

Alice Louise Fribbence

1802352

Surface Pattern Design and Textiles – Maker Pathway

Research in Practice (ADAD5004)

Lectured by Julia Lockheart

Keywords: Colour | Saturation | Bespoke

Word Count: 2598

Proposed Question for Independent Inquiry:

How important is it for a designer to communicate through the language of colour and hand craft, and how can a psychological connection be made between the consumer and the craftsman?

This essay has developed from an introspective reflection which was prompted by writing my manifesto in my first year of university. I was asked as a practitioner to consider the core truths of what was important to me within my discipline of surface pattern design and textiles. Through contemplation and writing a manifesto I found myself able to isolate key areas which hold individual, personal value to me. Within this essay I aim to further discuss three keywords which arose with poignance from my manifesto, which are Colour, Saturation and Bespoke.

Within any creative disciplines which rely on the visual, colour is arguably the most imperative tool as it can be used to evoke emotion, tell a story and create an aesthetic. As a surface pattern designer, the values and saturation of colour is incredibly important to me, all the more as I have colour vision deficiency. Johannes Itten determines “Colour is life; for a world without colours appears to us as dead.” (Fetell Lee, 2018, p.19.). I strongly align my appreciation of colour to Itten’s, as the values of colours bring life and meaning to design.

Despite being born with colour vision deficiency, I was only aware of it and formally diagnosed when I was seventeen years old. When considering the statistics of colour vision deficiency between genders, Kassia St Clair states: “The phenomenon is not completely understood, but it is usually genetic and is more prevalent in men: around 1 in 12 men are affected compared to 1 in 200 women.” (2016, p.14.). In my case, colour vision deficiency does not genetically run in my family, making my diagnosis a statistical anomaly, especially considering the rarity of cases in women. As much as I value my ability to see colour as imperative to my work and future career, Aldous Huxley opposes this as he interprets the ability to see colour as superfluous,

“Man’s highly developed colour sense is a biological luxury.” (St Clair, 2016, pp.17-18.). Whilst Huxley believes the ability to see colour is a ‘biological luxury’ Chris McManus would argue that the ability to see in colour is crucial in order to survive. According to Chris McManus: “A world without colour is not just a drab and dreary world, it is also a dangerous world in which it is easy to be poisoned.” (Wright, 1995, p.7.). Through the storytelling and information within colour we are able to read a sense of the chemical compositions of objects and materials. Historically this has been prevalent to the ripeness and nutritional value of foods, as well as the genetically inherited cognitive links between red and danger. In assessing the context of colour, we are able to make decisions in relation to our safety. In this way, we are informed about the world around us through colour and a psychology spectroscopy. The ability to see colour enables us to interact with the world around us and gauge how to safely navigate it, which is why it’s so important within childhood development.

Historically and retrospectively looking back to my childhood I am able to assess my relationship with colour and how it has progressed to what it is today. In doing so I am able to create a narrative of my developing understanding of colour. When applying theories of hauntology to this journey I reflectively relay a series of childhood memories. A memory I recall vividly is a dispute between a colleague and I when trying to identify the colour of an object at work. My colleague believed it was blue, but all I could see was black. Upon confronting my mother about my confusion my mother replied: *‘you aren’t very good with seeing colours... - didn’t you know?’* My response to this was utter shock and disbelief to learn that from my perspective, for years the way in which I had viewed the world has been different to everyone else. When I initially applied

hauntology to my colour vision deficiency, I felt to some extent very isolated. Andrew Gallix refers to hauntology as a sense of being “haunted by a nostalgia for all our lost futures.” During my younger years of studying artistic disciplines I would often feel overwhelmed when I would struggle to interpret the hues and values of different shades. Even now I often look back and consider the implications of my deficiency as I was growing up, as I often thought having a sight deficiency could be detrimentally restrictive to my artistic education and understanding. In spite of struggling with my colour vision deficiency, the hauntology of it has now changed to work in my favour. What initially was a deficiency has transformed itself into an advantage of interest and individuality; as I fully exploit colour as a tool. Spectators find it fascinating to learn that I have colour vision deficiency, wondering how I navigate struggles within the development of my work. I can now appreciate that my colour vision deficiency is an interesting characteristic, as although I cannot see the world the way other people do, nobody can see it from my perspective either. I find hauntology to be a really fascinating concept when considering my development as a practitioner as it is imperative to revisit historical narratives nostalgically in order to develop in the future.



Fig One.

Only in retrospect looking back at my work am I able to understand why I chose the colours that I had. Angela Wright defines saturation, or rather chromatic intensity, as “the percentage of colour present.” (1995, p.21.). Referring to fig. one, these upcycled cow mannequins by interior design boutique Muck N Brass have a luminescent, neon value to them, with what I assume is a very high percentage of colour present. The brightness of these colours combined with the concept and imagery connotes a very playful and energetic brand – a majority of which is denoted by the colour within this piece. When developing colourways for designs I always used an exceptionally

bright, saturated and vivid palette. Only once I had been diagnosed, I understood that I had been using these highly saturated shades of colours because my eyesight could clearly comprehend them. When selecting colourways, my opinion is that the brighter and more saturated the colour is, the more alive, playful and energetic the piece is because of it. In support of this statement, Fetell Lee concludes that “Colour is energy made visible. More broadly, colour is an indication of the richness of our surroundings.” (2018, p.19.). When considering that colour is literally an exchange of light energy being received through our sight, it makes sense that it can carry and express energetic information.



Fig Two.

Whilst I am a firm believer that colour is a language capable of creating a narrative, we need to borrow information and comparatives from the English language to communicate and describe the colour values and attributes. Angela Wright further explains:

There are only eleven basic colour terms in the English language. A computer of colours will show us up to sixteen million colours, but we only have names for eleven – black, white, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, pink, brown and grey. Confusingly, we borrow terms from many walks of life – from Nature, from food and drink and so on – to describe colours such as peacock blue, burgundy, peach, cream and tan. (Wright, 1995, p.24.).

Through making comparisons to the natural and material world around us, we are able to give an in-depth and realistic description of the shade that is being referred to by recalling from memory. Fig two is a wallpaper design titled ‘Omni Splatt’ by Timorous Beasties. From the values of the array of colours within this wallpaper it can be assumed that there is a high percentage of colour present, as it is strikingly saturated and vivid. I am able to describe the shades within this wallpaper: an overripened raspberry red, a warm tropical orange and a cooling Tenerife blue. In expressing colours in this way, I am able to create a rich example of the shade which is wholly based on reference, which conjures an example which is more informative than simply ‘red, orange and blue.’ Although this is a helpful assist to making a true description of a shade, each recalled comparison is interchangeable based on the individuals experience. The time aged question of ‘*is my pink your purple*’ referring to where and how people define these thresholds is wholly unique to the individual, as everyone has their own internal spectrum of viewing and understanding colour.

Within the 21st century Interior design is thriving with people decorating their homes to create a comforting living space which is personal, individual and bespoke. In spite of people's ambition to create a space which individually reflects themselves, an over-reliance on machines within interior design production makes it seem impossible to ever have something truly unique and personal. Traditionally wallpaper would have been hand printed by master craftsman and upholstery was hand woven. I propose that whilst a broad span of the interior market is mass produced to keep up with demand, there remains a desire for bespoke, hand crafted pieces within the home.



Fig Three.

Oxford dictionary defines bespoke as “making products specially, according to the needs of an individual customer.” (Oxford University Press, 2020.). Fig Three is a bespoke piece of work designed by Timorous Beasties for a tour, commissioned by Kate Bush. Whilst I can acknowledge a comparative connection between a bespoke piece of work and a commission, I am expressing bespoke in an entirely different way, focussing on the definition word ‘*specially*.’ At this stage in my career I interpret bespoke to be more so retrospective, having the consumer in mind as the craft is being physically made by hand, rather than fulfilling a specified brief from a client. Through this way of thinking I find the charm of bespoke hand creations to be more personable, as if having the consumer in mind, despite not having met them.

In using hand crafted methods, there is an indexical relationship between the craft and the craftsman that is historically present through the piece. There is a magical and thought-provoking charm to pieces which have been created by hand. The indexical nature of the hand being controlled by the brain and coordinated through the eyes of the craftsman is an incredibly intimate system. This intimate system is reflected by Richard Sennett on the development of Homo sapiens through Frederick Wood Jones statement: “It is not the hand that is perfect, but the whole nervous mechanism by which movements of the hand are evoked, coordinated, and controlled.” (Sennett, 2008, p.150.). Through hand methods collections are able to give a personable, indexical quality into the interior design industry which rejuvenates and fulfils the desires of having a one of a kind, special piece which can express the consumer on a more personal level than machine-based production.

Within the interiors industry technological advances and developments in machinery have completely revolutionised and altered how interior pieces are being produced, moving away from hand craft. Since the Industrial revolution, the rise of the machines has progressed to make man's life easier, more convenient and efficient. Flusser suggests that we can determine history and predict the future by assessing how we manufacture and produce craft within factories. Flusser refers to this as the story of humankind, stating: "Factories are a place in which new kinds of human beings are always being produced: first the hand-man, then the tool-man, then the machine-man, and finally the robot-man." (1999, p.45.). Here Flusser is suggesting that the current Anthropocene is 'the machine-man' given our over-reliance of machinery and almost complete abolition of the hand and tools.

Throughout my university education there has been an emphasis on preparing for the design industry, which has included being taught computer aided design and how to use industry standard machines. Flusser suggests the studio in itself is a factory:

This provides a hint as to what factories of the future will look like: like schools in fact.

They will have to be places where human beings can learn how robots function so that these robots can then relieve human beings of the task of turning nature into culture. (1999, p.49.).

Whilst I acknowledge and value Flussers' statement of the university being like a factory, it does not entirely rely on machines in the content of the teaching syllabus. To the contrary, we are

taught a variety of traditional skills and hand craft, such as printmaking, stitch and painting which are equally sought after in the field of design.



Fig Four.

My personal aesthetic is that of a maximalist designer. Being a strong advocate for '*more is more*' I use time intensive and laborious methods of embroidery, beading and surface treatments – all of which are created by hand. Fig four by Jennifer Lamontagne visually demonstrates an investment of time through her intricate hand embroidery, telling the story of her craft. Looking at

the variety of stitches, threads and knots there is a conversation between the artist and the consumer, as the consumer can envision the care, time and technique which has been lovingly created through the artists hands. Flusser theorises hopefully: “The factory of the future will cease to be a madhouse and will become a place in which the creative potential of homo faber will come into its own.” (1999, p.46.). Through this statement I hope that the bespoke quality of hand craft can outweigh designers over-use of machines and reconnect with traditional methods of craft and skill. In using additional methods to decoratively adorn my work I aim to give the spectator this sense of the special which is missing in mass produced collections within the industry.

Writing this essay has given me the opportunity to further evaluate and concisely focus on elements which will fuel my dissertation study. I have found it fascinating to consider why I hold colour, saturation and the bespoke as so important, and wonder if they are as detrimentally important to other designers – and the consumer, as they are to me. I believe that colour and the bespoke has a vital role within the interior design industry, as using colour and bespoke techniques enable the designer to communicate to the viewer on a deeply psychological level. When decorating an interior space, I think that people are unaware that they are inadvertently creating a visual narrative about themselves. Making choices for an interior space is a dedicated decision, as we tend to decorate our homes with the intention of being surrounded by it for an extended period of time. Through chosen furnishing styles, imagery, preferred colour palettes or general aesthetic preferences, a home creates a conversation about the person who inhabits it; leading to the belief that a personal space can be very informative about the core truth of the individual.

Through bespoke hand craft, designers are able to create an indexical relationship and narrative with the consumer, whilst colour is able to relay a story and create ambiance and having a psychological effect on the spectator within the space. In the 21st century I believe there is an ever-growing need for connectivity and communication, which has been highlighted during current turbulent climate of Covid19. I believe that this desire is timeless, as humanity will constantly be seeking a connectivity and comfort by nature. As a working title, I propose that my research question will be: How important is it for a designer to communicate through the language of colour and hand craft, and how can a psychological connection be made between the consumer and the craftsman?

References

Fetell Lee, I. (2018) *Joyful, The Surprising Power of Ordinary Things to create Extraordinary Happiness*. London: Rider.

Flusser, V. (1999) *The Shape of Things, A Philosophy of Design*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd.

Gallix, A. (2012) *The Death of Literature*. Available at:

<https://andrewgallix.com/tag/hauntological-fiction/> (Accessed 18 May 2020).

Oxford University Press. (2020) *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Available at:

<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/bespoke?q=bespoke> (Accessed 21 May 2020).

Sennet, R. (2008) *The Craftsman*. London: Yale University Press.

St Clair, K. (2016) *The Secret Lives of Colour*. London: John Murray.

Wright, A. (1995) *The Beginners Guide to Colour Psychology*. London: Kyle Cathy Limited.

Figures

Fig One.

Muck N Brass. (2020) *Upcycled cow mannequin lamp* Available at:

<https://mucknbrass.com/listing/759501853/cow-front-lamp> (Accessed: 17 May 2020).

Fig Two.

Timorous Beasties. (2018) *Omni Splatt Wallpaper* Available at:

<https://www.timorousbeasties.com/shop/wallcoverings/1822/omni-splatt-wallpaper/> (Accessed: 12 May 2020).

Fig Three.

Timorous Beasties. (2015) *Commission Kate Bush* Available at:

<https://www.timorousbeasties.com/project/kate-bush/> (Accessed: 10 May 2020).

Fig Four.

Lamontagne, J. (2018-2019) *Roving and Bead study 1* Available at:

<https://www.jenniferlamontagne.com/stitch-studies-2018/roving-bead-embroidery-stitch-study> (Accessed: 20 May 2020).