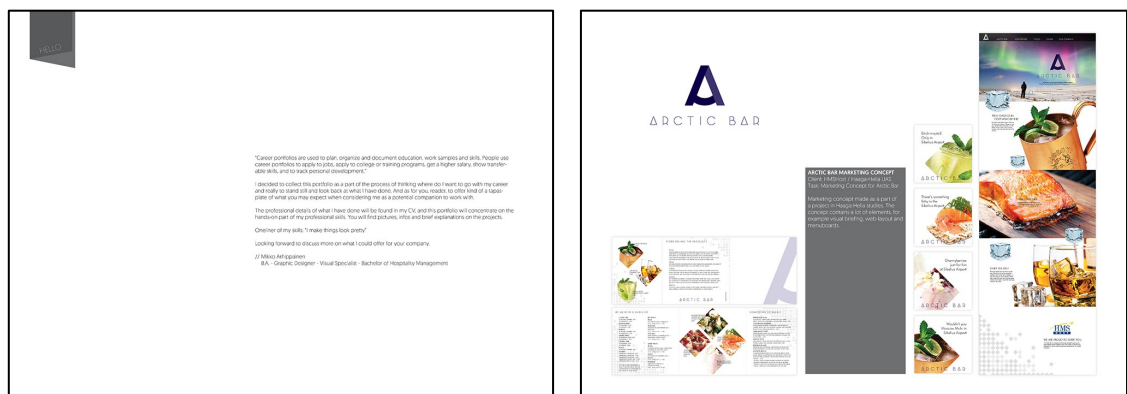
there is much more skills than just the actual working skills needed for professional level work. As Mr. Janda states in his book “Teamwork, client skills, communication, social aptitude, production speed, and business savvy all play a GIGANTIC part in what will make you successful as a graphic designer, whether your aspirations include freelancing, working for an agency, or managing your own firm.”. As these skills are something you learn only by life, and doing a lot of different kind of jobs, it seems obvious but it is always great to have other opinions about this kind of experiences and learning points too. Mr. Janda also states in his book (in chapter 5. Be nice to everybody) “treat others how you want to be treated” - as this has lead for him to make millions of dollars. Sounds amazing, but an intern who he treated really nice and actually paid respect towards, was directing her clients to Mr. Janda and they became great business contacts later.

Portfolio and digital footprint can mix up with each other, and all the materials uploaded to web are accessible for the recruiters as well – legal point of view to access personal data online by googling is another thing. For example it is illegal in Finland to google person who’s considered to be hired. It might be a good idea to share your social media links for the job applications too if they are made with good quality. The main point for preparing the portfolio is to help gather samples of current know how and help you to have something to be presented for the future employers. Also it is a good way to collect your work and see your own development in such a clear way.

2.2 Form of portfolio

It seemed reasonable to make the two versions of the portfolio slightly different, based on the used media and its nature. The printed version became the main version and online version slightly more easier on the content as the nature of online things are more scrolling and quick looks. The printed version was also more important as this is easier and worry free to carry with you to potential job contacts. The printed version, as it is more broader, needs some explaining and maybe discussion to go through, so it is safer to be presented by yourself.

Printed version enables design-oriented solutions, for example selecting the right paper, maybe some polishing and also binding options. The printed version of the portfolio will be in a black case with plastic, removable pouches, as this will make it more usable. The size will be horizontal A3 and paper will be uncoated, with material thickness at least 160g/m². It will be printed in colors, only on one side of the paper, with the backside of paper printed with light grey to give the product a finalized feeling and to prevent the paper to shift. In this case there will not be any special coatings added - neither perforations or other styling effects, as some of them are not environmentally friendly and cost a lot of money. Also as there will be only small amount of portfolios printed the production would be especially expensive and harmful for the environment.



Figures 1 & 2: layout of the printed portfolio.

The online version of the portfolio will be optimized for several devices. The structure will be really simple and only scrolling is needed for the navigation on it. (obeying the webdesign trends at the moment when the online version was made) and the contents will be optimized for many devices varying from retina-display to mobile devices. The platform will be Cargocollective, which is very versatile, free platform concentrating only showcasing portfolios. They have ready installed engine on the web page so it will be easy to create and publish. Also the basic version is free, which counts in the process.

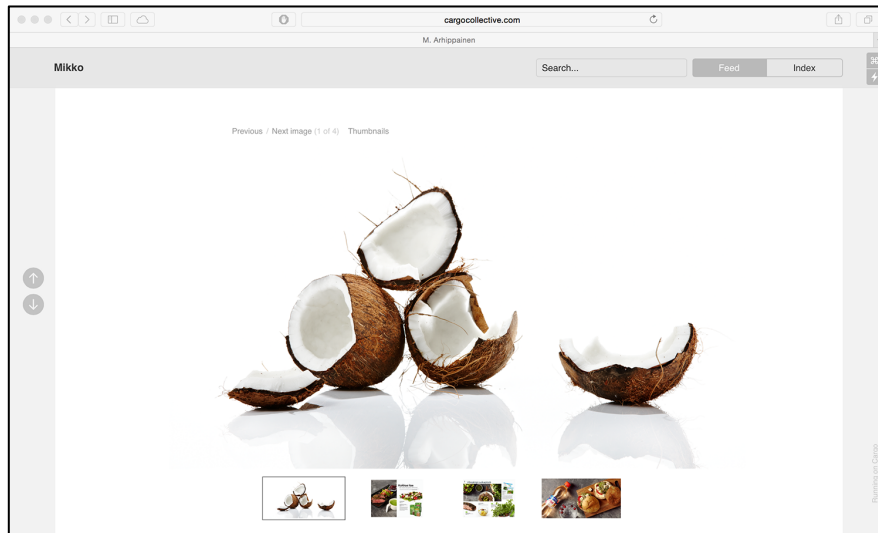


Figure 3: screenshot of the online portfolio.

2.3 Skills needed for creating the portfolio

Portfolio showcases skills in great way, and at the same time it is a way to document your achievements in very tangible way. The actual production of the material is easy, and in this case basically photos and the readymade documents end up in the portfolio. The technical and visual skills are acquired in the earlier career and education by the author.

With a graphic design background, the author was able to design a simple, yet informative entity for the whole family of products: portfolio in printed and online formats, CV, application letters and business cards. All materials in portfolio are professional quality: retouching of images and the original documents presented in portfolio are all made with industry standard qualities. In the hospitality industry this portfolio will be a great asset by presenting a personal brand and skills of the author of the portfolio.

Noting that the portfolio showcases a lot of different skills, some of the earlier works are presented in imagery and small explanations, rather than actual photos or products.

2.4 Copyright issues

As all the materials used in the portfolio are produced by the author there isn't really any copyright issues. The Finnish law for copyright (Finlex, can be accessed in the web www.finlex.fi) states, that the one who has produced the materials has the copyright to the product.

Also in general, it is seen that the producer of the actual work has the right to present the works he/she has done in their portfolio. It is important that all the legislation and copyright acts are protecting the intellectual property of individuals in this way, as this encourages all to use their creativity and act upon the issues they find they could have something to give.

3 Visuals of the application

When sending job applications it is really important to give a professional and truthful image of your self, and branding yourself is also a great idea. A big part of this is the coherency, spelling, grammar, and clean outlook of all the documents you send. For a designer the visual outlooks are even more important for the application and many times one of the key parts why the future employer gets interested in the applicant. In the media it has been a really hot topic this year, that sending video applications is one of the best ways to make the difference and get employed by a company. There are many stories supporting this trend and there are a lot of ways to make a video application – which often lead to job interviews and hiring of the person.

There are several trainings for job seekers and the author participated one of these trainings, a CV workshop held by MPS. MPS is a workforce-consulting company in Finland and the MPS consultant has participated in the process of improving the following CV. They said that many times a basic and clean CV is better than something with a lot of clutter and artistic materials. The author chose to write a basic CV and job application instead of making them, for example, to info-graphics with recognizable visuals. That can be risky, when you don't know the recipient well enough to make it special and use the style that the recipient likes.



Figure 4: CV & Portfolio outlook.

The consistency to all other materials is important as well. All of the materials you send to your future employers need to be coherent with each other in the content, as well as in outlook: fonts, colors, shapes etc. The professional outlook comes when you choose all the elements carefully and have one, strong tone of voice.

The author also has a logo, kind of a modern monogram, which is formed from initials and appears on everything sent out – for example business cards, application letters, CV, online portfolio, offline portfolio and video applications. The author sees applying for a job as a kind of marketing campaign which needs branding. It is important asset in especially when the future employer has 2 equal applicants and the choosing comes down to small details.



Figure 5: logo/monogram, which repeats in all materials. Business cards, CV, Applications, official letters, portfolio etc.

3.1 Personal Branding

Personal branding is one of the key elements when applying for a job. Part of it is visual and part of it is about knowing yourself but mostly it is about what kind of image you want to hand out for the potential future co-workers and employers. Authors of the book called “Career management in LinkedIn” state the following on personal branding:

“Personal branding is a concept that is becoming increasingly widespread. Personal branding means that you take time to reflect on the image you evoke when others see you, and what they think about you afterwards. You actively try to portray an image of yourself that you would like others, such as recruiters, to have. An image that makes you unique and makes you stand out from the rest. This means that you think about

your personal and professional goals in life and reflect on whether and how you are communicating these on twitter or on Facebook, or on LinkedIn. Personal branding therefore starts with self-knowledge and self-analysis.” Vincent, A. & Valkenburg, J (2010)

Personal branding is a great idea to do when joining LinkedIn. It is very wise to consider LinkedIn as one of the key medias when applying for a job. LinkedIn publishes job announcements and connects people within organizations and lets you share your professional views for the surrounding world. Also when you want to share content that is strictly professional and connect with your colleagues and business connections who are not part of your personal life, LinkedIn is the media.

LinkedIn, however, needs a lot of attention. As Alexandra Samuel writes in her book “Work smarter with LinkedIn” (eBook, pages 12-14), It’s not enough just to join and then forget about the profile. Very many times in LinkedIn there are profiles, that are created but after joining there's nothing happening in them. These profiles might be even harmful for the personal brand to appear in LinkedIn. There are several great examples how to nurture your online brand: one example is to ask for recommendations and, for example, rearrange your profile in an optimal way for your professional skills and experience. Another great way is to maintain the profile very often and update contents and for example to work with recommendations and groups within LinkedIn.

When the LinkedIn profile is maintained, and you add all the information, including background picture in your profile, the recruiters and headhunters are very much more interested in the profile than in the case, where you have just opened a profile without maintaining it. Of course professional assets are important but the interesting thing is that many times when you have more to say you naturally become more interesting person.

Other social medias such as Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr and Instagram might also be a very good way for you to present yourself for the future employer. However these are

not as official as LinkedIn and may be just an additional asset for job seeking, rather than your main way to get the interest of the employer.

4 Production phase

Production phase is, according to my experience, one of the hardest parts of the thesis production and needed a lot of concentration and time. On the other hand it is the most important phase where you actually show what you can do in professional way. For me, in this case, I tried to select only the samples for portfolio I can truly stand for, as some of the best works have been affected by a lot of outside opinions. The case being for example, a wedding, where you do a lot of work – design and project management wise – but on the other hand the client can influence the outcome a lot. It may be that the end result is decent but there are some minor details that actually break the entity. As a professional it is important to try to embrace the opinions of the customer and try to convince the client to choose better or make your best to fit the misfits look like they were planned groovyness.

4.1 Planning

The actual planning happened withing long time period and happened in bus, coffeeshops, airplane, on a walk, during the classes and while making food. As a designer I have a method of distracting myself and concentrating at the same time. The best ideas and the actual design work happened in my head while least expected, between cucumbers and tomatoes in the hallway of a supermarket. This is why I use iPhone as a creditable device on all communications and also making a lot of notes and lists.

The planning phase actually is actually in close connection with the benchmarking process, which opens up your mindset to multiple ideas with great potential to broaden the original idea you had. While I was certain of what to do for a portfolio, and how to design it, I noticed some typographic ideas on – for example – billboard ads next to the highway. At the planning phase I paid a lot of attention to the details and visualisations. The strong layout and only small graphic elements – being the small label on the upper left corner and a grey box under the texts I aimed to a strong entity and recognizable identity, which match the forms and nature of already existing logo and other elements of my materials.

4.2 Collecting and choosing the materials

When collecting material for a portfolio it is easiest to always document all possible events and products made with as much material as possible. Whether the actual product is tangible or intangible, the documentation is easiest to be collected in electronic format. Video, PDF documentation, photos and written reports are good material for the portfolio but also for developing your professional skills continuously. During my career I have learned that it is really good to go back to similar products and actually think what was good and what would you do differently this time – of course you need to see the products individually and enhance them with new ideas you develop in your briefing- and brainstorm sessions.

The quality of the materials has proven to be the key also in this portfolio. The higher the quality of the photos and documentation is, the easier it is to make nice presentation of your previous professional achievements. On the other hand if you have a lot of diverse materials it makes the finalized portfolio much more interesting to watch and go through. I chose my portfolio to include just photos and images of the ready products with short introductions/stories about the work done.

I concentrated on the most recent products and events but I also chose some of the older productions, keeping in mind that large-scale events made with considerable amounts of money are demanding productions. Production is more demanding with budget, with subcontractors, and the more staff you have and the more you have bought services from other parties the more the risk of something going wrong also increases. The larger-scale productions and events don't get as outdated as references as quickly as the smaller and more irrelevant pieces of work.

With design-oriented works I concentrated on commercial graphics samples and the less commercial works showcased are chosen from the most recent works as they represent my current style and state of mind. I believe that following trends also in your portfolio is very important as it shows your ability to follow the time and develop as you go.

All of the works presented in my portfolio are actual works and I have written to each project about my role in the project. As this thesis is made for Haaga-Helia UAS, the case-example is Arctic Bar made in block 8. The case-example explains briefly the background of the chosen work and backgrounds and inspirations for the final product showcased in the portfolio.

4.2.1 Case: Arctic Bar Marketing Concept

This case was made as a part of the studies in Haaga-Helia UAS. The learning project was part of block 8 on the ExWell -group studies in spring 2015. The project was very interesting especially because we got to participate in a project made with real clients and a company, which could potentially be a future employer for some of the students. The project was made with a student group gathered by students participating the study program and I was doing all of the visualizations and also participated highly on the concept ideation and design.

The project started with a competition for a large group of students by HMSHost Finland operating at Helsinki-Vantaa Airport. HMSHost Finland gave us basic brief on the project and our group started to work on some ideas. After careful consideration we decided to start working on the northern lights and elements of nature as our vision. The group I was part of was chosen to continue by the teachers and HMSHost Finland representatives.

Northern lights are unique phenomena only viewable in certain locations in the world. Finland and especially Lapland is great area to view these lights due to the pure nature and small amount of light pollution. The Finnish nature is something unique, too. We wanted to bring elements of Finnish nature – moss, granite and Finnish wood to the interiors and menu of the restaurant.

The architect had already planned the wall to be color changing according to the time of the day but we wanted to bring the wall to another level. The main idea of the concept was to utilize the led-panels installed on the wall, and make them responsive to the restaurant patrons. We believed in the power of changing element, and decided to

alter the original plan of static light scenarios to simulate the actual northern lights. The simulation would utilize the movement of the restaurant patrons via sensors installed on the restaurant hallway. Whenever a patron would have walked or run on the hallway there would be a new color and subtle movement on the wall. The visible changing elements would also draw customers to the new restaurant located in the 2nd floor of the terminal.

Graphic elements for the whole concept were inspired by nature and they would also be repeated on the actual menu cards. In the menu there would be a special color changing coating on the place of the repetitive elements (small squares on 45° angle) – this coating would be responsive for the heat emitted by a patron and the color would be changing whenever the menu were touched.



Figure 6 & 7: menu layout of the project.

The project contained a lot of areas; concept design, marketing planning, project management, revenue management and supply chain management among other smaller

parts. The areas chosen to the portfolio are restricted to the visual parts, as some of the contents were confidential and they were made in closer cooperation with the other team members.

Other sample works in the portfolio are done with real clients as a freelancer, as an employee or just pro bono, with free will and enthusiasm towards certain projects. All the projects chosen to portfolio are made with great passion and have gotten really good feedback from the clients/employers and satisfied also my own artistic views.

4.3 Production

The actual production phase is a lot easier with good planning and thorough background work done in beforehand compared to unplanned workflow. It is common sense to concentrate on the planning phase and try to take all possible things into consideration. Depending on if the actual product is tangible or intangible, the production phase has pretty much the same phases but there are small differences. For example producing an event may be done in a small office but for example catering needs facilities: a kitchen and a lot of expensive tools. In this case the intangible product becomes tangible in the printing house, and the service will be outsourced.

According to Managing Project Delivery by Melton & Iles-Smith (20-21) the project has a life cycle with 4 main stages: 1) “Business case development”, where the project is considered to be started, where the need for the project is noticed or the status quo is not considered to be a good one. 2) “Project delivery planning”, where the actual planning of the project is done. 3) “Project delivery”, when the actual product is produced, and the possible risks are mitigated. 4) “Benefits delivery”, where the outcome of the project is integrated into the business.

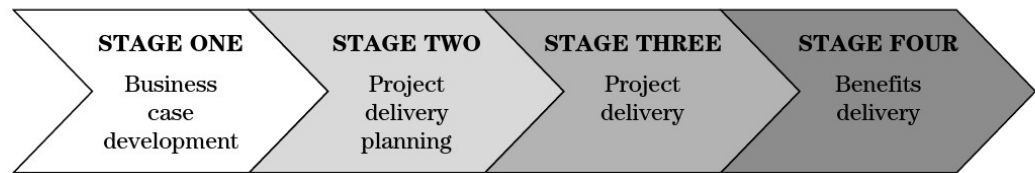


Figure 1-1 The four ‘value-added’ project stages

Figure 8: Four stages of project life cycle. Melton & Iles-Smith.

With my portfolio the actual production is rather narrow but there is still a lot to do. I started with benchmarking some portfolios made by other people with similar background to mine. The production phase was not limited to certain time. Actually the production was done simultaneous with collecting the materials and planning and the time after these phases. I had already gained a lot of experience and know-how on how to prepare and plan documents and publications so I was concentrating a lot on the design and contents, making sure that the entity would be fluent and coherent.

I aimed on making the printable portfolio as current as possible and also versatile but only with certain kind of samples of my work. I wanted to showcase the main points of my know-how and concentrate on the visual aspects of my professional career. As I have had feedback and also believe myself that these are the most important assets I have and can offer for the future employer.

This phase was completed with 2 versions of easily updateable portfolio – the electronic version as a website and the printed version. Both of them share basic visuals common to each other. The printed one contains a lot more information and showcases more in-depth information. The web portfolio’s intentions are to wake up the interest of the future employer/customer to contact and ask for more.

I will add more video to the online portfolio in the future and will also continue actively updating the contents actively with the printed portfolio. Video is one of the rising key elements in future recruiting, according to Mr. Ruuska from InHunt Group (Helsingin Sanomat 23.10.2015), as he says that the videos open a whole new experience and offer a lot of new information for applicants. I would like to add, that also it gives

a whole new perspective for the recruiter, as personality is very hard to see from the written text if the writer is not professional.

I have designed the structure of the portfolio in a way that it is easy to add and remove contents based on the need and the future projects (for example in the printed version there are no page numbers). I paid extra attention to the typography and technical solutions so that everything would be easy to update and as timeless as possible.

The publication itself is electronic so it is very easy to update and I have used InDesign, illustrator and Photoshop from Adobe to build the entity. The programs are common tools for the graphic industry and always compatible with previous versions. The website runs on Cargocollective, a portfolio website intended for designers and freelancers on the creative industry. I have showcased creative work and also some project works and events in the portfolio. As the content is creative in my portfolio this collective was a natural choice for me, keeping in mind, that this site is free and easily accessible.

4.4 Finalization

The finalization of the portfolio consists of testing, attention to details and publishing. The electronic version being a byproduct I published it long before the printable version was ready. The nature of the electronic version is more constantly updating rather than more stable, printed format.

For the testing phase I chose some of my professional contacts to give me feedback on the portfolio and then made some adjustments based on that feedback.

Just before going to the printing house, I paid close attention to the details, for example the elements being on their assigned positions and all the colors to be exact and right. As my working habit is based more on flow and how I feel and how the product looks, I tend to ignore some of the “golden rules”. The finalization was mainly just checking the details and the actual contents was on this phase already considered ready.

5 Summary

I made the portfolio as I had a strong need for one – actually I got the idea from my thesis supervisor. In my portfolio there is a lot of contents with diverse background. I made an online version, and a printed version with slightly differing contents. The main learning point for me in this project was to realize how much I have developed with my aesthetics skills and to think more on the inspiration and the importance of collecting good quality materials as sample work for the portfolio updating.

The resource scouting and reading with the input of my own experiences in the thesis process made me realize that learning is something we are exposed all the time. The first book I read was “burn your portfolio” and it made me understand fundamental, small details in getting a job. Getting a job is basically about networking, presenting yourself in various medias and just being in the right place at right time. In this process it is important to have something to proof your knowledge and skills – owning a good portfolio is a great way to show your skills.

Concentrating on LinkedIn in this thesis made me realize that it is a place for connecting people and sort of a modern day phonebook. When looking a bit more I found out, that it is really important to keep the profile up-to-date as much as possible. A “dead” profile might even be harmful for the owner and good ways to keep the profile active is to join groups and work inside LinkedIn with for example connections. Also keeping the profile active all the times, not just when looking for a new job is a good idea. The inspection got me interested to invest more in LinkedIn.

As a good outcome, I would suggest everyone working with projects and/or especially events to start collecting documentation as widely as they can. Portfolio is a good way for seeing the professional development and direction also for the portfolio owner and for the future employers.

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Attachments:

Portfolio, printed version