

Design Considerations

A brief look at designing visual
comms to support your practice.



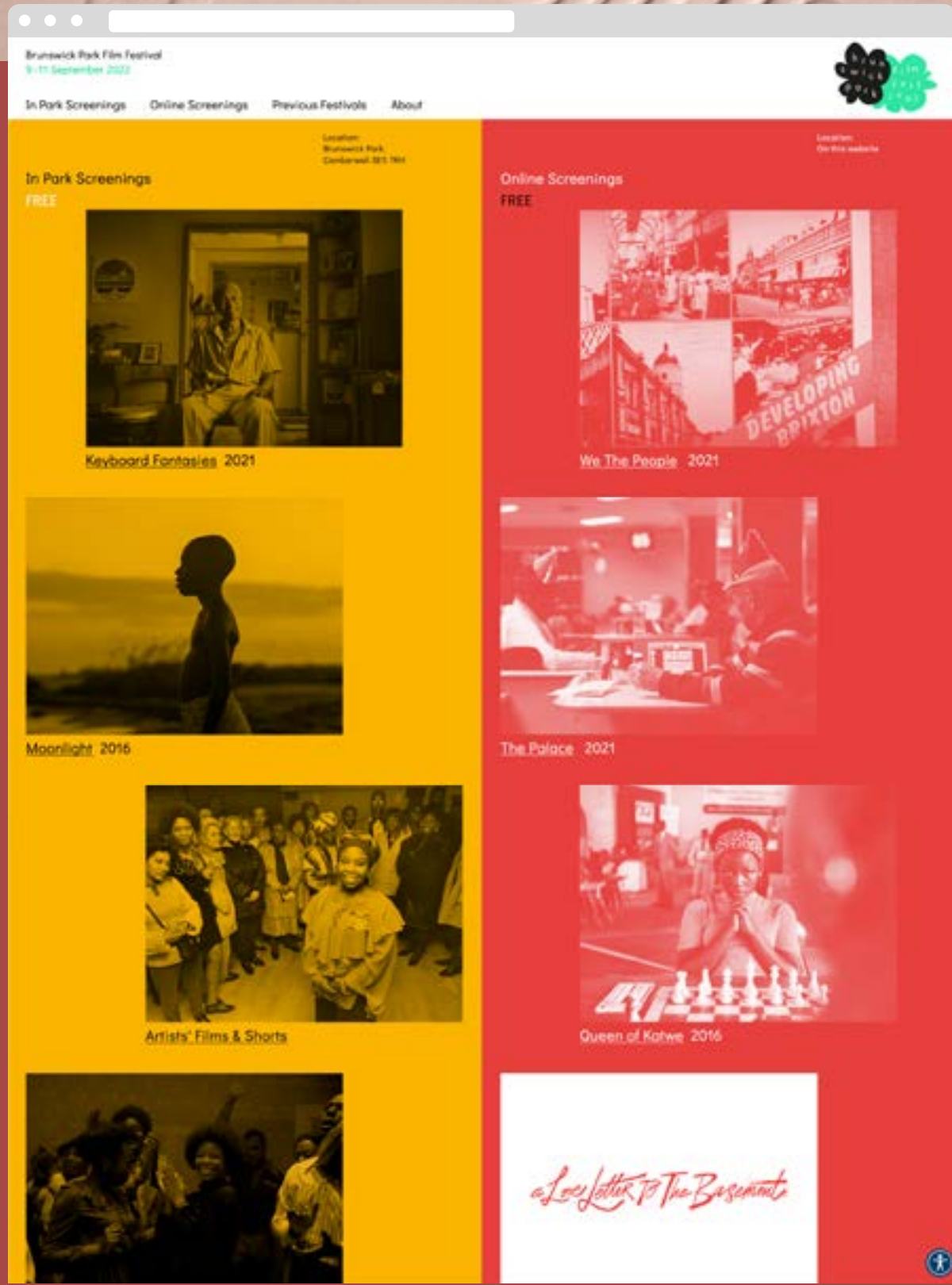
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 FILMMAKER

A lot of people say to me that I make films about East London. I make films about my environment and my immediate experience and obviously I know Hackney and East London better than anywhere else. I've got quite a strong belief that you should make work based on your own experience, not just based on some research in a book. Especially because my work is documentary-based. I'm using images from the real world. But also it's a belief that you don't have to go far to find your subject matter or get whatever meaning you want to.

My work is much more overtly political than it used to be. For me it was basically after 9/11 and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq that it became really dominant in my consciousness. Up until then I knew my country was involved in dodgy things. It always had been as a colonial power but it was only in my face after 9/11. The Citadel film, I'd been planning to film that view [of the City from East London] for years, and I'm glad I waited because it's got more and more extreme. The reason I wanted to film it initially was for aesthetic reasons: the change of the light on the buildings. But I didn't feel back in the 70s and 80s I could film that architecture without addressing what it represents. I wanted to make something which said: isn't this beautiful to look at, but isn't it shit what it represents? I started filming before covid but after Boris Johnson was elected. When he was elected I thought we really have a voice that represents business much more than it represents people.

Don't get me started about this image of East London which has come about with gentrification. Like lots of people living in Hackney, I get quite a lot of stuff from estate agents coming through my letterbox. I got some brochure, two or three years ago, through my door which was romanticising The Blind Beggar, saying how edgy it was with the Krays and all that. One of my favourite things to happen to me is that round the corner there's a pub called The Spurstone Arms, next to a laundrette on Greenwood Road. When I lived here in the 70s and early 80s I used to go to the laundrette and when I was waiting for my washing I would go and have a pint. And it was always empty, the only people in there were either asleep or waiting for their washing. I used to wonder how the place was kept alive. And it was still like it when I moved back to Hackney just ticking over, an old-style Hackney boozie. Very, very unpopular. And then probably in about 2006 it got sold off, someone bought it up and the first thing they did was chip all the plaster off the walls so it revealed brickwork. And then they brought in some crappy second hand furniture, none of it matching, you know the style. Discomfort-chic. They do that and immediately it's absolutely heaving, it's incredible. I thought where do all these 25 year-olds get the money to come and drink here every night paying however much for a Guinness?

And don't get me wrong, I'm somewhere in the middle between the bankers and the indigenous people living on the council estate. So I use all the resources, I go to the bakery under the railway arches to get my bread and I go to the restaurants and things like that. But I am nostalgic about things in Hackney. I've got a real attachment to the Rlo cinema because it's been going for so long and it is a proper independent cinema.



nearby and the world over. To be valued and value each other. And in the garden, diasporic past and present and futures can be illuminated.

Because often the threads of land care and earth knowledge are intact in cultures that originated far from here. It's just here there is the assumption that the knowledge here is intrinsically, fixedly correct and superior! And now with global north science proving the magical interconnectedness of everything and the forests and the fungi – well! Now it must be true! To interrogate and deconstruct these assumptions is always fun. To look to what people have always known and done, and to do it in the garden together, is even more fun. Though you do meet resistance. And that is part of the journey.

So working to develop a project like the Community Apothecary, I think about the satisfying systems of sharing resources that come about when we make the gardens together, the solidarity economics that have long been present in the cultures I've talked about here – communities supporting each other materially, spiritually, emotionally. This activity opens up new possibilities (which are not new but in the context of our current systems seem revolutionary) and makes me feel excited for a different world, which is already in the making. Seeds and plants to exchange, mutual acknowledgement and uplift, love and skills and medicine as currencies can take a little of the pressure off. There's a lot of good work to be done together.

Ask a tree for its support.

Community Apothecary participant Shaboo picking Calendula flowers at Mulberry Close garden in Chingford, a harvest towards making a healing skin balm for the local community.

Working out the brief

Specify the design work required.

Here is a basic brief for our book launch event:

Book Launch flier

To distribute around town and at venue
A6 size, double sided

Needs to have launch info and a bit about the publication
An image of the publication
What is happening at the event and date, time venue

Deadline for print delivery, approx 2 weeks before event
Have £35 budget and 1.5 days for labour

If possible make a couple of posters to display at
bookstores and venue, budget? time?

Book Launch socials and online promo

Create 3 or 4 images for socials
Images for socials to also be used in email newsletter
Banner for ticketing website

Needs to have launch info and a bit about the publication
An image of the publication
What is happening at the event and date, time venue
url/links to tickets, more info, other artists

Deadline for images, approx 2 weeks before event
Have £0 budget and 1 day for labour

General workflow

Use your brief to prioritise the work to be done and work out a rough timeline.

Gather images, in this case of the publication being launched or of something else relevant, images from inside the book or typography from the cover.

Make sure you have all the text details for the launch event and any other text you want to include about the publication. Double check vital details with others involved, dates, times, spelling of names.

Get the technical specifications for all the graphics you need to create, make a list of the final files you will need, formats, end use, colour mode, dimensions and resolution.

Store your files well, name them meaningfully and with version numbers if you are prone to making multiple starts. Back them up too especially for larger projects.

Sketch some rough layouts on paper or if you are comfortable with graphic software play around on screen.

Setting up print files can be a bit tricky if you haven't done it before so give yourself extra time to get it sorted. If you've not printed stuff before opt for a printer that can give you some face to face service, cos it'll probably save you time, anxiety and error.

I'd suggest starting with the design of your printed matter then moving onto online versions.

Give yourself buffer time, it can be tricky to design material for your own work, as the iterations, possibilities can easily feel endless!

Budget: money and time

Be realistic about your budget, including what you can do yourself and try to account for the time that will take.

If getting stuff printed commercially using an online printer will generally be cheapest. Or if you know a small local printer talk to them about what is possible within your budget.

Can you print it yourself? What access to printers do you have, at a workplace, open access studio, library? Is it actually feasible to print what you require?

Print can be expensive, especially if you are using non-standard paper stocks. Paper has gone up in price considerably since 2020 and so weigh up if you want to print only a few fliers or posters on a nice paper or if you'll benefit from a wider distribution.

Try to work out how many printed pieces you'll need. You don't want to create unnecessary waste or be storing 100s of books or other printed matter for years.

Communicating about your work can be done without cost if you spend time actively on socials or other online networks like substack or an email newsletter.

Accessibility

At the beginning of the design stage take accessibility considerations into account.

On both screen and print pieces make sure information is clear, that you've enough colour contrast, that your type is at a legible size.

Online graphics should be accompanied by the relevant captions and alt text.

Spend some time researching the accessibility standards for the outcomes/formats you are working on and prioritise these within your design process.

Images

Basic specs for images to be used in print or on screen and approaches to making them.

Think about the final size/ratio of the graphics you'll be producing will the original photo or image you have transform well across those?

Do you want an image that conveys information or something more akin to a background/mood?

You can use high quality photos from most modern phone cameras for use on screen and in basic print outcomes.

Scanning flat works is also an option, make sure you scan at 300dpi or more.

Images used in print must be of a certain resolution to print clearly, cleanly. Generally speaking you want an image file to be 300dpi at the desired print size (in physical dimensions).

Images to be used online are only reliant on the pixel dimensions and you'll be able to see if an image is too small for your needs on the screen.

Colour

Selecting key colours and using colour modes.

Try to stick to a colour palette for each graphic outcome or series of, it'll make your job easier and it'll help people navigate the information and connect numerous pieces of communication when needed.

You don't need to have a fully set number of colours, but a few key colours that can be added too as appropriate.

If you are working on graphics for something that has a range of outcomes over a long time frame you might want to consider making a bit of a style guide, which would include a colour palette, typefaces and possibly some layout templates.

Colour reproduction spectrum for print is different to that on screen. Print will generally be a bit murkier and cannot replicate the very bright RGB spectrum colours without using spot colours, such as full RGB green, which would require a fluorescent ink.

Typography

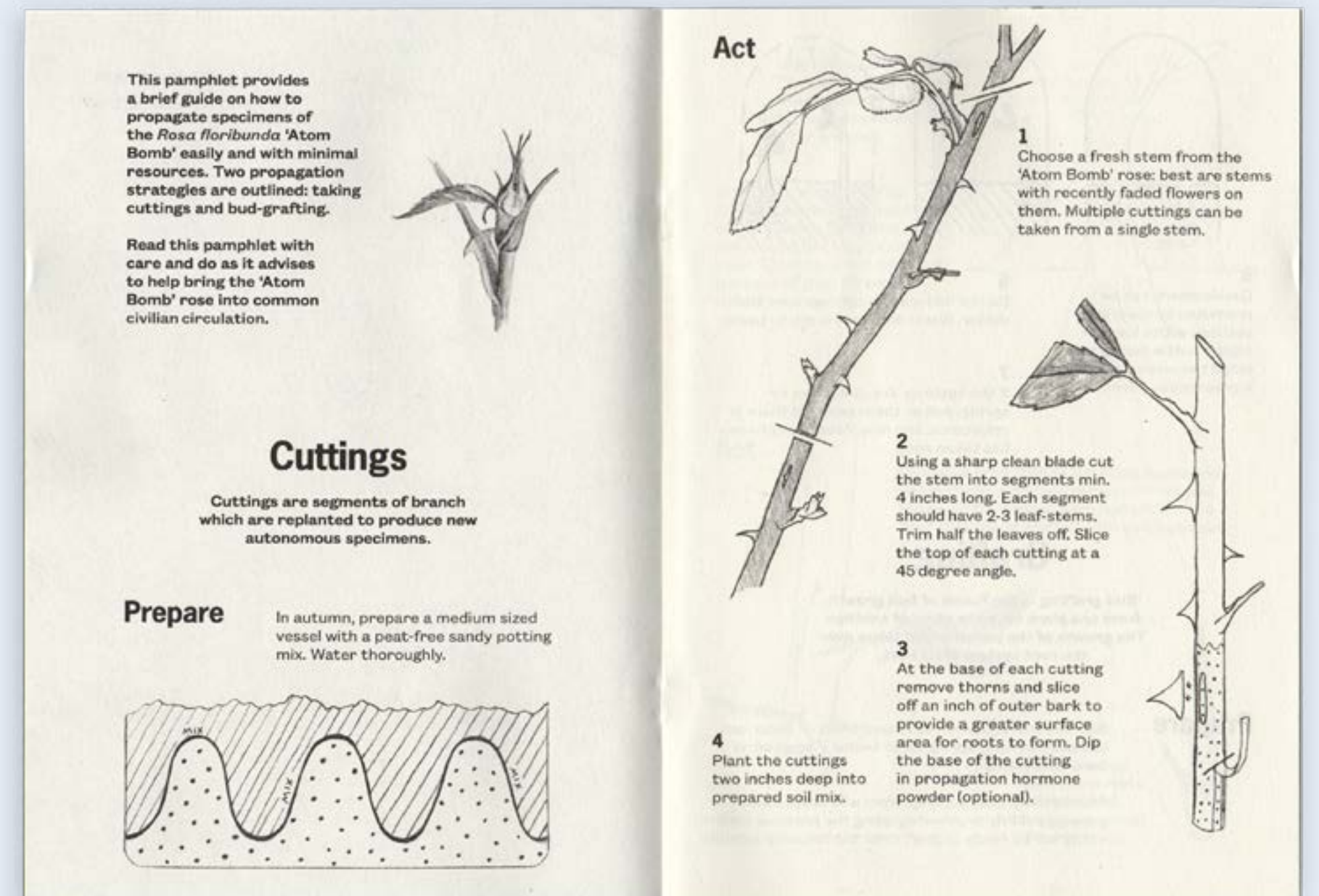
Working with text and where to source typefaces.

Sourcing type: there are many free/libre/open source typefaces available online as well as affordable options from independent type foundries if you have budget.

You can use as many typeface as you like, but it's generally easier to work with fewer, 1 to 3 is enough in most cases.

Consider the hierarchy of the text information and how that can be emphasised by your typographic choices through selection of typeface, size, weight and colour.

Most software will let you set up typographic styles that you can then apply to a variety of headers and body text, a similar but less complex set up works in html/online.



Tools and materials

Options for software, graphic tools and sourcing paper.

We use Adobe Creative Cloud software, but its expensive and restrictively subscription based.

Canva is an online graphics tool, there is a free option as well as subsidised options for not-for-profits and similar organisations. The free account option is quite limited but fine for simple online graphics.

Scribus is an open source graphics tool, somewhat like InDesign, it can be quite clunky, but has its charms, including the ethics of open source options in a market where Adobe is often seen as the only option.

There are other software and tools available ask around in your network see what people you know use or have access too and how you might also access it.

You can always produce graphics by hand and get them on screen by photographing or scanning.

If your are outsourcing print, the printer will generally sort out the paper stock. You can specify stocks though printers will have their own restrictions in terms of minimums on specialty stocks and which paper merchants they have accounts with.

If you choose to make your graphics by hand or you are going to print it yourself there are a few paper merchants which have more reasonable minimums, see the resources for links.

Outputting files for screen

Pixel dimensions

RGB colour mode

Common file formats jpg, png, gif or webp

Make sure you know the pixel dimensions for any specific sized graphic required. Depending on the software you are using you may be able to keep multiple size options of the same layout components in a single file.

Any image file you are outputting for use on screen will need to be in RGB colour mode. Find out how to set RGB colour mode in the software you are using and ensure you are working and saving in it.

File sizes, try keep images reasonably small under 1mb or under 500kb if possible. A lot of sites will automatically resize your images if too large, sometimes that's great other times it might cause compression and pixelation.

Final location. When possible it's worth testing to see what overlays there are and what any automatic cropping might do.

Outputting files for print

300dpi @ print size

CMYK colour mode

Common file format pdf

Make sure you have enough time/attention to proofread and check printers proofs before sending files to print or employ someone else to help or do it for you.

Check that all the images you are using are 250dpi to 300dpi at the final print size. If you have access to Adobe Acrobat you can use their preflight tools.

Check the amount of bleed required by the printer, its usually 3mm or 5mm on all edges. Check to see if the printer requires crop marks, some do, some don't.

If you are printing something in full colour you'll need to supply the file in CMYK colour mode. Find out how to set CMYK colour mode in the software you are using and ensure you are working and saving in it.

If you are printing something in single colour you can use a grayscale colour mode, the same goes for setting Risograph print files. Most printers will have comprehensive guides on their website.

If in doubt talk to your print supplier :-)

Resources

Tools:

www.canva.com

wiki.scribus.net/canvas/Scribus

www.adobe.com

www.osp.kitchen/tools

colourcontrast.cc/

Type:

www.design-research.be/by-womxn

fonts.google.com

www.velvetyne.fr

www.atipofoundry.com

www.colophon-foundry.org

Printers:

You Love Print

Mixam

Pagemasters

Calverts

Pureprint

Open access:

The Old Waterworks, Southend

London Centre for Book Arts

Rabbits Road, London

Unit 33, Hastings

Paper merchants/mills:

G.F. Smith

Fedrigoni

Paperback

Design Print Bind is the studio practice
of graphic designers Flaminia Rossi
and Samantha Whetton.

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