# [ADAD5004] Research in Practice

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## ***Introduction***

Today's world has become more visual than at any point in history. From posters in bus shelters to product mascot characters, the world has become a canvas for artists and designers. We use symbols to gain information quicker than words, new technologies are developed to design faster for the world, and education has been in the news a lot regarding the topic of creativity.

For my keywords, we will discuss **Education, Symbolism, and Digital Art**. We will also discover three individuals for these keywords (Sir Ken Robinson, Jean Moréas, and Ben Laposky. I will also mention Bill Atkinson and Susan Kare for their contribution to art design.

## ***Education***

*"Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up." - Pablo Picasso*

When it comes to creativity, schools are lacking behind with the concept. Creativity does not just mean using your imagination; it also means problem-solving or recognising ideas.

Young people go to school to learn about the world, which is changing very, very fast. The world today is far more visual than at any point in history and thrives on people who can be creative, manage their own time and find new ideas. However, schools in the UK have stayed the same since the industrial age, where they educated students like how factories want their employees to work, such as not talking to one another and doing exactly as they are told.

While the UK's education system is praised for having a range of choices for children to go to when they finish school, such as further education or internships, it is still riddled with flaws from injustices and discrepancies. *(Porter, 2022)*. The UK school system follows the national curriculum, which means teaching students in batches or years to educate them in the same way to learn the same things. *(GOV.UK, n.d.)*. This is not a good idea to teach a whole class, considering everyone learns in different ways, such as visual or auditory, and some children may need tools to help themselves catch up with their classmates, which could make them labelled as a 'failure' in the school's eyes. The system also does not help to grow a child's passion because there is no room for it, which can make them struggle with what they want to be when they grow up. Everyone is unique on their own and also learns in different ways.

UK schools pressure students with harsher examinations that judge their learning, which can be seen as a memory game. When students finish an exam, they will immediately forget the ‘knowledge’ they wrote down, and the cycle repeats for the next exam. When it comes to creativity, the UK system is facing a ‘crisis’ where a study found out that the number of GCSE music and drama students has fallen by a fifth over the last decade. In addition, one in seven music teachers and one in eight art and design teachers have left teaching, and there were plans to cut art subjects in universities by 50%. *(Weale, 2021)*. Because the system is relying on academic work, most students are dropping out of art related subjects in order to get a better chance of getting a higher result when they leave school.

Because creativity subjects are not like academic subjects, a person cannot take a test to measure their creativity; this still means that the teacher can grade a student's artwork. For example, if a teacher asked students to draw a tree, there would be different results with students' drawing skills. Some students are talented, and others are okay. The teacher would give some students an A+, some get a D, and others get a big fat F. *(Dalile, 2012)*. Students who got an A believe they are talented and artistic, but those who got an F will think their work is rubbish and put themselves down. Schools teach students to draw a 'perfect' triangle; everything must be drawn 'properly', or they will scream in panic when they colour in and go over the lines. This does not encourage anyone to be creative; it makes students fear imperfection and avoid new ways of trying anything.

Because of this perfectionism in school, this caused several students to be afraid of failure and not willing to try anything different. In 2006, Sir Ken Robinson (1950-2020) made a TED talk criticising the school's education system for stifling creativity. Robinson believes creativity should be treated the same as literacy, which should be accurate in today's standards. Schools do 'kill' creativity; the system produces people who desire good grades but do not think out of the box. Schools do not let children express their imagination. They deemed them as a failure for doing something different when in reality, it is a good problem-solving skill which schools should encourage. Creativity is important to the world, along with literacy. Without them, the future will be bleak.

## ***Symbolism***

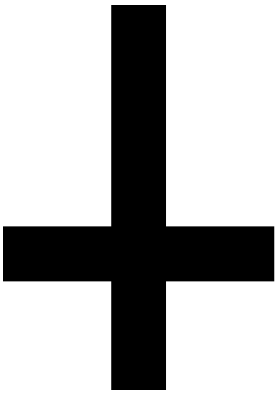
From the moment we are born, [p1] we see before we speak. *(Berger, 1972)*. Symbolism, also known as Semiotics is a powerful tool in human communication in a visual matter. *(Levanier, 2021)*. Our perspective of icons, symbols, and objects can be different from one another, from the way we are raised in culture or personal experiences.

The origins of the term 'symbolism' goes back in the 1880s in France, where a literary movement began in Europe. The first mention of the term came from poet Jean Moréas (1865-1910) who published his 'Symbolist Manifesto' in the Parisian newspaper Le Figaro. *(nationalgalleries, n.d.)*.

Humans always used visual imagery to showcase stories or warnings to others, such as cave paintings depicting animals or hunting scenes or Egyptian hieroglyphics consisting of symbols representing different words or ideas. *(Miller, 2021)*. In Victorian times, they used flowers to symbolise a meaning or emotion, commonly known as Floriography. *(O'Connor, 2016)*. Floriography is still being used today, and most of the meanings in Victorian times are still relevant, such as roses meaning true love or daisies symbolising innocence and purity. Today, Symbolism is all around us. The letters that make up a word, the icons are shown in our social media, emojis to react to our emotions, and more.

Symbols help provide a visual expression of meaning. For example, a red octagon is universally understood to mean 'stop', which can save lives on the road compared to reading the word alone. Other times the same symbol can mean different things to some people, either how they were raised, their culture and beliefs, or how the symbols are portrayed in the world. A good example would be the upside-down cross, which many today would symbolise evil or the devil himself since the horror genre

uses it in paranormal or ghost stories. However, others see it as a religious symbol of St Peter's cross, as he requested to be crucified upside down because he felt unworthy of being crucified in the same way as Jesus. *(Britannica, 2017)*. This shows that symbolism can significantly impact an icon's meaning with the world. However, this confusion can be avoided by first using the correct symbols and learning about the meaning of them.



***[Fig 1] Upside-Down cross***

While symbols and icons are the most popular form of symbolism, the complex but fascinating form of the concept has to be colour. Like icons, humans react to colour from our biological, cultural, and personal responses. An example of biological response would imply the colour red for anger but yellow for joy; Western Culture, for a cultural response, sees green as a colour for envy, but luck, and personal associations, like someone's hair or eye colour.

Colours also have their own meaning, determined by the three responses previously mentioned. Red is commonly the colour of danger in western culture, but in China and India, it is the colour of love and traditional bridal colour, compared to white in other cultures. Orange is the national colour of the Netherlands, associated with royalty. Yellow is mainly a cheerful colour in many cultures, but in Russia and Germany, it is the colour of envy; however, green is the colour of envy in Western culture and luck and movement. In most cultures, blue symbolises sadness or mourning, but Eastern cultures see it as the colour of healing or relaxation. Purple is a popular colour of royalty due to how rare it was to create then, but other cultures see it as the colour of magic or evil. As for mourning or death, in the US and UK, it is black, but in East Asia, it is white, but in Australia and NZ, it symbolises happiness. *(Catherine, 2023)*.

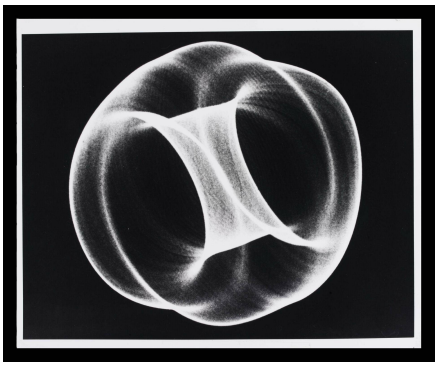
Symbolism at first may seem tricky to understand and work with, but once understood, you'll see that symbols can say more than a thousand words.

## ***Digital Art***

*"No masterpiece was ever created by a lazy artist." - Salvador Dalí*

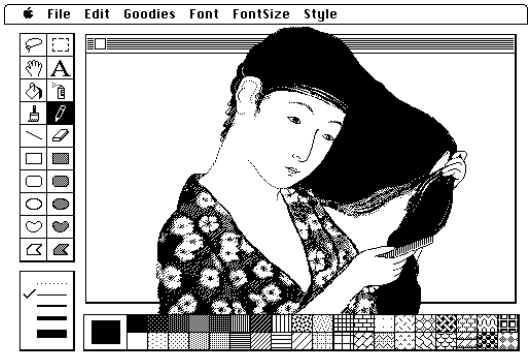
Recently, digital art has become controversial. Many believe that digital art is not 'real art', saying that digital tools make drawing 'cheating', that the app/computer does everything for the creators; and no one should be known as an 'artist' if they use it. *(Merrilees, 2020)*. But, many digital artists argue back saying that they spend the same amount of effort into their art as traditional artists and it should be classed as art.

Although digital art was popularised between the 1980s and 1990s, during the Digital Revolution (aka the Third Industrial Revolution or the Digital Era), digital art was actually discovered during the 1950s. *(Victoria and Albert Museum, n.d.)*. One of the first works from the medium were experimental approaches of photographs called Oscillon 40 (1952), created by American mathematician Ben Laposky (1914-2000). *(Victoria and Albert Museum (n.d.)*. Laposky created this design by manipulating electronic signals from an oscilloscope and photographing the shapes of waves to create a digital piece, which later fusions of art and computing.



*[Fig 2] Ben Laposky 'Oscillon 40' 1952*

When the Mac (named Macintosh at the time) *(Galvan, 2020)* was invented in 1983, however, digital art started to gain a widespread reputation. MacPaint was one of the first digital art apps with tool icons that can be controlled by a mouse or drawing tablet *(Meggs, 2019)*, allowing creative people to extend their imagination through computer graphics. It was developed by Bill Atkinson *(Meggs, 2019)* and designed by Susan Kare, who is also known to draw the earliest digital illustration from the app. Soon after, designers used other creative software, the most popular Photoshop and Illustration, developed by Adobe.




*[Fig 3] Susan Kare 'Woodblock' 1984*

Digital technology allowed designers to change the layout of their images, discover new font styles and more, saving designers additional expenses and cutting time. Nowadays, we have improved digital computers, drawing tablets, 3D machinery, better software, and more to improve work and expand the creative industry more. However, even though the digital revolution positively impacted visual communication and design, there has been an alarming debate as of late if the people using this technology are in fact 'artists' or creating 'art'.

The definition of **'art'** can be simplified as expressing human creative skill and imagination in a typical visual form, such as painting or sculpting. However, it can also be understood as any activity or product created by people with a communicative or aesthetic purpose. *(Smashing Magazine, 2010)*. Many artists and designers would agree that art has to have a meaning or a purpose. The design must have a target audience, a message, and a community of interest. Any form of art medium can meet these standards, including digital art.

Most designs nowadays are designed digitally. Though the argument from the start states that digital tools are a form of 'cheating', they actually help artists to cut time to produce artwork for the world in a faster paste. Digital artists still need to put effort into their work and learn how to use the technology to bring their imagination to life. Furthermore, at the end of the day, digital art is still being created by hand. In other words, digital artists practise their talents and work hard to create their art, just like a traditional artist would, which makes digital art REAL art. Unlike AI, which is generated by a machine, not a human, and caused more controversy by stealing other artists' work, violating the copyright law, and causing more starving artists due to companies funding AI ‘art’.

You can compare this argument with painting and coloured pencils in traditional standards. Painters may argue that coloured pencils should not be classed as art because they are flat on a canvas, compared to paint with a physical texture. In contrast, pencil users would argue that painting should not be classed as art because they can create any colour by mixing paint, which is ‘cheating’. Regardless, art requires human imagination, skills, effort, a purpose, and an audience. As long as these elements apply to any medium, **IT IS ART.**

## ***Synthesise***

Upon researching these three keywords, **Education, Symbolism and Digital Art,** it got me to think deeper about the subject matter and be grateful for the theorists I had discovered, which helped designers and artists make their work better than ever.

While it does hurt me when people claim that digital art is not 'real' art, I can tell from nearly a decade of experience that it does take a lot of time to learn the technology, let alone the skills to develop to improve your style. Computers help artists save a lot of time and money, and produce projects out to the world in a much faster paste, compared to traditional art methods.

Learning about Symbolism for the first time in uni was very complicated, admittedly, but with further research and knowledge, I feel like I got a grasp on what it is. I found it fascinating how different cultures around the globe see colours in a different way, either by emotion or symbolism. It does make you wonder why they view colours differently from others, which assumes that they have a positive or negative experience with certain colours.

The education topic I feel like no one is talking about it enough. Admittedly, I was debating to myself if I should write about it myself, because I don't want to sound too biassed with my negative expressions with school. However, looking at my research and knowing that the UK schools education system hasn't changed since the industrial age, I feel like it safe to say that it needs to change and creativity should be treated like literacy, as Ken Robinson mentioned in his TED talk.

The theorists I have discovered, **Sir Ken Robinson, Jean Moréas, and Ben Laposky,** played into the art and design world that caused either a massive or little impact. Robinson spoke out with the school's flawed education system and how creativity is dying because of it. Moréas created the term 'Symbolism' which helped designers to use icons to speak more words than letters would do. And Laposky created one of the earliest digital artworks during the 1950s, showcasing how far digital art history was before the Mac's time in the 1980s.

To summarise my write up, my question is: ***'Since most brands use digital art, why aren't critics attacking businesses for not using 'real' art for their branding?'***

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***[Fig 1]*** *Cross of St Peter. (n.d.).*

*https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/9/9a/Peter%27s_Cross.svg/1200px-Peter%27s_Cross.svg.png.*

***[Fig 2]*** Laposky, B. (1952). *Oscillon 40 1952. Victoria and Albert Museum*. Available at:

https://assets-cdn.vam.ac.uk/2022/09/15/15/17/34/91e99f69-32a7-4f26-899b-69c6f38ad331/1920.jpg.

***[Fig 3]*** Kare, S. (1984). *Woodblock 1984. Behance*. Available at:

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