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MDes Surface Pattern Design

Research Methods and Communication

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CW1: Project Proposal and Research Methodology

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Introduction

I learn primarily through play and intend to keep this energy alive throughout my Creative Venture to create a collection of prints for fashion - specifically womenswear - that encourages experimentation and a curiosity for the new.

I want to create prints that have a purpose and are impactful for the wearer, whilst fulfilling my needs as a designer. To do this, I will use colours, materials and motifs that aid the subconscious wellbeing of the user.

My visual narrative will be an in-depth study of biophilia with the addition of textural components to further explore the narrative, fuelled by my thought experiment where I looked at tactility and the use of the human form within art.

The Handmade and Wellbeing

The act of creating is an act of self-care for me. It has an impact on my wellbeing as I find that without a physical handling of work or continuous movement, I feel sluggish and demotivated to be creative.

When in the print room is when I feel most motivated, spending days churning out new prints that each exist within their own realm of design. It is common knowledge that being productive and using your body is a good indicator of a healthy wellbeing, but the impact of creating physical work is also beneficial for human wellbeing.

Screen printed works are a result of artisan manufacturing, as a consumers' awareness of a maker behind a product grows. An emotional connection is formed when participating in consumerism of products that have been designed or made by hand, as there is knowledge of the person behind the print, rather than a mass-produced product that has little distinguishing remnants of a maker.

There is a human level of value to craftsmanship and appreciation in personalisation, but also a quality to hand-printed design that digitally printed designs cannot replicate alone. There is value in the technical knowledge of creating a hand-printed pattern due to the multitude of elements that need consideration upon production such as the knowledge of material qualities, process and how these can work together.

The practice-based research is an important part of the working process for me as a designer, which ties in with my love for traditional practice. I aspire to work similarly to Lola Lely as I found her way of working within her discipline resonated with me. Lely is a designer who is "linking contemporary practices and technologies with age-old techniques" (Lely, 2020) to form a new avenue of craftsmanship, with an emphasis on the importance of process.

Figure 1 | 'Indigo Aprons' by Lola Lely

She discusses the importance of the practice-based research and despite her production of a final product, it is the process of making that produces new avenues of discovery, as she views her work as a “resting point rather than an end point” (Elle Decoration UK, 2020). This resonated with me as I prefer the play and experimentation that comes with forming ideas for a final collection, rather than producing the collection itself.

As a designer, I enjoy working at a fast pace but I feel that the work I want to create is more reminiscent of a slower practice as I intend to use slower methods of creating work, such as screen printing. I find working with traditional practices more fulfilling on a personal level, carrying a need to feel the tactility of my work as I continue to create.

In discussion of wellbeing, I feel that it will conflict against my personal beliefs if I contributed to the fast fashion industry as it currently stands. Despite loving what I do, I would rather collaborate with companies that work ethically to create conscious fashion in a gentle protest against the current environmental issues.

Sarah Corbett discusses the idea of gentle protest in the fashion industry, and how she used her skills as a craftswoman to question the consumers choices in an indirect and non-invasive way. By placing notes in the pockets of garments, in high-street stores, she quietly questions the consumers need for the garment, their

knowledge of its provenance and the value of that (Mann, 2020). Although I do not intend on participating in activism, I am a quiet contributor as both a designer and consumer, participating as a designer allows me to consider my career values in regard to environmentalism.

This is not only personal but global as there is growth in global recognition of the consequences of the fast fashion industry, with an increase in smaller brands that ground themselves on eco-conscious values.

Biophilia and multi-sensory design

Visually, wellbeing is often associated with biophilia and biophilic design. Biophilia is rooted in the belief that “humans are innately and emotionally attracted to other living organisms” (O'Wilson, 1984), driven by Edward O’Wilson’s hypothesis that bringing natural elements indoors can improve human wellbeing, leading to the concept of biophilic design.

I am fascinated with this concept, but continuously find that it is often perceived as the addition of drawn flora and fauna. I would like to study it at a greater depth to introduce multisensory design into my work and apply the theory of biophilia to a new context - print for fashion. To achieve this, I intend on studying a multitude of elements further than flora, such as the addition of marks made from nature, dapplings of light and shadow – the curious elements of nature that are often overlooked in day-to-day life, as its consistency is familiar.

Floral prints are continuously popular within fashion, a print staple that escapes time and the seasonal changes in fashion, but I aim to explore how other influences such as tactility, colour and depth can influence wellbeing.

I came across Jennifer Packer’s exhibition ‘The Eye is not Satisfied with Seeing’ at Serpentine Galleries (Serpentine Galleries, 2020). Her work ‘Tia’ intrigued me as she depicted a male figure resting on a pillowcase that held a ditsy floral pattern.

Figure 2|'Tia' by Jennifer Packer

Initially, what struck me about this was the contrast in the character and the gentle pattern in the background, but as I read into her work and discovered her floral imagery, I could see how her work intertwines with theory of my own. Her work explores a sense of connection and familiarity as she is interested in the environment of her work as much as the figures that sit within it.

Figure 3|'Say her name' by Jennifer Packer

Figure 4|'Untitled', Jennifer Packer (2016)

Packer uses floral paintings to express personal emotions that better her wellbeing, in the same way that I use screen printing as a therapeutic process. She discusses how her work 'insists on the emotional' (Serpentine Galleries, 2020), but that floral paintings also do not need to carry the weight of the world, and how we evaluate life but instead can be a decorative outlet.

Her exhibition title 'The eye is not satisfied with seeing' nods towards the use of multisensory design to express a deeper investigation of design further than visual interaction.

Electroencephalographic studies have found that there is both passive touch and active touch when interacting with soft substrates (Hoefer, 2016). Passive touch is what we most commonly use – the subliminal knowledge that cloth is touching our bodies, yet active touch is what we use to decide whether or not that cloth will touch our bodies. It is the deciding element of touch that discovers if we find something too coarse or too soft.

As my work is heavily led by practice-based research, I want to expand and innovate beyond what these processes can do in relation to human engagement. The term 'human

engagement' indicates the active involvement a person would have with a substrate and how that can positively affect their wellbeing.

There is a textural component to hand-printed design that digital print cannot achieve in that it is solely one surface texture, whereas with hand-printed components I can strive to achieve more emotional and interactive design with an engaging surface. I intend to use a variety of substrates to hold processes such as puff binder to introduce an interactive element through the sense of touch.

The electroencephalographic study also found that there was a subconscious emotional preference of substrates with softer textures in comparison to coarse substrates which can be an irritant to people with sensory issues. It further discusses that the experiment was conducted using this method as questionnaires would form insufficient results as our conscious and subconscious react differently – what we believe to be nice against our skin may not always be in agreement with our subconscious emotions (Hoefer, 2016). I would like my creative venture to respond to the emotions of the subconscious to carry a deeper affect through tactile print.

Using texture within my work would benefit the viewer visually, as having more than a flat surface for our eyes to penetrate is also a subconscious way for our bodies to engage with an object. Classen discusses how "modernity has overlooked the powerful sense of touch to favour visual senses due to a growth in technological aid" (Classen, 2013), yet touch is more instinctual. Personally, I find it a clear indicator as to whether I will or will not purchase a garment through the use of active touch. When used, touch provides a more immediate reaction than our visual senses.

I intend on using the laser engraver and textile print processes such as puff binder as it is appealing to the eye and ocular bias, as immersive print design is the most engaging for a handler – and ultimately, the most beneficial for wellbeing.

A play with transparency using devore also appeals to me in that it would explore the visual sense in a more creative outlet – through exploration of depth of perception. I envision a layered composition of soft substrates that are readily made transparent, and

heavier substrates that allow the devore print process to be used to create a variety of depths. I would like to explore how a variety of layered substrates can suggest new materialities, visuals and textures. The textural combination of devore and puff binder appeals greatly to me as they work in conjunction with one another, alongside an exploration of engraving methods.

I intend to experiment with a variety of processes and substrates as I do not want my collection to be overpowering and maximalist, but calm in its nature to replicate the effects of biophilia and wellbeing. Using a variety of processes in a subtle nature can explore my maximalist way of working, whilst simultaneously creating work that aids wellbeing.

The gentle watery tones and colour of Bluebell Gray's work replicates the nature of reactive print pastes, and despite my love for them I would like to develop work that is stronger and more confident in its stature through a combination of processes.

Figure 5|Wee Peggy Midnight by Bluebell Gray

Using reactive print pastes and digital print alongside binders such as metallic and puff, combined with the use of the laser engraver would form an influx of texture and an invitation to engage with the material. I would not want to create a sensory overload with my prints, but a beautifully engaging set of fabrics that provided comfort, warmth or joy to the handler.

I am aware of the contradiction between creating prints that are textured and prints that are wearable as my focus is in making print for fashion, therefore I hope to create a series of prints that are experimental in design and process, yet functional in context.

I gather inspiration from the runway where I can see process in designs created for fashion in order to visualise how I can take that forward and utilise it in my own work using my own methods. My mind naturally works in visualising process – from the images below I visualise screen printed velvet and devore, cross-dyed velvet, metallic binder and clear devore resist. I intend on utilising my methodical way of thinking to play and form luxury prints for fashion by taking inspiration from a multitude of practitioners and form my own way of working, as I gather contextual references from a variety of sectors in design.

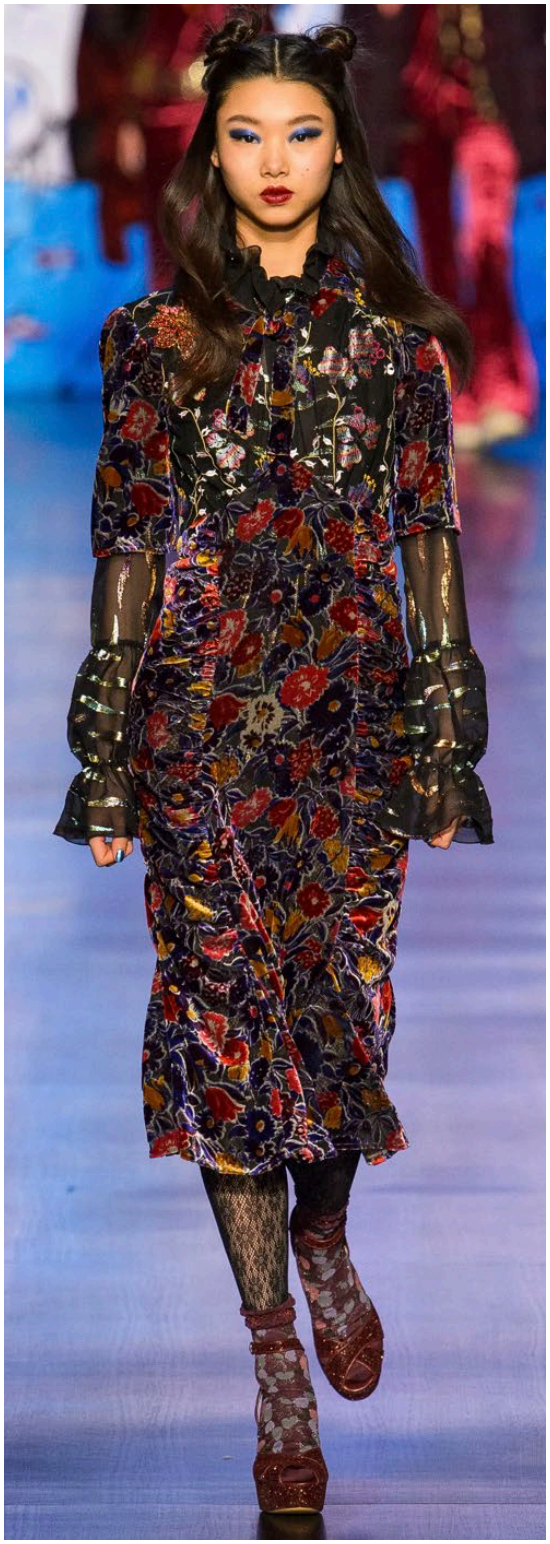

Figure 6|Anna Sui A/W 17

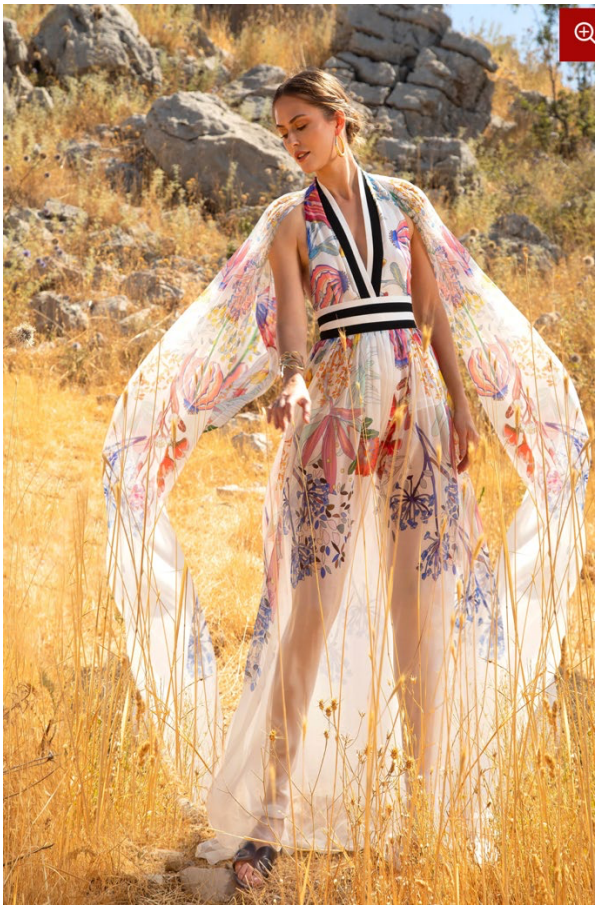

Figure 7|Elie Saab S/S 21

There is an expressive element to fashion which I aim to explore, as “fashion carries physical and social properties” (Weizhen Wang, 2018) which indicates that not only are the material properties and processes used important, but how the wearer feels when wearing the garment, as fashion is a communicator. I want to briefly explore this through a strong use of colour, to allow my visual style to translate into print for luxury fashion and express individual personality through design.

Societally, we feel that it is important to be well presented, but when interacting with clothes we never see their full extent on our person unless looking in the mirror – what we feel within the intimate space between our bodies and our clothes is marginally more influential, as it is where our senses personally interact.

Colour and Emotional Design

In reference to biophilia, I intend to use a colour palette derived from nature. Previously I have played briefly with using red cabbage, avocados and onion skins to create golden hues of purples, pinks and golds to entice the rich colours of nature into my work. I would like to continue this exploration as using bright but natural colourations can evoke a sense of familiarity in an audience, formed by awe of the colours created by our earth. Although I do not intend on using this method of colouration to dye my final collection, this is where I will draw my colours from and use my synthetic dyeing skills to colour-match to these hues.

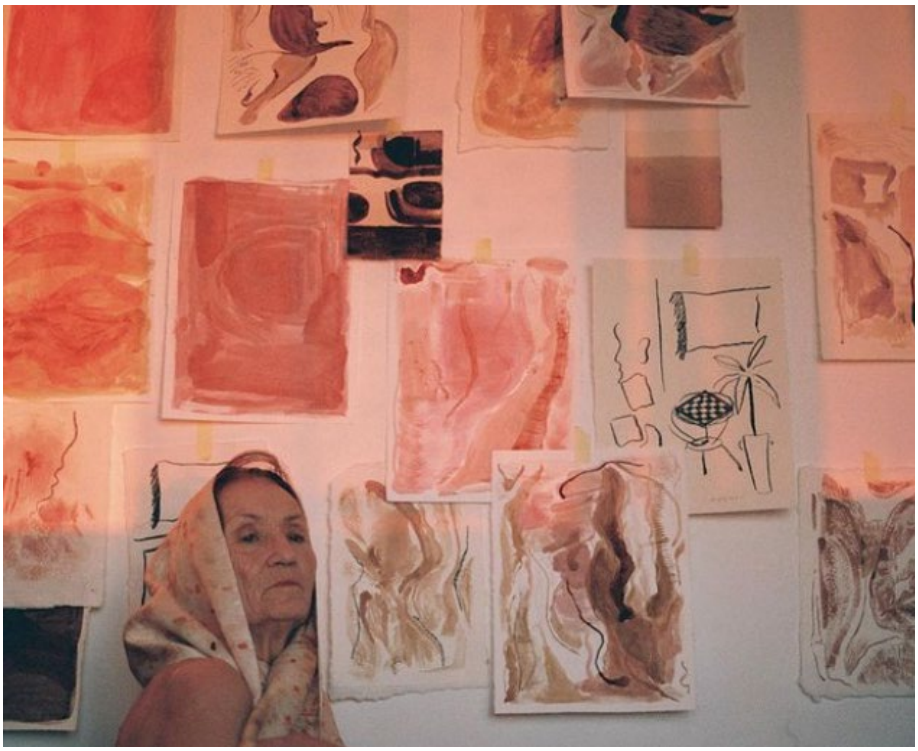

Figure 8|Hand Dyed Colour Exploration by Katrina Wilde

This image of prints painted using dyes formed from vegetables alongside an infiltration of golden-hour light depicts how I want my final collection to feel.

Lidewij Edelkoort's 2020 trend forecast declares a "continuing popularity of pink but the emerging 'Brown Age'", as natural colours come into force to coincide with an increasing importance of tactile textiles to combat the affects of the digital age (White,

2020). This overlap in the need for comforting textiles and organic colours aids the underlying theme of wellbeing using multi-sensory aspects.

Figure 9|'Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose' by John Singer Sargent

Although a different palette, there is an exploration of rich tone in John Singer Sargent's 'Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose', that fuels not only my drive to create colour infusions of a similar ambience, but the ethereal imagery also encapsulates the visual research as it holds a narrative.

In introducing tactility to my work as a deliberate feature, I loved Emma Lacey's 'In Conversation' lecture (Lacey, 2020). Her work focuses on ergonomic design in a commercial setting, and her 'tacit' mug envelopes the form of the body to create something meaningful yet functional.

Figure 10| Tacit mug by Emma Lacey

With a focus on form, the monochromatic design allows a focus on the indentation where a user's hands would fall when holding the mug, being the element of ergonomic design. As a designer, using colour is important to me as I enjoy creating colour palettes rich with flavour, yet working in this way could be beneficial to me to focus on the tactile qualities of the work and introduce sensory play.

I want my sensory design focus to be on that of the visual sense, and sense of touch. Arguably, these are the most powerful senses when discussing engagement with cloth and will provide the most success in achieving an engaging and calm surface to interact with.

Conclusion

My creative venture will explore a variety of soft substrates and traditional print processes to create a collection of prints for fashion that heighten and encourage human interaction using tactility.

I intend to use a combination of screen print processes that create texture and translucency, such as puff binder and devore alongside processes rich in colour, being reactive print pastes used for both monoprinting and traditional screen printing. Through a combined use of the laser engraver and Graphix Scan, I will delve into the properties of each substrate and use this to create further elements of print design.

This large-scale collection will be formed for the high-end market within the realm of luxury fashion design, using the purpose of human wellbeing as an underlying driving concept.

I intend on using this to heighten my portfolio and show potential employers a preferred direction and passion within my work, and an increase in traditional skills, to accompany the briefs from previous years that currently reside in my portfolio.

In a world focused on digitalisation, this collection will be formed as a celebration of our ability to be human, a celebration of our senses and emotions to form attractive design to better our wellbeing.

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