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Research in Practise – Essay (2500 words)

“How has culture developed through the decade of the 80s, and how has this had an impact on the illustrations being created?”

Key words – Memory, Nostalgia, Content

For this essay and my practise, I have chosen to study the theme of the 80s and everything that coincides with this theme. I have a strong passion for this theme, as I enjoy 80s music, fashion, movies, and trends of this time. I intend to research and analyse artists and illustrators that have created artwork and illustrations for posters, album covers and vinyl art. I intend to research into the history of this decade, as well as colour schemes, colour palettes, interior design, and patterning. I have also asked family members about this decade and what the lifestyle was like, to get an idea and a feel for this essay and to provide some depth, also. I wanted to research and identify if this decade was different to any other and the significance that this decade provided. There is the keen sense of memory and nostalgia throughout this project, so by researching further into the history and the lifestyle, it allows me to create this sense throughout future artwork for my finalised project in my third year. In my final third year project, I would like to be able to create artwork in the style of the artwork that was produced during the entirety of this decade.

I have chosen to use three key words because I feel like I will be able to cover a variety of different topics throughout this essay and to discuss on a more personal level, also. My three key words are “memory,” “nostalgia” and “content.” I have chosen these key words because I feel that by gathering thoughts and opinions of family members and friends that experienced the 80s, it will provide a sense of memory and nostalgia. It is found that the decade of the 80s is considered as being, “iconic” and “memorable” due to the key changes in society when it came to culture, film,

fashion, and music. After carrying out my research, the 80s, was overall, an incredibly happy period of many, despite major changes in society and history, which contributes to the reasoning behind the key word, "content".

The question that I have decided to author this essay around is, "How has culture developed through the decade of the 80s, and how has this had an impact on the illustrations being created?"

The first source that I have analysed is a website named, "*the decade 1980-1990*" taken from the Norman Rockwell Museum (<https://www.illustrationhistory.org/history/time-periods/the-decade-1980-1990>).



Figure 1 – *Illustration (above): **Marshall Arisman**, magazine illustration, "Reagan and Latin America," 1984*

Arisman, M. (1984) *Reagan and Latin America, The decade 1980 - 1990*. Norman Rockwell Museum. Available at: 2020 (Accessed: April 2, 2023).

This source portrays the image of two people with extreme expressions. The medium of this piece is oil pastels, as this is shown through the rough textures that have been created using this material. The tone of this piece is extraordinarily strong, with the hint of bright colourings which have been included to create a dramatic sense throughout. The use of the bright colours depicts the idea that this was created throughout the decade of the 80s, as this era is known for its bright colours and vibrant tones. This piece has been displayed and presented in the Norman Rockwell Museum since 1984. This article states, “The 1980s were creative years in illustration” and “the new illustration showed influences of punk rock attitude”. From this, it could be interpreted as meaning artists and illustrators were creating artwork based off the music that was also being written and produced during this period.

Another source that supports the title in question is an article entitled, “*the most iconic artists of the 80s*”. This source has been taken from the website, ‘Artsy.’ The author of this article is named, ‘George Philip Lebourdais’ and he states, ‘The 1980s was a decade of meteoric growth, both for global economic system and for the art world that swung in its orbit’. By this, it could suggest that no matter what life and society events that occurred, artwork and illustrations were continuously being created. It could also suggest that these societal events that took place were extreme inspiration for many artists and illustrators.

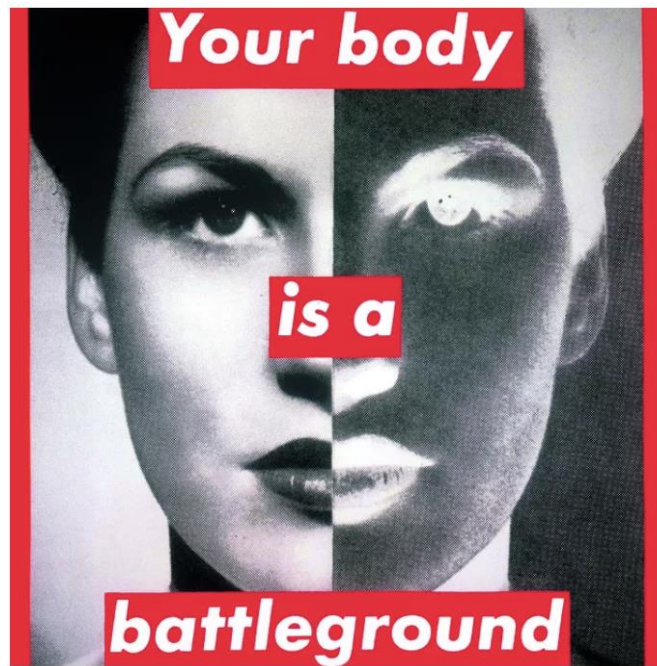


Figure. 2 – **Barbara Kruger** - *Untitled (Your body is a battleground)*, 1989

Kruger, B. (1989) *Untitled (your body is a battleground)*, *The Broad*. East West Bank. Available at:

<https://www.thebroad.org/art/> (Accessed: April 2, 2023).

This second image has been created by the artist and photographer, Barbara Kruger in 1989. Despite this being created towards the very end of this decade, this piece was a major turning point in society as it displayed the “consumerist and paternalistic ideologies that produced the images in the first place.” This second image depicts the idea that our bodies should be protected at all costs and should be worshipped by ourselves as much as we would admire and portray that amount of love for someone else. After carrying out research, this source also portrays the sense that even modified, images are classed as artwork as this is a metaphor for how we view ourselves, as well as society and that we should accept to view our bodies as how they are, despite what

society is making us think otherwise. This could have influenced society, due to the way in which people view themselves and their body image. Illustrations being created at this time, may have become a turning point, to help people overcome and fight against body dysmorphia.

Many fundamental changes were made during the decade of the 80s. These changes include television, MTV, music, film, and fashion. Many musicians were the main faces of magazine. The source, <https://www.ushistory.org/us/59d.asp>, states, “MTV, or music television brought a revolution to the recording industry” and, “the eighties were a decade where style reigned supreme.” From this, it shows how these changes had such a massive impact on society and the way in which people would live their lives.



Figure. 3 – **Klas Fahlen**

We Art Agency (2017) *Klas Fahlen*, WE ART. P/P. Available at: <https://weart.co/illustrators/klas-fahlen/> (Accessed: April 2, 2023).



Figure. 4 – Klas Fahlen

We Art Agency (2017) *Klas Fahlen*, WE ART. P/P. Available at:

<https://weart.co/illustrators/klas-fahlen/> (Accessed: April 2, 2023).

These next images have been taken from the source, <https://weart.co/illustrators/klas-fahlen/#>, which depicts different illustrators that had an impact on society. This was carried out due to the style and the imagery that was being depicted in each of the specific illustrations. Again, the use of a vibrant and bright colour scheme is very prominent throughout each of these pieces. Fine line work has been included to create the main suggestion of the characters and other shapes portrayed in this set of pieces.

The source, <https://www.illustrationdivision.com/klas-fahlen>, states that K, Fahlen, “brings a classic pop sensibility to his illustrations with an interplay of expressive line work and saturated colour forms.” From this, it is noticeably clear and easy to see that the use of his expressive line work depicts the impression of impressive style and a unique sense throughout.

It could be understood that these designs were extremely popular throughout the decade of the 80s, due to what the images were depicting. These pieces are incredibly unique and stylised and portray a large sense of nostalgia for many throughout. Due to what the illustrations are displaying, it creates a sense of memory for this lifestyle during this time.

Another source to support this factor is, <https://www.rsc.org.uk/news/archive/why-the-eighties-was-the-coolest-of-decades>. This source suggests, “whatever your style, there was one golden rule: the more neon, the better.” This idea shows that bright colours were the turning point throughout this decade. This can be visually shown through the artwork that heavily uses bright colours and the repeated sequences of patterns.



Figure. 5 – **Patrick Nagel** (*American*, 1945 –1984)

Nagel, P. (2010) *American*, Patrick Nagel. Available at: <https://www.patricknagel.com>

(Accessed: April 2, 2023).

Geometric plaid, acrylic on board

This next image depicts a woman who is in the nude, whilst posing for the camera. She portrays a pixie style haircut with bold streaks of highlights throughout one of the most iconic hairstyles during this time. With this piece, the background has been used to create the clothing that this woman is wearing, as well as blending in with the existing background. This piece includes a bright and vibrant colour scheme, as well as the strong use of bold patterning. To create illustrations in this style, it could be understood that the use of bright colours and patterns are essential due to the styles of fashion, as well as clothing and the inspiration from music throughout the decade of the 80s.

A source that supports the key change in society is, “The century of artist’s books: J Drucker.” This book suggests, “much activist work is topical, politically or socially motivated in its thematic, and distributed through inexpensive editions as cheaply and widely as possible.” From this, it creates the idea that when an illustrator creates artwork, they have potentially been influenced by something or something in society has had an impact on their thought process and how they create the illustrations that they want to create. Society has had a massive influence on how artists view their work, especially when it comes to the work of illustration. This is shown through this next illustrator, Tony Viramontes.

Tony Viramontes was a “fashion illustrator” during the decade of the 80s. “His vibrant eyes move over the model capturing more than the newest fashion in which she is adorned: he is able to put on the page a bold and palpable as well.” This depicts the idea that this illustrator was able to capture the essence of this model, through the extreme use of black and bold, thick line work to suggest the overexaggerated facial features.

A source that can support the topic in question, is this album cover that was created for the artist, ‘Bruce Springsteen.’

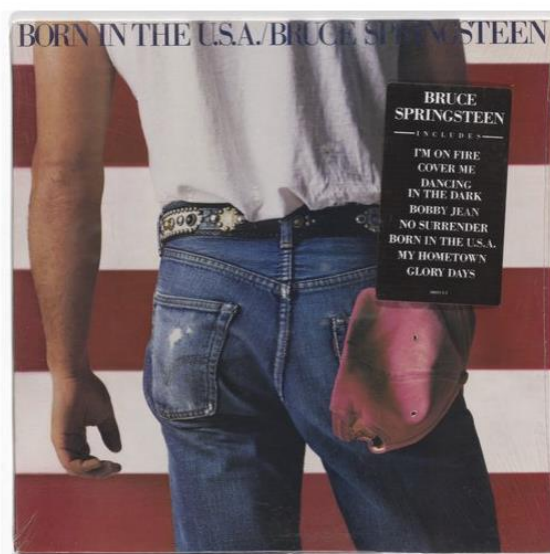


Figure.6 -

Andrea Klein, Annie Leibovitz (*Album cover for Bruce Springsteen, Born in the U.S.A*), **1984**

Klein, A. and Leibovitz, A. (1984) *Born in the U.S.A.*

This source depicts an album cover that was created for the musician Bruce Springsteen in 1984, for his hit album, '*Born in the U.S.A*'. This became popular and iconic during this decade due to the bold colour schemes and iconic imagery that is being used. The imagery depicts the photographed image of a man that has this significant stance, whilst wearing a white vest/tank top, high-waisted blue jeans, a black belt that has jewels, as well as carrying a baseball cap in his back pocket. This became incredibly significant during this time, due to the American flag being displayed in the background of this album cover.

The colours are thick and striped, to show the boldness and importance of this feature. The placement of text is especially important, due to the text being placed towards the top of this cover and being pigmented with the remaining colour of the American flag, the missing blue. This goes to show how artists and photographers included and incorporated society and the 80s lifestyle into their work. In this case, 80s style and fashion has been included, to show what the typical and average man of the 80s would wear daily.

One illustrator that really stood out dramatically during this period was Tony Viramontes.



Figure. 7 - Tony Viramontes



Figure. 8 – Tony Viramontes

The work and illustrations that were created by this artist can be described as, “dreamy and theatrical” by the source, <https://giftwaremagazine.com/2013/09/02/tony-viramontes-fashion-illustrations-sale/>. This magazine also states that, “Viramontes got his start at the illustrator of choice for all the big names of the day. By the time he dies of AIDS at the age of 31 in 1988, he had also immortalized a host of New Wave darlings including Duran Duran, Paloma Picasso, Tina Chow, Janet Jackson, Naomi Campbell, and Jamie Dickenson to name a few”.

After analysing these images, it is noticeably clear to understand Viramontes’ style, as well as this illustrator living up to the iconic status. It does not go unnoticed that his style is very dreamy, and this is due to the unique style and flowing movements of this brush strokes. It is truly clear to see that the mediums are watercolours and ink for each of these pieces. The first image that I have included by this illustrator portrays the depiction of a woman dancing. This is known due to her flowing arm movements, as her arms are in the air and her body language is bold. 80s fashion can also be suggested throughout this initial illustration, due to the bangles and bracelets placed on the lady’s arm, as these were seen as very fashionable throughout this iconic decade.

Another source that suggests his loose and unique brush strokes is, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bluecarreon/2013/11/11/the-colorful-world-of-fashion-illustrator-tony-viramontes/?sh=69bd65406382>. This magazine states, “Tony Viramontes was a leading fashion illustrator in the late 70s and the early 80s” and “his work used punchy colours with lines that were often jagged and strong”. Despite his career being very short-lived due to his battle with the disease of AIDS, his legacy will be continued on.

The last source that I will be analysing is the illustrations and work of the illustrator, Ashley Bickerton. Sadly, Bickerton passed away in 2022, but even though he will not be creating anymore artwork of illustrations, his legacy will be continued for an extended period.



Figure. 9 - Steer, E. (2023) *The 80s artists who predicted the future*, BBC Culture. BBC.

Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20230201-have-we-reached-mass-media-overload> (Accessed: April 2, 2023)

It could be argued that some artists and illustrators predicted the artwork of history. By this, it could mean that according to the source and article, <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20230201-have-we-reached-mass-media-overload>, “artists who explore this area, here is often a simultaneous fascination with the technology, and the fear of quite where it is taking the human mind.” This goes to show the significant impact that technology and society had on the work that illustrators and artists were producing. It was also states that, “in the 1980s, struck by the stream of imagery, sound and information flooding through countless television channels”. All these different components

work together to produce artwork and illustrations that represents common and trends of society.

This artwork displays a very retro and vintage sense, due to the 80s styled television set, depicting the image of a range of flowers.

Finally, throughout the decade of the 80s, fashion illustration was massive and carried a large following. Its artwork would be displayed throughout fashion and design magazines, targeting the audience of the younger generation. The article source,

<https://periodicult.com/wp/?p=1272>, suggests the idea that a range of illustrators had a

very vigorous style and worked very loosely. As it states, “there’s no question that photography and illustration dominated the pages of fashion magazines throughout the 1980s”. The main and most current fashion illustrators were, “Gruau and Lopez” as they created artwork throughout this decade.

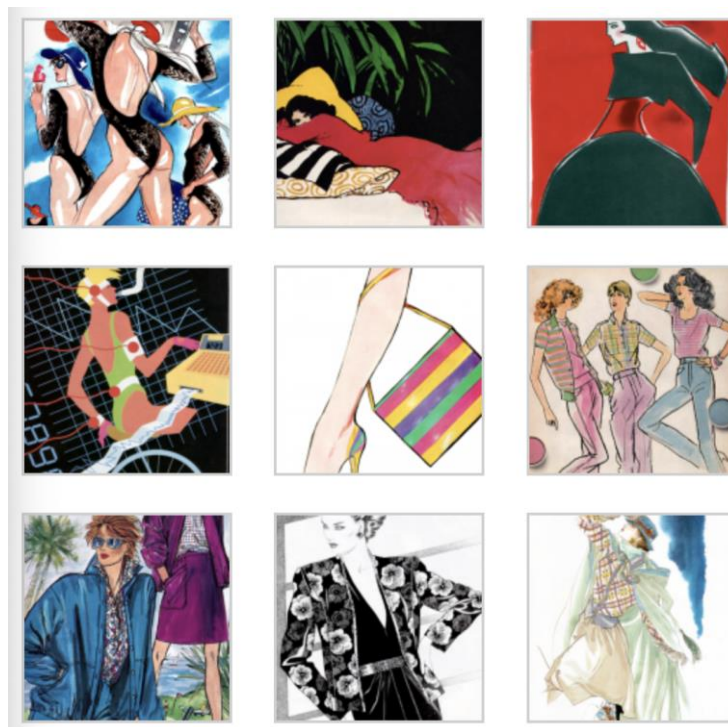


Figure.10 - Periodcult (1980) '80s fashion illustration, *P E R I O D I C U L T*. Available at:

<https://periodicult.com/wp/?p=1272> (Accessed: April 2, 2023).

In conclusion, it could seem that major changes were created during this decade. Whether it was the way in which people styled their hair, or how music had a major impact on the illustrations were being created, art developed through time, through styles and colour palettes and patterning. Art created a turning point with album covers being developed, as well as fashion illustrations.

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