

Pattern, Material and Culture - Proposal

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In my proposal, I will be looking at three key words that explore the practice of art and design. Material, pattern and culture. I will investigate, the origin of these words and their meanings in different contexts, how these words represent art objects, and how the understanding of these categories allows a better understanding of art.

Specific to surface pattern design, these keywords explore the origin of traditional methods and I wish to research how these methods change over time. I will be evidencing theorists specific to my key words to back up my knowledge and will discuss how these words give art meaning to both the artist and the viewer.

Material

Material, in an artistic sense is described as 'information or ideas for use in creating...work' (O.E.D. 1989). It is the physical object of knowledge we immediately see in the art world. It is through sight that we can initially process what is in front of us. Within us we have many complex senses that go beyond sight, touch, taste, smell, hear. According to Perry (2018) each of these senses are 'a channel through which your body can observe itself or the outside world.' (Perry, 2018).

This implies we know more than we know through the amalgamation of our senses. This is a form of tacit knowledge, and it provides us with a multisensory perception of the materials we see before us.

From lithic technology to computer technology, our hands and our materials have always had the connection to create. *'Our thoughts and feelings are shaped by the knowledge which comes through the uses of hands.'* (Wilson, 1999). In the book *The Hand*, Wilson talks about materials connection to the hand and how it has allowed us to reach our full potential. Material and hand need each other to work, one without the other would be meaningless. *'An essential physical instrument for the realisation of ideas'* (Wilson 1999)

Wilson talks about the importance of hands as a passing and receiving of tacit knowledge through the material. This makes them signifiers of a system for the understanding of art anthropology. Understanding materials' first system of meaning and its signifiers, leaves its second system of expression to understand. *'To see art as both a system of meaning encoding propositions about the world and as a system of action intended to change the world'* (Winter, 2007, p62).

'Tacit knowledge is an active and personal involvement of knowing' (Polanyi, 2009). Using tacit knowledge to view materials lets us see it from a multitude of perspectives. Warren Seelig describes material meaning itself as tacit knowledge *'knowing about it in a way that can't really be written or communicated about through words...it's directly connected through instinct'* (Seelig, 2012).

By comparing materials as a type of tacit knowledge we accept that the material world is a part of our being and can be interpreted in different ways by different persons, as we all have different translations for what is symbolised in front of us. Materials themselves also provide different meaning in different cultures. Therefore,

the cross-cultural aesthetics of a material can represent symbolic communication like that of semiotics. 'The same geometric sign can mean completely different things within a culture according to context and that across cultures its meanings may vary' (Morphy, 2010).

Seeing a material as a symbol in your own context is an impulse that is biologically driven, the steerer being the amalgamation of senses. To understand this, we must understand where our impulses and instincts come from. In his book *The Spell of Sensuous* David Abraham discusses the idea that human beings co-exist with nature and not alongside. Material culture reflects the individual instinct that tacit knowledge creates. It is the same idea that we co-exist with the material we make through touch. Materials are active and alive, and the maker and material will have a relationship that is unavailable to others. Material culture focuses on the material qualities of an object and challenges that 'art objects are the equivalent to persons' (Gell, 1998). If we are what we make, then the cultivation of craft as a source presents us with the oldest form of knowledge.

By analysing the form of a material through design and colour we come across the physical differences in cultural translation. It shows the expression of context and how visual properties explain concepts intended to reflect the system of meaning that material holds. To understand material fully we must look at both its knowledge and its intention. This structure splits materials into an understanding of both meaning and expression through cultural context.

Pattern

Author Simon Clarke (2011, p155) defines patterns as simple or complex, symmetrical or asymmetrical and any identical or similar image or motif that is repeated can become pattern. Anything in repeat can become pattern, but to understand the culture of pattern we must discuss its origins and traditions. Pattern design has a vast history that has resulted in today's pattern influence. It affects imagery, design, colour and methods. The book *The Fundamentals of Printed Textile Design* explores the knowledge of pattern design and its whereabouts. Culturally patterns have originated from all over the world with patterns dating back as far as 4000 years in Egypt and many traditional methods dating back 2000 years in Asia.

Clarke (2011, p10) declared that the influence of Asian design, both in style and in content formed the bedrock of European design which is clearly visible to this day. A significant number of European patterns are influenced by originals created in Asian culture. Due to Asia's cultural impact on pattern design, there was much demand for it in Europe and this led to the start of the manufacturing and westernisation of pattern.

According to Cole (2002, p65) it has been said that '*the Indian subcontinent is the most original, creative and prolific source of patterned textile production in the world.*' Indian fabric was in such high demand by the west that the demand was for pattern of Indian origin.

Europe's attempt to commercialise Indian culture led to the biggest technological advancements in pattern design. The evolution of technology in pattern has been shared by many cultures. The same method has different requirements in different countries. For example, resist printing. The overall method for resist printing involves painting fabric with a form of resist so that when the fabric is dyed the untreated parts of the fabric become colour, but the area protected by the resist remains the same and reveals the pattern. The method is the same, but it is the resist that changes. In Asia, a wax resist is used and in Africa the resist is starch paste. A huge cultural difference and yet we see how different traditions can still lead to the same outcome with the pattern.

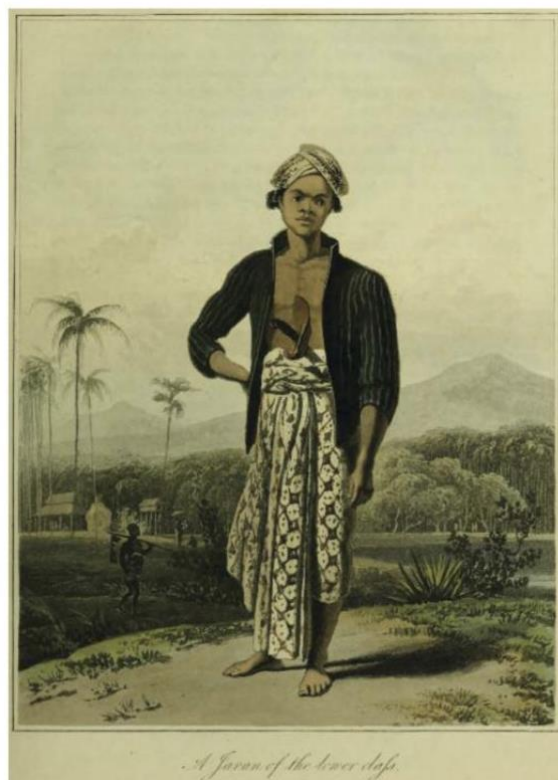


Figure 1 (Kerlogue,

2021, p51)

In Asia, patterns not only represent design but both social and moral class. Figure 1 above shows a Javanese man wearing a resist batik garment with a pattern

resembling the Kawung. This motif is taken from an Asian specific palm tree that is of great importance. This should also symbolise that the wearer 'be useful to the community as is the Kawung palm.' (Gypsied, 2017).



Figure 2 (Kawung, Thames and Hudson, 2014)

Through the origin of culture, it is apparent that patterns hold meaning to the community and this has perhaps been lost at the hands of the west, turning pattern into trend rather than a reflection of self. Like trends, patterns now have a cyclical nature. The demand for culture has led to pattern turning into desirability rather than meaning in the commercial world.

However, pattern still holds its power in the cultures that created it. 'The visual language of print and pattern has been shaped by the past to a very large degree,

the possibilities of the technologies involved have been central to this' (Russell, 2001).

Europe's lust for Indian design led to the evolution in printing technology. From block printing to copper plate printing eventually to copper roller printing, a process so much faster than the previous methods that leading to further pattern printing abilities beyond the original batik resist process.

Culture

'Culture is music, literature, painting, and sculpture, theatre and film' (Williams, 1988, p90). In his book *Keywords*, Williams discusses the culture of art, and its relevance in aesthetic developments which are 'transferred to the works and practices which represent and sustain it'. Culture is a knowledge that is transferred and translated into art, art being the host. As previously discussed, in anthropology, culture is primarily suggested to be within a material whilst cultural studies reference itself as a symbolic system. So, one could presume that visual culture is that of both symbolic and material influence. Visual culture is unable to be understood without its material or its context. To create work without culture is something many artists attempt in search of their own individuality.

'Suspend us over this abyss of the visual without the conceptual crutches' (Jenks, 1995, p202-210). Here, Jenks' discusses that artists wish to show an audience their work without the bias, influence or representation of contextual traditions. Seeing concept as a 'crutch' to rely on implies, that we rely on knowledge too instinctively.

But to dismiss the fact that all work is based off the fundamentals of “the concept”, dismisses that culture plays alongside the visual and should not be taken away and replaced with this “abyss”. *‘Art cannot exist separate from culture. Art reflects culture, transmits culture, shapes culture, and comments on culture.’* (Lents, 2017).

In his book, Visual Culture, Sociology Professor Chris Jenks (Jenks, 1995, p202-210) says ‘to refuse art on culture’s terms is to deny its importance’ he claims artists experiment with this to seek outside of culture, an ‘other place’ that culture has not yet reached so that the individual can be fully expressed. However, what is art if it has not been derived from the learnings of the past? It would be unmindful to deny that culture has formed everything that we create and will create. Even if an artist achieves to create outside the reigns of culture, it will still co-exist with it.



(Figure 3, *Marilyn*, 1962)

Figure 3, *Marilyn* by Andy Warhol is an example of how art made outside of culture still exists because of culture.

Warhol was the leading drive for the pop art movement, and it was something completely new in the 1950's. Even art that is completely new has inspiration that it falls back on, and pop arts inspiration was commercial culture. Behind these pieces were influences from music, movies, media, advertising and magazines/comics. This is the culture in context.

Visually, the material culture was screen printing. A process that originated in China in 221 AD and found its way to France in the 17th century where silk screens were invented and advanced into the 1930's where serigraphy was invented in New York where it was then established as an integral part of the pop art movement in the 1960's and popularised to produce contemporary art.

Marilyn's Visual culture can be understood through both material and context.

'Artistic practices find (or lose) themselves in the ways that they are strung out across the senses of tradition... for there to be tradition there must be practices which are traditional' (Jenks, 1995, p202-210). Through cultural developments tradition is born, and it is through traditional practices that Warhol was able to create the fundamentals for pop art culture. So, without art traditions we are unable to revolutionise new ways of working within the art world, hence why culture and art co-exist together.

To specifically understand culture in works of art you must understand all the meanings that art holds, including its material culture and contextual culture. If artists embrace the culture they have subconsciously used instead of trying to replace it with an 'other' they recognise the traditions used in their own work and transform tradition into an object of knowledge. To which art then evolves from just aesthetic, to a visual culture.

To conclude, my proposal has discussed the dissection of material, pattern and culture in art and in turn culture's specific relation to material and pattern.

Material culture being contextually specific creations that are created at the hand of the individual through tacit knowledge.

Pattern culture being the histories of fabrics and their visual meaning specific to the country they were created in. These words come to signify that visual culture includes both material and pattern and all three are inextricably linked containing context and material in order to understand the co-existing of art and culture.

Seeing these words from a historical sense allows thinking for the chronological development of materials and art. As researched previously, all these words are reliant on traditions from the past to see them as they are today, with a heavy influence on the consequences of westernisation. Through art we can see the cultural context from the country it was made in. However, through Europe's transportation of art its meaning can be lost.

If the country it resides in has changed then surely the cultural meaning will change, and its intended audience will no longer be the same. An example of this is artworks presented in museums, the work can be appreciated but can it be fully understood in a surrounding that is alien to all its meaning? As Jenks said (1995, p202-210) 'if 'taking place' entails both the appropriation and fixing of a position it may be that to gather art and our relation to it within such a framing is already to have forfeited the possibility of a relation with it on something approaching its own terms'. To force an artwork to 'take place' removes the chance in fully understanding it as it has been removed from its intended space. Instead of displacing artworks we should be displacing ourselves as viewers to see the art in its original space in turn removing the bias of western culture and viewing 'the art from its own representation, knowledge, tradition and culture.' (Jenks, 1995, p202-210).

Europe's evolutions of the design world have perhaps tried to leave behind its appropriated beginnings, but history teaches us the colossal influence other cultures have had on fabric and pattern design. Furthermore, the discussions of tacit knowledge in art delves further into creations as an instinct and how art relates to the individual. Therefore, looking into the cultural past of an artist individually, would further span the knowledge of the creation and give depth to the pattern itself.

This adds curiosity as to whether the display and placement of art changes its meaning entirely, and if Europe's transportation of art has lessened its cultural importance.

How has the westernised display of art changed its understanding and cultural importance?

Figures:

Figure 1 (Kerlogue, 2021, p51) - Kerlogue, F. and Pospíšilová, D. (2021) *Batik. Traces Through Time: Batik Collections in the National Museum–Náprstek Museum* (Vol. 27). Národní muzeum.

Figure 2 (Kawung, Thames and Hudson, 2014) - Kerlogue, Fiona. *Batik: Design, Style & History*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2014.

Figure 3 (*Marilyn*, 1962) – Warhol, A. (1962) *Marilyn [screenprint]* Tate Modern.

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