

Title - Question 2: Define skill in the context of your own practice and the work of two artists/makers/designers from the lecture series.

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This essay will discuss the skillset of a surface pattern designer. The artists chosen for this discussion are Abigail Ahern, William Morris and Timorous Beasties for their designs for home textiles and wallcoverings. The use of skills within their designs will be related to the way that surface pattern designers create their work today. Also, Cole & son will be looked at for the traditional methods, currently used, to produce wall paper designs. Furthermore, the introduction of machinery, during the industrial revolution will add to this discussion, in how textiles have become more affordable with mass production.

Surface Pattern Design is defined as:

Surface design is the creation of artwork that will be applied to products or environments. This artwork might be a repeating pattern or a stand-alone illustration.
(Jones, 2020)

Designs can later be applied to a variety of surfaces to include: furnishing fabrics, pattern fabrics, ceramics, graft wrap, wall covering, life style products and flooring.

The skill set of a surface pattern designer includes creating mood boards from research or client briefs, initial drawing and painting in variety of media and styles. This is then followed by repeating the design to create a repeat pattern; which can be produced digitally or manually, see image one, an example of how an in house design studio maybe set up. This process continues to screen printing, block printing, transfer printing or digital printing onto fabric. The printed cloth can then be further worked into applying devore techniques or embellished with stitch, foil, needle punching processes to name a few.



Figure one: Surface pattern Design Facilities

A working day for a surface pattern designer very enjoyable and creative. The time is packed with being productive and working towards an end result, whether it is as an in house designer or for clients as a freelance designer. Abigail Arhern has her own brand for interior products and designs specific items of furnishing for Debenhams, See image two below.



Figure two: Abigail Ahern/EDITION - Orange Bead Embellished Snake Cushion

The example shown is an embroidered design later embellished with beads and teasels in a bold colour way with a Moroccan inspired theme, which is fashionable currently.

Surface pattern designers, as with other artists, take inspiration from works of others.

An artist that has been great inspiration to many is William Morris.

William Morris is an artist, designer, poet, and campaigner. His design career started by designing from his own home. In 1861, he started a business, which was called Morris, Marshall and Faulkner & Co. Later in life in 1877, he decided to take the sole control of the business and renamed the business Morris & co, they offered wallpaper, stained glass, furniture, hand-patterned tiles, embroideries, carpets and tapestries.

Morris is known for his designs that are inspired by nature, and include animal and plant life from his surroundings.

William Morris is chiefly known as a great designer of patterns derived from natural forms. Wild and garden flowers, inter-twining leaves, birds, and animals all feature in his wallpapers, textiles, carpet and ceramics. (William Morris Gallery, 2020)

A visit to a hunting lodge in Epping forest, as a boy, provided inspiration to create beautiful tapestries, see figure three (V&A, 2020).



Figure three – lotus wall hanging.

Morris' designs continue to be popular and are available onto different products to include lifestyle products, stationery, fabrics, wall coverings and flooring. Most of these designs continue to be manufactured as they would have been done long as go, see figure four hand blocked wallpaper.



Figure four: Historic wallpapers and cole & son

His wallpaper designs are produced in a different way than the majority are today, see figure four. In the time of William Morris, his wallpaper and printed cotton were produced with a complex printing technique, done by hand using a carved wooden block. A single block was needed for each colour; blocks had a metal pin on all corners. This is to have the design to line in accurately (Mason, 2017, p. 9). The right amount of pressure has to be applied for the pigment to transfer on paper or on cloth. After the block is pressed on to the paper, or on the cloth, it is then left to dry; this is then pathed for the next colour to be applied (Mason, 2017, p. 9).



Figure five: Bullswood Carpet (detail), William Morris and John Henry Dearle, about 1889, England. Museum no. T.31-1923. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

In 1889, Morris designed his last carpet the *Bullerswood*. This carpet shows off Morris' designs skills with his drawing ability in creating a complex design that features, scrolling arabesques with the stylised flowers and birds. There is also a border with repeats motifs leaves and flowers. (V&A, 2020). Another example of the way he repeated his motifs can be seen in figure six, tile design.



Figure Six: Tile, designed by William Morris.

Morris' tile creations were plain blanks, produced by other firms, and then these would be fired in a stained-glass kiln. These designs were hand painted, the design features patterns, simple scenes, they are often flowers, and were painted in the style of a distinctive vibrant blue, onto a white background (V&A, 2020).



Figure Seven: Stained glass panels, designed by William Morris, made by Morris & Co., 1872 – 1874.

Morris-stained glass, as shown in figure six, started when he went on a tour of the gothic cathedrals in Northern France when he was at Oxford. Morris's motto: "Ars Longa, Vita Brevis" (Life is short, art is forever).

Morris motto is true, the reasoning for this is that you can learn from art and analyse any piece of artwork or take influence from it. Within this the audience, can learn the about hand skills of how they created arts and craft. "Often making objects that relied on the revival of craft-based styles and techniques from the past." (Harkness, 2015)

On another note, Morris was looking into contemporary machinery, but he was appalled by the crude ugliness of it. The above quote is very appropriate to the way that Morris created his artwork. His skill of making objects became more honest and for him to investigate past techniques of craft, which really helped to focus on his design skills. (V&A, 2020)

Industrial revolution, this is where technology in machinery started to become more known to strengthen the British empire and the economy. Morris' views were that he preferred the machinery from the middle ages, where in craft practice products could be designed applying hand skill from start to finish. Whereas during the industrial revolution, machinery was used to produce products, such as printing on textiles. This allows the low wage class to

afford to have pattern fabrics and homeware products into their homes, which they could not have afforded before. "Morris therefore also hated the products of the Industrial Revolution: cheap, unnecessary goods that essentially relegated workers to a kind of slavery" (Colne-Stour, 2020). This suggests that Morris had a strong belief in hand traditional methods and materials to produce his work. The traditional methods are too expensive for lower wage households, this meaning only higher range incomes could afford his artwork.

Skill in machinery can produce more products than by hand, technology in machinery can improve and have a better standard to improve product quality, such as the printing "the machine sets the terms of quality, raising the game to a standard the human hand and eye cannot achieve" (Sennett, 2008, p. 100).

In the discipline of a surface pattern designer or in any other discipline there is always a method when creating artwork "work finely executed by hand or technical methods belongs to those who have been specially trained in a single trade" (Sennett, p. 133). This suggests that there has always been someone who has been trained in that profession who knows the hand skills of the techniques and methods to teach others. When designing or creating any work, the skills in using tools and materials are important "to give work substance, we require a medium" (McCullough, 1996, p. 2). The work substance means to have the raw materials that are being used can be further developed to improve or to make a design out of it. The tools of this can be relevant in a surface pattern context.

The skills of art and craft practice is similar, even though they have been separated in the past. It is coming to define that they are both becoming joined together as a unit, where the materials and skill is being used in the same type of context. Surface Pattern designers works within using different material and the surfaces such as craft does. Craft practice works within weaving, knitting fabrics and other making materials. They join because artist who uses surface pattern or textile in their practices, integrated of have ideas that will merge in their design work.

When starting a design process, it is good to put in some thought into the design methods, such as hand skills "a particular structure that started as a sketch, capable of evolving" (McCullough, 1996, p. 10). This can show how everything can evolve, in a simple sketch, an idea it can keep changing or improving hand and further evolve into digital skills.

The traditional art and craft became a separate skill, the designs of an art piece had an immediate effect than the craft, such as stated in the quote “The elapse of time proved one way to separate craft and art: craft practice is stretched out; art of the original sort is a more immediate event” (Sennett, 2008, p. 127). This suggests that both skills set became divided, because art was more an immediate effect and craft was not.

Timorous Beasties is a company that is based in Glasgow and manufactures, fabrics, wallpapers, cushions that are all hand printed. The company was formed in 1990 in a small studio in Raeberry street. In providing silk screen printing goods. Timorous Beasties work embodies the unique diversity of pattern. The starting point with any design process, is to draw inspiration for their artwork.



Figure Eight: Timorous Beasties and Vintage Classics

Beasties looks at references on the subject matter, such as he is looking at old illustrations and photos before he even started drawing or painting. “I prefer to have images frozen in time, so that they really give the viewer a chance to study them and look at their beauty” (Simmons, 2016). Beasties suggest that he is looking into the details of the subject rather than his imagination. He always draws in black and white first, before adding colour to the object that he is creating. The reasons to draw in black and white is to scan the drawing, this process is for a practical reason is to have designs forever stored or just to use to create into a pattern. Beasties can then focus on forming them into different repeats and the different scale of the pattern.



figure Nine: Timorous Beasties Craigend Collection

The work produced is applying silk-screen printing and applying different crafting methods, such as paint, ink, to paper and fabric. They use viscous ink and focus their painting skills onto the use of the ink splatters, drips and blotches within their pattern and the repeats, such as seen above in figure eight. Painting skills also include brushstrokes that are more controllable. The ink splatters, drips, and blotches have more of a free moving design, and are combined with original artwork to create a style unique to their brand. (Timorous Beasties, 2020)

The hand skill methods, as stated above, are to create a range of splats, dribbles, and marbling with ink. These are then scanned into a computer to be cleaned up. This process is then applied to put the digital scanned artwork to layer digitally, then they create a pattern followed by printing onto different fabrics digitally (Timorous Beasties, 2020).

Beasties designs has a combination of methods that bring the designs together. The methods of using hand tools and modern methods, such as using machinery to print onto fabrics and the digital equipment. The methods that they apply are of the way that surface pattern designers apply today. Yet, they continue to create hand drawn methods and screen printing to create their work.

We as surface pattern designers, do a lot of work digitally such as using hand skills methods first and then combine or layer artwork together, just like Beasties does. Surface pattern designers work within the digital tools “software designed and used properly creates a world of possibilities” (McCullough, 1996, P.25). This means shows how digital tools can show another way how surface pattern discipline to see new possibilities to experiment into

modern techniques. Design software can do a wide range of techniques that do not need to do in the physical hand such as using paint, ink, drawing or other techniques. Design software can be used to have the designer to experiment with patterns, layers combining and how to scale of pattern or a standalone piece of work.

In conclusion, the artists discussed within this essay demonstrate the wide-ranging skillset of a surface pattern designer. However, it can be argued that Morris was a textile designer, as he applied construction methods to his work; he mastered the skills of tapestry and weaving too. He continues to be a great inspiration to many. Interestingly, today, traditional skills within the industry remain, as discussed with Timorous Beasties, who combine both traditional and modern technologies, to archive patterns that are worked upon, and manipulated further, to create new designs. Furthermore, Cole & son continue to produce hand printed lengths of wallpaper that are expensive to buy. Ahern, on the other hand, embellishes her work to create a style unique to her brand, whether this is applied by, hand or, machine is unknown. Machinery have their good use, in that pattern and colour on surfaces can be produced quicker and be more affordable, yet, there is more of an attachment to an item that has been lovingly crafted, with a need to preserve it, rather than to dispose it.

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Figures

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Figure Nine: Brinton's, 2020. TIMOROUS BEASTIES CRAIGEND COLLECTION.

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