

EPIISODE 086

PAC NYC

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Leo Porto and Natalee Ranii-Dropcho, PORTO ROCHA

AND

Bob Pilon, PAC NYC

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to The Follow-up, a weekly podcast that goes in depth into projects recently reviewed on Brand New featuring conversations with the designers, and sometimes their clients, uncovering the context, background and design decisions behind the work.

ARMIN VIT

Hi, this is Armin Vit and welcome to episode number 86 of The Follow-up.

Before we get started, a semi-quick note to let you know that this will be the last episode of 2024 and we will come back as early as possible in January of 2025. As some of you know from previous hiatuses — haitusi? — this is our busiest time of the year as we produce the materials for the Brand New Conference which take up pretty much all of our waking hours and leaves little time for anything else. We know it was a short, quote unquote, season, with a few interruptions and delays so we'll do our best to be more consistent next year and aim to reach that elusive 100th episode. Having said that...

This week we are following up on the Perelman Performing Arts Center, PAC NYC for short. Long envisioned as a major international cultural institution in the heart of Lower Manhattan, it is the final element and cultural keystone of the 2003 plan, developed during Mike Bloomberg's tenure as mayor, to rebuild the World Trade Center site after the tragedy on 9/11. PAC NYC is a new home for emerging and established artists in theater, dance, music, opera, film, and media from New York and the world. With a 129,000 square-foot building spread across multiple levels, the performance space offers flexible

layouts in three theater spaces that can be combined to provide dozens of seating configurations, and the lobby level includes a restaurant, bar, terrace, and stage open to the public.

The project, designed by Brooklyn, NY-based Porto Rocha, was posted on Brand New on April 23, 2024. You can pull it up on your browser at bit.ly/bnpodcast086 that is B I T dot L Y slash bnpodcast086, all in lowercase.

This week we are joined by Leo Porto, Co-Founder and Creative Director of PORTO ROCHA; Natalee Ranii-Dropcho, Strategy Director at PORTO ROCHA; and Bob Pilon, Chief Marketing Officer, Senior Advisor at PAC NYC.

In this conversation we learn about the various challenges that this project demanded from the identity: to convey accessibility to a large audience, to appeal to high-end donors, and to provide a fresh perspective for how a performing arts center in New York should and could present itself without being too elitist or too niche or too experimental or too mainstream. Easy peasy, right? Well, at least it seems that way when you bring in the thoughtful, seemingly never not chill minds at PORTO ROCHA to work on it through their constant search for the magic in the tension of challenges like this or, as Natalee more succinctly explains, how, quote, “harnessing tensions can be a positive friction to create something new” as we go in-depth into how a seemingly simple cube device is able to solve all of this and more.

Now, let’s listen in as Bryony follows up with Leo, Natalee, and Bob.

BRYONY GOMEZ-PALACIO For over a decade. I have personally spent hundreds of hours scouring venues for the Brand New Conference and First Round, be it online or in person, always seeking a unique and memorable experience that is then matched by an interesting and affordable city for our attendees.

All this to say that I am a clear sucker for a venue with good branding and the recently inaugurated PAC NYC does not disappoint. It actually excites me.

Leo, Natalee, and Bob, welcome to The Follow-Up.

LEO PORTO Thank you. Thanks for having us.

BOB PILON Thank you. Great to be here.

BRYONY Let's take a minute to introduce each of you so our audience gets a sense of who is who and who you're representing.

LEO I'm Leo Porto, one of the founders and creative directors at PORTO ROCHA, a strategy and design agency based in Brooklyn, New York.

NATALEE RANII-DROPCHO I'm Natalee Ranii-Dropcho. I am the strategy and copy director at PORTO ROCHA.

BOB Hi, and I'm Bob Pilon. I'm representing the Perlman Performing Arts Center, actually known as PAC NYC and have been on assignment from Bloomberg Philanthropies working on this project for the last three and a half years.

BRYONY Let's take a few minutes to establish the origin and the location and overall structure of the Performing Arts Center so that we get a good context of where this new brand comes from.

BOB After 9/11, there was a significant process to rethink and reimagine what the World Trade Center would be after the greatest terrorist attack in the history of the United States. Obviously commerce and finance was going to be at the heart of the World Trade Center, but there was a vision really to make that space more than just a place where people worked, a thriving community where people worked, they lived and they enjoyed themselves, whether that was through public space or the arts. Very early on, the idea of a performing arts center, a cultural center was part of the plans and when the plans were established in 2003, the space that we're at now was designated for a performing

arts center. It could have been a parking lot, it could have been a lot of things, but the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, which was established after 9/11 to spur economic growth downtown, put aside a hundred million dollars to jumpstart the project.

And then some very generous donors, including Ronald Perlman, which is the namesake and other philanthropists came in to match the hundred million, which gave the project its legs. It really started establishing some momentum in around 2011 after the Memorial Museum were firmly in place as the first priorities. And then in 2016, ground broke, and I'm leaving out a lot of history, but 2016 ground broke and in September of 2023, the Performing Arts Center opened. It is the final piece of the rebuilding of the World Trade Center, which is very exciting and special and because of the meaning behind it, it's a open to the public venue, so you don't need a ticket to walk in. There's a lobby stage activity happening throughout the week that's free and open to the public. There's a restaurant by Marcus Samuelson and then of course upstairs in the theaters there's music, dance, opera and a whole bunch of other activities, conversations we rented out to corporate events and nonprofits and so it's a thriving cultural center in the heart of lower Manhattan.

BRYONY It is an enviable space, I have to say. Now, what were some of the key considerations, Bob, that you and your team were seeking in a creative partner once you were able to move on to now need a brand?

BOB So we had two distinct challenges, and I say challenges affectionately opening a new cultural center in New York City, which is arguably the cultural epicenter of the world. One, establishing something like this in New York is hard in and of itself because there's so much competition, there's so many other places for people to go and enjoy the performing arts and entertainment. And then second, the World Trade Center has never really been a place where people think of going to have fun. We also didn't want this to feel very elite and feel like it was just for wealthy people throughout the city. We wanted to make sure

that this was very well presented as an accessible public space. And so that's a tough balance, right? When you're creating a brand to capture those two visions and the ethos behind it. We wanted something fresh. We wanted a fresh face and fresh team, and our team reached out to the and Felipe to see if they would be interested in taking on this project. To answer your question more succinctly, it was about fresh creativity and bringing on a team that can balance to what I would consider really challenging kind of objectives into one.

BRYONY And what was it about PORTO ROCHA that drew your attention?

BOB Their past work obviously speaks for itself. We liked what they did with the likes of the Sundance Film Festival and other culturals, a few museums. They've worked on one in Mexico City. We were really inspired by the work that they've done. It looked different. I have said in the past that I think that the performing arts sector in New York City, a lot of it looks the same and that's not a criticism, it's just the way it is. There's not a ton of resources for marketing and branding and creative and so we wanted to make sure that this stood out and looked fresh and different and fun.

BRYONY And Leo, what was that phone call like?

LEO Definitely received with a lot of enthusiasm, of course, for many reasons. Just the importance of PAC NYC to the city alone was really impressive and I think our whole team got really excited right off the bat when we were invited to participate in the RFP, we ended up meeting with the whole team here at our office in Bushwick, and I think there's an immediate alignment in terms of our philosophy of how we like to approach similar projects and an overall chemistry that was really exciting. Felipe and I being Latino immigrants, thinking about how that alone creates just such a personally important project that's going to be permanent in the city of New York. That was a driving force. But not just that, I think all of the ambitions of the project, like Bob was describing, this big goal of being inclusive to all five boroughs of New York and not thinking of theater and design as an exclusive discipline

is something that we take very seriously. And as we were being briefed on the project, we just felt an immediate alignment, as I said. So we were all super excited, to be honest. I dunno how else to describe it, even more excited when we got the project.

BRYONY What was the overall timeline of the project? As we go into the details, it's always good to have an understanding of how long it took.

LEO The project took, and you guys correct me if I'm wrong, Natalee, I think you probably know the numbers a little bit more specifically than me, but I would say around six months. We started in June, 2022 and actually we're still working together, so definitely more than six months, but just the bulk of the work, six months it started with us visiting the construction site, conducting several interviews with stakeholders, really understanding the main challenges that Bob outlined, those three challenges of being able to change the perception of theater as an exclusive form of entertainment. Also the architecture, this huge beautiful majestic cube that's entirely made out of marble is both beautiful but also a little bit intimidating. And the site itself, as Bob was describing, people don't really associate the 9/11 memorial site as a place for you to necessarily go entertain yourself. There are several barriers for entry plus the fact that New York is extremely competitive, as Bob also said, not only other theaters but so many other kinds of things you can do. So we did a very thorough analysis of the competitive landscape and all of these challenges in order to make sure that we were well equipped to tackle this challenge.

BRYONY And Natalee, all of that gathering of information, what was the process like for you and your team in turning it into something more tangible?

NATALEE We always challenges as opportunities to harness and find a nexus between the tensions that can allow us to create something new. And so all of these challenges that we were faced with in the research and had to contend with in welcoming people in the historically charged site of 9/11, this beautiful but also imposing marble architecture and the history of exclusion, performing arts as a whole are things

that we really took into the process, especially when researching the competitive space. We saw that there was this split happening between these legacy institutions who had really great reach but skewed more traditional in their approach to branding, more elitist in their approach to branding. And then there are these newcomers who had perhaps pushed the boundaries as it concerned visual and verbal identity or even their programming, but they were still quite niche and marketed toward a smaller creative class audience, which excludes a lot of New York.

We saw this opportunity to position PAC NYC as both a mass and contemporary brand, something with a scale that would appeal to New York residents from every borough, travelers coming to the city, but with this programming and experience driven approach that aimed to create this really welcoming and inclusive identity that invited the world in. What was interesting throughout the process is in order to deliver on that, we ended up harnessing some of those very challenges we identified as obstacles in the beginning and then subverted them to kind of weave into the fabric of an identity. So a brand that really became the world stage and was able to reflect the artists, the audiences within its fabric rather than keeping them relegated to the performance or the seats alone.

BRYONY That's really interesting. As you moved from the strategy into creative, what were those initial conversations and perhaps first creative presentation, what did that include? Territories, mood boards, flushed out ideas...

NATALEE While we had around one creative as part of the strategy phase, did different territories to align conceptually on the roots that we wanted to go and we had initially presented two paths, one that was more about this space that was a home New York's living room, this idea that anyone from any background, age experience could come to PAC NYC and really feel at home and sink into this space and the many places that it offered from the restaurant to the performances to the

public lobby and feel really at home in it. And then we had this other side that was more about transformation and really thinking about the site itself and how it could transform the possibilities that you could experience within it. The stages we were really inspired by, so the performing spaces are quite modular and can adapt to fit different sizes of audiences or different performances based on what the artist and curators are looking for. That act of the stages transforming, we wanted to translate into the identity itself an identity that would always transform, adapt, and reinvent itself. So one that was focused a bit more on transformation, another that was focused more on this sense of a home or New York's living room and we ended up taking inspiration from both I would say into the first round of identity.

LEO That informed a lot of our decisions. We had two sides that we had to consider. On the one hand we're saying everyone is welcome and that alone is a challenge because we're talking to a really wide range of target audiences that needs to feel like they're welcomed and that resonate with the space sometimes the easy way to do that is to create an identity that's super neutral so we're not alienating anyone, but that goes against our main objective of creating differentiation in a space that's so saturated already. That was one of the main challenges. How do we create an identity that is both really bold and confident and has a very uniquely PAC NYC point of view, but at the same time allows enough space for it to adapt to all these different genres of programming that we're talking about and different people that we want to reach and different moments throughout the season.

So there's a lot of flexibility also calculated into the system. That kind of takes us to the other side of the equation, which is like I said, this wide range of programming. We're talking about sometimes cats the musical, sometimes we're talking about really serious performances or a hip hop dance festival or poetry or whatever it may be. There needs to be that flexibility that allows to accommodate for all these different genres and people. That was one of the big takeaways of the project was creating a system that could do both and not only

communicate PAC as an institution, which is extremely important, communicating PAC as this iconic site for people to visit, but also be able to communicate all of the unique programming that was taking place and being able to reach those unique audiences individually as well as collectively.

BRYONY Bob, as you started to hear all of this information coming your way, what was your reaction in that of your team and what kind of feedback did you start to provide in order to get everybody to the next step?

BOB It probably took six to nine months, right? This was a challenging project. This is 20 years in the making. There's a lot of people behind it, so there's a lot of voices that need to be heard and get feedback from. What I was confident in really was complimentary on was how simple the PORTO ROCHA team's approach was to the branding and the design. Powerful, profound but also simple enough to meet a mass contemporary audience but also be able to speak to an elite donor audience. It's a very hard thing to do visually. It was wonderful. The really hard part for us, and we went back and forth on this for a long time, was the actual brand name, the branding of the institution, the building had a name Perlman Performing Arts Center. Not everyone in the world is going to remember that, and so we needed to distill that down to something that would work on social and digital and in a colloquial way, just be something that people would be able to say and familiarize himself with.

So PAC NYC was for me a really strong option because we were calling it the PAC informally and not through the media as a team, but then the NYC part of it was not something we really thought about originally, but there's not many places that are more New York City than the World Trade Center. Keeping that cultural, the heritage piece of this, and while we wanted to be for the world and are for the world, I think rooting ourselves in New York City and reminding people where we were and particularly at the World Trade Center was really important and the Portia team, again, simple, but a lot of complexity

behind the ideas that they came up with from New York City for the world was, I don't know if we're calling that a brand mission, but was the perfect way to introduce ourselves because again, didn't want this to just look like a lower Manhattan, lower New York City project or just a New York City project, but it was still big enough the way they approached it to position ourselves a globally strategically as a business. We didn't want to market ourselves to the world initially. You've got an audience that you've got to cultivate. It's going to be primarily New York and then we'll pull from the outer boroughs and we'll pull from the Tri-state area, hopefully start pulling from across the country and around the world, but we really needed to root ourselves as a New York City institution and balance it as also an institution that we wanted to build a global brand around.

BRYONY That's a really interesting perspective figure out with something so new to have a very solid local foundation before branching out. Now in terms of the logo, which has so much depth, but you kind of have to find it, Leo, if you can walk us through the development of the typography and for our audience where the square comes from and all of the details.

LEO I think that's a good segue into some of the things Bob was just bringing up, which is that tension of legacy, but also being a mass and temporary institution. That building is going to be there as long as we're probably going to be alive, I'm assuming. So we wanted to make sure that whatever design we made was built to last the test of time, so that was one main consideration. The square came quite naturally as an inspiration of the architecture itself. We felt like if there's a building or an institution that could own the square, it's PAC NYC, a perfect marble cube with that size, that importance. It has a really confident take through the logo, but also extremely flexible in how we apply motion behaviors and it expands into all of the possibilities of what's happening inside, so you can dive into the logo and experience firsthand all of the different things that PAC has to offer.

That was a big part of the insight in terms of the logo, creating something that was bold and confident and timeless enough to be there for many, many years to come. On the other hand, having that flexibility through motion behavior that is always changing, always alive, always kind of adapting to its surroundings and formats and so forth. And when it comes to the typography, also very similar inspiration. Looking at the square motif of the building and creating a custom font that every single letter form is perfectly square. It's a subtle nod to the architecture, but also it immediately evoked a New York urban feeling that we thought felt extremely appropriate and was both strong in character but also a little bit neutral enough to not get tired over time. We were super conscious of not doing something that was extremely trendy and that wouldn't last. So that was kind of the thinking.

BOB I want to underscore what Leo said about the design and making sure that people had a good sense of what was inside the building. It was a really smart concept and again, we have the challenge of worst terrorist attack in American history happening in that location. No one really ever thinking to go to the World Trade Center area for fun and a marble cube that could be intimidating and not overly inviting. There's no windows in the building, so it's really the stairway up and then that's where you get your sunlight, and so this idea of using the cube as a vessel to show all the exciting things happening inside, we really thought that that was clever and smart. Probably one of favorite parts of the brand system.

LEO Like taking a peek inside.

BRYONY And I think it speaks to the two territories that Natalee was talking about earlier. You're in the living room watching this, but at the same time it transforms with all of the motion as it comes alive on the various applications. Natalee, in terms of the strategy, how involved is your team moving forward into the creative?

NATALEE Strategy stems the whole way through the project, especially because once we move into identity work, we're also developing the verbal

identity in tandem as the visual identity is being developed, there's this constant balance of making sure that we're creating a voice that can invite the world in. Just like the logo is doing, the job of showing people what's inside the voice is another way to extend that invitation. As part of that work, we developed this persona of the people's host, which really carried the weight of inviting people inside. When you think about a host and their role, they have this fluidity and ability to gather people in small intimate settings like you might meet in the lobby or at the restaurant with friends, but also are able to carry the weight of a round of applause at cat's angelical ball and really get you excited to see a show.

So having this voice that could welcome and challenge energize and educate, but also similar to the challenges we were trying to capture within the identity and creating this mass contemporary brand that could invite a range of people inside. We wanted the voice to feel very straightforward. We didn't want added flourishes. We wanted it to be easily translatable. We wanted it to feel accessible to people regardless of their native language. We made a lot of decisions that worked in tandem with the typography, especially when we think about these bold headlines that we were showing and repetition that was happening throughout the visual identity. We were also carrying that repetition and boldness through in the copywriting, took it across these messages in a way that felt like this open invitation that anyone could accept and come inside.

BOB One of the things that struck me about the strategy, which again was really smart, there are four pillars of the brand come as you are, and so everything that we think about in our public facing work, we want to fit into at least three of these come as you are here for a good time, show, don't tell, and that's a really important one that I'll get back to and then art as exchange. The show don't tell one was important to me and the team because we're presenting a lot of work inside the PAC that tells serious stories about the way the world is, and I think a lot of nonprofit social impact groups, however you want to call them,

will present things like that or will work on issues like that and tell you how you should feel or tell you or prescribe to you what you should do or think and that was an important thing for us not to relay to audiences that we're going to tell you what you should think when you leave a Bill T. Jones piece about gun violence. You should leave there either learning something, being entertained, being educated, or none of those, and that's okay. The show don't tell was important for us. Come as you are, the accessibility piece, show up in jeans and t-shirts or show up in a black tie and you're going to feel welcome at the PAC. I really like the strategic pillars that the team put together, which has helped us with a lot of our public facing work and even the experience inside the PAC.

BRYONY Those four pillars really stand out beyond a corporate personality approach. They are very deep truths that while the audience doesn't get them spelled out, they get to live them through. Correct, yeah. All of the communications and the events that you're putting together. Let's shift gears for a second and talk about the stationary, the business card with a cutout die cut. It is so refreshing to see an old school stationary set at this point. It's not something that a lot of people are producing.

LEO The stationary sets, to be honest, is something that we designed in every one of our design directions for PAC NYC, not because it was a priority touchpoint, but because we thought it would help also showcase a different manifestation of the brand. We were doing a lot of digital applications, a lot of motion, a lot of also big out-of-home placements, and in many ways the stationary served as the smallest possible format for us to explore and in the case of PAC and particularly when we think about the relationship to Bloomberg philanthropies and the need to be constantly meeting with potential investors, the business card also became a really important touch point. It's a little bit of both I think. It wasn't the priority of the project, but it was something that we thought was important enough for us to invest some time into and we were really happy to see Pac NYC actually produce those cards.

As you know, a lot of times clients when they have to cut production budgets and they see how much it costs to do, they cut on thousands of business cards. That's one of those places where they would maybe let go of a nice design gesture, but it wasn't the case. The process was very similar conceptually to what we were just talking about, having a super simple logo that's really iconic signals PAC NYC, but also serves as a window into different spaces and a portal into what's inside and that relationship between inside and outside. So that's kind of where the thinking comes.

BRYONY That stationary is not a mockup.

LEO It's not a mockup. No.

BRYONY That is refreshing and in a way it feels very grounded. That's the kind of stationary we used to see 20, 30 years ago where you had the different colors for the business cards where it was all very solid and we don't see that as much nowadays for sure. When you can print the logo and color out of your printer at the office, you don't print stationary, you just print your letterhead along with your document.

LEO There's a level of restraint, right? Yeah. That connects back to what we were saying earlier that one, we wanted to make sure it felt timeless, that it felt like it's been there for a while and that it's going to continue to be there for a while longer. Besides that, in order for us to have such a flexible identity, we need to have a really strong foundation. It's in these moments that you realize the system is really considered. Every detail is really sharp, and when we establish a framework that is so sharp, it gives us permission to be way more expressive through everything else the system contains, whether that's photography, video, color, illustration or whatever it might be. Really looking at the identity through that perspective of a platform that can be very much a living organism that adapts to the world around you. I think another consideration behind the stationary and a lot of the more foundational elements of the system was making sure we had a really

tight framework that could host, no pun intended, many different shows and many different activations throughout the year.

BRYONY Bob, is this something that you're either already doing or look to bring in-house, the actual implementation of all of these materials moving forward?

BOB It's probably a hybrid plan. We've been working with PORTO ROCHA on another project that we'll be announcing later this summer. While we have incredible leadership like Mike Bloomberg and others on our board, and Mike's the Chair, the PAC is very much a startup, and so while a year ago when we were opening, we wanted to do everything all at once, it was nearly impossible. We had to hire people just to figure out how to distribute tickets. We had to get a website built, we had to get the building built. Building a building alongside building an organization is a very unique challenge, getting a restaurant partner in the building and operating as a third party. So I say all of that because we've got ambitions and a lot of plans for future marketing and brand activity, but I think it's an iterative process because we're so new and growing, everyone's learning by the day, we will have presented over 20 different programs in the theaters in the inaugural season, and I think after this summer, after Cats, which is in the building and Angelica Bell, the team will be able to just take a step back and look at what really worked over the first year, what didn't work, and keep refining and iterating on that, which of course the brand is a central point of all that activity much more to come and I think the work that PORTO ROCHA presented to us, I'd say a lot of it was implemented, but there's a lot more that could be done.

BRYONY I guess my question comes then into what are the tools that are being transferred? How do you share all of this knowledge, the grids, the foundation to the person who's going to be doing it on the day to day basis?

BOB We've hired a marketing and communications team that is taking the baton on much of that, but there'll be new projects like the one

we're working on where PORTO ROCHA's creativity and partnership will be important.

BRYONY Question for each of you. I want to know if there was a particular moment or an element or a meeting, something that really stuck with you as saying, okay, from this point forward, this is going to be amazing.

NATALEE I wouldn't say that there was a point in the project where it was okay, we got it all sorted out onto the next, if we're really creating a world that takes on a life of its own as we're crafting and after we're crafting it and sustaining that momentum throughout the duration of the project was really important, but I would say that we were very aligned and in sync with the team through every aspect, even from our first discovery presentation where we're showing these different territories and the team is kind of saying, wow, these are things that we have always thought about and discussed, but we've never seen them reflected back to us in this way. That actually captures exactly what we're trying to say and the willingness when we got into strategy and we're trying to express how we could invite the world and how we could approach all of these different people.

I think the openness of the PAC NYC team to equally want to share that challenge together and push the boundaries was I think a really solid mark for us that okay, this is a brand that wants to do what it says it wants to do and puts that into action. So those kind of foundational pieces and alignment allowed us to, I think create a strong scaffolding for where we were to take the brand both visually and verbally and creating this type of performing art center that hadn't really been seen before or hadn't expressed itself in a way that stepped outside the confines of the traditional box of elitist institutions and really wanted to become this center for everyone to come and feel like they could belong.

LEO I'm trying to think of a specific moment, but I already mentioned our very first meeting here at the office, which I think left such a great first impression. I was just super surprised at the enthusiasm of the entire

team and the fact that there's so many different people representing different aspects of PAC NYC, including Bill the artistic director, including just a lot of people that were there because they really cared about the project and they cared about how important this branding work would be for the success of pac. So to me, that was a great first interaction. There was also another super interesting meeting, which was getting to actually meet Michael Bloomberg, which I'm not going to lie, I was a little bit nervous about. It was our final meeting before we got the green lights or the approval to actually move forward, but it was one of those moments where it just felt a little surreal, me and Philippe in the Uber over to go meet with Michael Bloomberg and thinking we all started as graphic designers and here we are going to talk to the former mayor of the city about a project.

It went great to talk to Mike and he approved it, so here we are. But yeah, just a little random piece of information.

NATALEE One other moment that I remember, it seems like interpersonal connection is a theme here, but during our identity presentation, we went to the PAC NYC offices at the time and we had brought and printed out different posters to show how the identity would manifest for different types of performances and how it would flex, and there were big posters and we laid them all out on the table at the end of the meeting and just seeing everyone's expressions of delight and it was something that you could hold, and I feel like that was the moment where everything felt real to people. All of the work that we had been doing, and it was kind of culminating into this moment that ultimately we become a signifier for the brand out in the world for all the performances they would do. That coming together and everyone getting to experience that tangibility of the identity I feel like was a mark and milestone for us.

LEO One last moment that I think was super special was when our whole team gathered to do the very first walkthrough of the building under construction. I think similarly, we all felt how tangible and the scale

of it walking into the building and realizing, because a lot of times as designers, especially nowadays, a lot of the work we do is so digital and it's very aware that it impacts physical spaces at that scale, so it just felt really special and it was nice that our whole team was here in New York for that and it was the perfect way for us to kick off the project the next day. We kicked off and worked on it for a whole year.

BRYONY Bob, it seems you created an impression with this project.

BOB Listen, it is a really important location and it was a big idea. It was a risky idea. Arts and performing arts in lower Manhattan at the World Trade Center, it's kind of like never would've thought of that, and so everyone has been and still remains very passionate about its success, bringing on the right team across the board from the architect, the interior designer to the team, to our creative partners, to the stuff that is presented and produced up in the theaters. All of it is taken very seriously. I am born and raised in New York City, and so personally it's been a passion project for me. I've never been the Bushwick, and so at least I got to go to Bushwick working with the Porter ROIA team for the first time when we first met, but I think on the personal level, Felipe and Leo were very involved from day one in meetings and part of the process, and I think they're young and growing, but have really big important clients aside from the PAC, and so the fact that they put so much time and effort and commitment into this was impressive, but also we are really grateful for it.

BRYONY Leo and Natalee, for each of you, is there anything in particular of this project that you either learned or solidified that you want to take on for future projects and clients?

LEO I think my main learning, I kind of talked a bit about already, so I definitely don't want to sound repetitive, but I do think similar to other projects that we've worked on, PAC NYC had that challenge of needing to speak to very unique audiences and of having to be both on the one hand, communicating PAC as an institution and PAC as a platform that hosts and represents all these different shows and artists and different

voices really thinking of branding, not through the lens of recognition for the sake of recognition or in other words, the traditional approach to branding, which has always been one of repetition and order super strict guidelines that you have to follow where else you're over, but rather thinking of it as a living organism, as a platform that's there to also represent other voices and represent other perspectives and be in dialogue with those perspectives. Of course, it is a performing arts center. It is a stage, but there's a nice parallel to how we look at branding in general, which is that we think of brands nowadays as platforms, as stages for other voices. Brands should be in dialogue with the world and the culture around them.

NATALEE I do think that this project really solidified something that we had always believed as a studio, which is how harnessing tensions can be a positive friction to create something new. We've talked a lot about these different challenges that we had to contend with and ultimately how those challenges became woven into the identity and we turned them into a new way of seeing things, and the second would be don't underestimate how profound simplicity can be. We created a strategy that was very, I think, simple and distilled down to its essence what the PAC NYC team wanted to do. As Bob went through these different pillars that we created come as you are here for a good time, show don't tell artists exchange. These were things that really resonated with everyone across both the PAC teams and the Bloomberg Philanthropies teams. No matter what the role in the business was, it was really clear to see how these things would translate to different aspects of the brand, but also the experience communications, the present place itself, and we extended that simplicity to the moves that we made in both the visual and verbal identity, which ultimately allowed us to reach that mass contemporary audience that we were after.

You don't need to hide things under layers of meaning in order for them to cut through the noise of the city.

BRYONY Very interesting. Bob, as we take into account these learnings and the entire process, what is some of the feedback that you are receiving now that the brand is out there and it's being implemented anywhere from the board to your partners, the employees, the attendees? What are you hearing?

BOB Across the board? People have been very, very happy with the brand representing the full spectrum of the audiences that we're looking to serve. I always say that the art in the building is a floating asset, right? It's going to change year after year, and so we needed a system. We needed a brand that can basically embrace anything that's going to be in the building every six to 12 months that I think across the board, people have been really happy with the brand system and the design. If next season we just do theater, it is set up to capture the essence of just theater. If we do theater and dance, we can do that. If we do theater, dance and festivals, whether it's music festivals or conversations, it can take on that challenge too. The overwhelming response was this was not a brand designed or a strategy designed for one season, the inaugural season, but something that can be continuous beyond. That's probably the top feedback that we've gotten.

BRYONY Definitely looks like it will stand the test of time for quite a while. You might adjust the colors as years go by. You might make some little tweaks, but the essence of it will be around for quite some time. In speaking of time, what is it that you're most looking forward to down the line, Bob?

BOB Cultural organizations evolve organically and the way people experience them and while the core product is the performing arts upstairs, I think, and I hope that New York and the world look at the PAC as a cultural headquarters for New York where there's something for everyone with food and with the various disciplines and with the different types of activities that are coming in beyond the performing arts. I think that vision will be achieved, but that's kind of my hope and where I see that PAC moving is much more awareness amongst New

York and outside of New York, of course, but not just a performing arts center, but a real cultural headquarters for the city.

BRYONY That would be absolutely amazing. As I look back in our conversation, you definitely as a group and through collaboration and I'm sure many, many conversations really harnessed all of those challenges and those tensions within your observations and the conundrums you were facing and really turned them into opportunities that became the DNA of the PAC and how it's being presented into the world. You surely managed to be bold and confident and unique and adaptable and flexible and have the legs to take this forward for the next 20 years, and in that process, creating a really solid brand that becomes a heritage of New York while staying very fresh because of the content of all of the things that are constantly in motion throughout the identity and how it's being presented. So congratulations to everybody involved in this very long-winded project. It definitely has a lot of heart and it can be felt from the outside. Thank you so much for being on the follow-up with me today and for sharing all your insight. Thanks for having us.

BOB Thank you. Thank you.

ARMIN One small detail that caught my attention in this conversation was something Bob said early on about how this piece of land could have easily been a parking lot. It would probably have been an easier thing to do, to monetize, and to maintain. So the fact that a literal platform for art and culture was created is a tiny miracle worth celebrating as is the super slick identity created by PORTO ROCHA and the embrace of its simplicity and flexibility by the PAC NYC team and how they are using it help the organization root itself as a New York institution. Leo had a great sentiment too about how we should think about branding NOT through the lens of recognition through repetition and strict guidelines but rather as a, quote, "living organism and as a platform that's there to also represent other voices and represent other perspectives and be in dialogue with those perspectives", end quote.

So, taking that perhaps too literally on our end, we look forward to continuing our dialogues here on The Follow-up in 2025.

Today, thanks for listening, until next time, we'll be here, we hope you'll be there.