

Define skill in the context of your own practice and the work of two artists/makers/designers

This essay will look at the skillset of a surface pattern designer, describing the techniques and processes involved with creating pattern for a variety of surfaces.

Secondly, the works of William Morris and Lucienne Day will be looked at and discussing what processes they used, and the inspiration behind some of their most famous pieces.

Finally, this essay will conclude reflecting on what has been learnt from both artists and the research, and whether the information is inspirational to experiment with different processes or explore themes around natural forms.

The training to become a surface pattern designer is intense. To become fully qualified will take a minimum of 3 years of rigorous study at university. University courses have specialist trained staff and equipment that are matched to those used in industry, that continue with learning about countless types of materials and techniques for future trends (UWTSD, 2022).

The skillset of a surface pattern designer is beyond broad. As a surface pattern designer in the modern world, the designer must keep up with fashion trends and processes of designing to maintain in the marketplace/ industry. The initial stage of creating a design is research, followed by drawing, applying a range of mediums that are to the designer's preference for example, charcoal/graphite drawing, pen, line drawings, painting, inks etcetera. This is continued with developing a motif with applying different printing techniques that include: screen printing, block printing, lino printing (Dyeing and Printing, Kate Wells 2000) This is then followed by the process of creating a design for an item of clothing or for interiors and developed into a repeat pattern, see image 1 below.

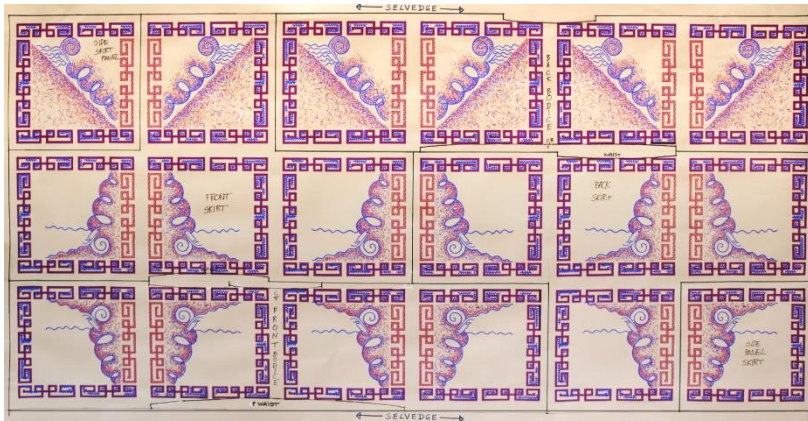


Image 1: (Zandra Rhodes: *Textile Revolution*)

The next stage in the process, according to Kate Wells (2000) is when the overall design has been created, the designer may continue working on the piece applying a traditional process with screen-printing- see image 2 or reproducing it digitally. Nowadays, the digital design and can be hand embellished at a later stage. Surface Pattern designers also need to have a full range of digital skills nowadays for designing and working in this modern world. Photoshop and Illustrator are two massively important programs that every surface pattern designer needs to learn how to use because these programs can support and help the designer so much whether that be to just clean up the edges of an art piece or to create a whole design on them (Textile design in the digital age, Tamasin Doe, 2012).



Image 2: (CHALFFYGETTY IMAGES)

However, the screen-printing process is very time consuming, the designer needs to be competent in applying a design to a screen, which includes knowing how to coat the screens, exposing the design onto the screen/s and the appropriate way to clean the screen ready to use. In addition to this, further knowledge on the correct mediums is needed to apply to specific fibres (Wells, 2000). These skills are essential when screen-

printing, because if applied incorrectly, the screen may become clogged, and the design will not be clear and therefore, cannot be used- this results in time wasted!

Furthermore, when working with specific printing pastes/ dyes, health and safety practices must be adhered to, as some of the chemicals used can cause certain health risks and reactions. All dye laboratories and print rooms must display health and safety procedures and information on control of substances hazardous to health (COSHH, 2021), see image 3.



Image 3: (COSHH poster)

The designer will also need to have a good understanding of which fabrics and materials would work best for their design and the printing method chosen. And moreover, the surface pattern designers need skills to screen-print a clean and even design (Wells, 2000). Other techniques and processes that could be used are lino and wood block printing. The designer would need to draw a design on the sheet of lino or wood and know which tools to use and the depths of carving to get a clean, smooth print. When lino/wood printing you the skill of using a printing press and learning about the tension and weight needed for certain materials is paramount (Wright,1973). Along with printing skills, many designers also possess needle work and fabric skills such as embroidery, sewing, knitting, and crocheting. These processes can enhance a piece of work- as seen below in image 4, embellished denim.



Image 4:(Alexander McQueen's embellished denim for spring 2016)

As Jessica Jane Pile (2018) states that embroidery is a very delicate and time-consuming process, but the results are always worth it. An artist that is renowned for creating designs applying traditional time-consuming processes to create designs is William Morris.

Morris is a well-known artist/designer for his stunning craftsmanship and meaning behind his designs. Morris in the 19th century was celebrated by many as he was a key figure in the Arts and Crafts Movement. The Arts and Crafts Movement was a time where makers and designers were striving and trying to revive their traditional techniques of handmade wears, that were quickly being replaced by machines during the Industrial Revolution during the Victorian era (Blakesley, 2009).

Morris is known for many aspects of his work in design in history from textiles to furniture, as well as literature and poetry. However, his woodblock-printed wallpaper designs continue to be popular today, that demonstrate his masterly skill in woodblock-printing. Block printing was known as his favourite form of printing as it can yield results that are unobtainable from any other printing method. Woodblock printing is known as one of the oldest and slowest processes for printing patterns onto material. The method is done by hand carving a block of wood and Morris mainly used pear shaped woodblocks that he would often carve himself. He also had full knowledge of natural and mineral based materials, and with that information, he could make custom dyes for

his designs. He would also use a foot operated weight to aid him with the long printing process. Each of his designs were carefully lined up with precision as he would hand print the motif multiple times to create a seamless repeat pattern (Mason, 2021).

These designs were mainly printed onto various textiles such as, cotton, silk and linen depending on what finish the artist wanted to achieve. Morris always tried to show the joy in creating and showing the beauty of artisanship, as he went on to produce over 50 wallpaper designs throughout his designing career. They were revolutionary for their time and as previously mentioned, continue to be to this day. They are some of the most, iconic, detailed designs in the marketplace (Mason, 2021).



Image 5: William Morris "*Strawberry Thief*" 1883

Image 5 is Morris's most popular repeating pattern designs. Its symmetry is precise with intense detailing of leaves, birds, flowers, and fruit. This piece is named "*Strawberry Thief*." It was created in 1883. The inspiration for this design is said to be that Morris saw thrush birds stealing fruit from his garden whilst gazing through his kitchen window at his home in the English countryside. Bain further continues stating that Morris spent many painstaking hours on this pattern alone, as he used the methods of woodblock printing, along with indigo-discharge printing to create this. He admired these processes above all forms of printing he had tried previously (Bain, date). He first attempted to create this print using these methods in 1875 but due to complications it was not until 1881 that he perfected the design, technique, and dyes to apply, as he was the first

designer to use red (Alizarin dye) and yellow (Weld plant) on a fully pigmented blue background (Bain, 2019)

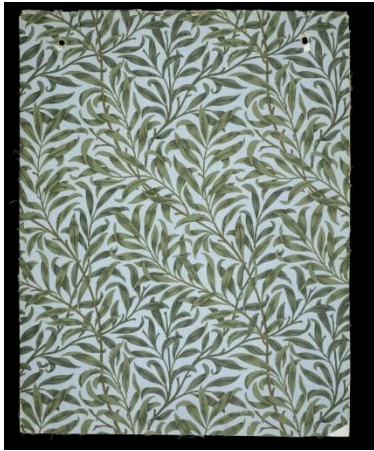


Image 6 :“*Willow*” William Morris 1874

Morris closely studied flora and fauna first hand, as he was fascinated by natural forms. Many of his patterns have been inspired by nature including the pattern named “*Willow*” seen in image 5. This pattern is said to be inspired by the wildflowers and plant forms he saw whilst being out on his country walks. It is also said that Morris enjoyed looking through 16th century herbal medicinal books as he would draw inspiration from the diagrams within the books. This design was also created using woodblock and using a variety of natural substances to gain the green tone throughout this pattern, such as indigo or woad plant to create a blue colour, then mixing it with wild mignonette and the weld plant to create yellow. He would then mix and experiment with these natural forms to create all the different green shades visible in this design (Bain, 2019) This *Willow* design was one of Morris’s favourite motifs to work with, he used this motif in several other patterns he designed for textiles and wallpaper. He mainly used a smaller scaled version of the willow leaves as a background for other floral motifs (Morris). In contrast to Morris’ traditional methods of creating furnishings are the designs of Lucienne Day.

Day was known as one of the most influential textiles designers in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s. Day was known for her new style of abstract pattern-making, this style is known referred to as ‘Contemporary’. She was known for her memorable post war wallpaper designs and helping her husband Robin with large scale interior design. Day

was unable to fulfil her love for designing for a while due to the war happening in Britain, at the time she was teaching art at Buckenham School of Art. However, as soon as the war was over, she jumped at the chance to finally start designing (Casey, 2014).



Image 7: *Calyx* Lucienne Day, 1951

Image 7 depicts one of Days most popular prints named “*Calyx*.” This design was created for the *Festival of Britain*, which was held in London the summer of 1951. The festival was held to celebrate the nation and to give many artists a chance to show off their work, and this is said to be a turning point for Day’s career (Casey, 2014).

Calyx was firstly created as a design for furnishing fabric to be used in an interior that Day’s husband- Robin, was working on, but shortly after became one of Days most popular wallpaper design to date. The design is a larger scale abstract interpretation of flowers. She used cup-shaped motifs to replicate the petals of a flower and free flowing line work as the stems. This motif was then repeatedly hand printed to create the wallpaper. Furthermore, the original design was hand screen printed onto linen. Firstly, she would base colour the flat olive brown ground to the cloth, the exact method is unknown. To follow, she would overlay with her line work in white pigments, followed by the abstract florals, which were all printed using yellow, orange, red and black pigments (Jackson, 2001). This was a time-consuming process compared to advanced digital methods used today.

After the Festival of Britain, this design was quickly picked up by Heals furnishings- a popular high end, designer store, and was being produced for consumers to buy. At first, they were not convinced that the innovative style would be as successful as their previous floral patterns. However, this design went onto be the most profitable design Day has ever created and went onto win a gold medal at the Milan Triennale (Jackson, 2001).

Lucienne Day will always be primarily known for her wallpaper and fabric designs as they are still being used and sold today. However, during the late 1970s Day lost interest with the designing and manufacturing world, as it was around this time more traditional floral designs were emerging into fashion. She felt that her modernist abstract style was no longer suitable for the market. Around this time, Day was in her early sixties and was nowhere near ready to retire, so she started experimenting and from doing so, she created her own technique. This technique was derived from traditional patchwork eventually creating her own art form she called “Silk Mosaics” see image 8.

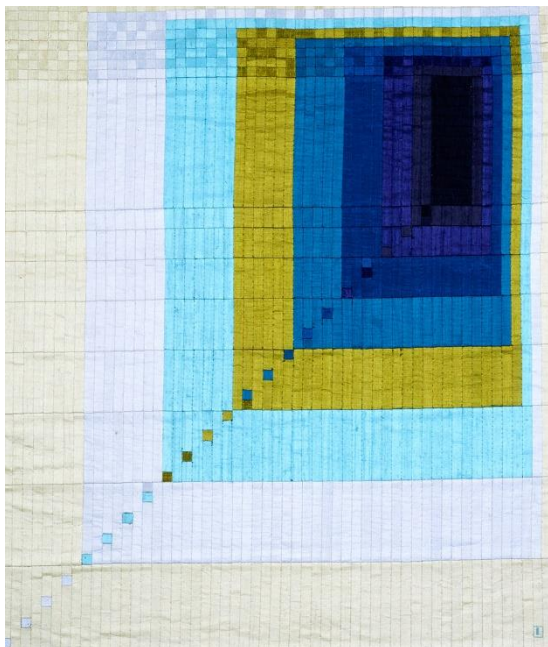


Image 8: (*Black Window*, silk mosaic, Lucienne Day, 1980)

Days silk mosaics named “*Black Window*” was composed of 1 cm squares and strips of different coloured silks that she would sometimes dye herself. The design is created by

placing the strips and squares of silk through overlaying. The colours and the woven texture of the silks naturally catch the eye and finding a good balance for this design involved the skill of a master craftsman. Instead of these pieces being seen as in-home furnishings, they were perceived as artworks, as they were not made from printed cotton, these pieces were made from richly coloured and textured Thai or Indian silks (Casey,2014).

To conclude, the skills of Morris and Day are similar with regards to the initial process of creating surface patterns. Both engage in the initial stages of drawing and using different materials to produce their designs and artwork. However, during Morris' time as an artist/ designer he worked a lot with making his own natural dyes and pigments for his prints, and due to the time, he worked with hand wood block printing, as he would print everything by hand. As with Day, there had been some advances in processes as printing pigments became more available around the world, as she would use only the highest of quality pigments and materials within her work. From research and learning more about both designers I have learnt and realised that Morris' ways of dyeing with natural pigments was very successful and how he mastered the art of creating his own pigments. This is inspirational for surface pattern designers to adapt in current times, as the carbon footprint needs to be reduced with using more environmentally friendly products. From further research into Day's processes, it is apparent that she created more than wallpaper and designs for fabric. She created textile artworks, which is very inspiring for a surface pattern designer to create real life textile pieces as artworks for exhibitions. Through reading books and online sources regarding some of her silk mosaics, the process of piecing fabrics and stitch methods are fascinating. It is the intention to experiment with the said methods that she used.

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