

Independent Inquiry

Name: Sophie Allen

Student Number: 1901822

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Supervisor: Kate Coode

Research Question:

How Important is the Narrative in Today's Surface
Pattern and Textile Design World in Comparison to the
Historic Design World?

For my individual project, I will be researching into the narrative in design. I will do this by looking at two key artists and designers work analysing how they leave behind symbols and key features that tell their own narrative. Having always had an interest in reading behind a designer's intentions and stories as well as just appreciating the art this is something I want to explore and research further in more depth. The report will compare historic designers with contemporary designers discussing whether there are any connections between both of their narratives and referring the importance of this in today's surface pattern and textile design world.

Some key topics I am aiming to research within this project will be symbolism in design- how/why do artists leave symbols within their work? What are these symbols? Furthermore, I will also be focusing into Historical artists against contemporary artists discussing the narratives behind their work reading in depth about their intentions and inspirations referring this back to their work. In Addition, I also want to investigate the opinions of others and whether they believe there is an importance of a narrative behind work and then relate this back to the question at the end.

In the first chapter I will present my findings on the breakdown of semiotics and symbolism within art using my research quoting references from books and online sources. Furthermore, in my second chapter I will give examples of historical designers who use narratives discussing what inspired them, what their story is and what symbols did they leave behind. I will under pick these key features showing how certain elements of their work provoke meaning. In my third chapter I will be comparing the artists in my second chapter against contemporary designers in today's design world. Do they have any connections? In my conclusion I will be comparing between both the historical and modern artists and designers, discussing the opinions of others, and then further relating the research gathered back to the topic question.

Chapter 1- The Breakdown of Semiotics and Symbolism in Design

“Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation.” (Oxford Languages). “Symbolism is the use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities” (Oxford Languages). Due to semiotics, symbolism is all around us in our everyday lives particularly within the surface pattern and textile design world because artists and designers leave behind key symbols and features in their creations that represent their ‘design’ journey. Designers use narratives behind their artwork to support the meaningfulness behind it this could be through a visual aspect whereby the work itself will contain symbols or key objects that will guide their audience to tell the narrative that is hidden behind themselves. As discussed in chapter 3 it is not only important that they do this because it shows the discussion between both the designer and the audience, but it also allows people to understand the true intentions of the maker. However, some artists may have a written narrative alongside their work if they want their story to be clear as a narrative/story can be anything the creator wants. For example, it could be the inspiration behind, the journey itself, a personal matter, a subject of awareness or the material matter. Rita Simon states: “I feel I understand best when I watch an image unfold in all its unexpectedness- showing the life of the inner person” (R.M Simon, 1991, P.2) this signifies that a story behind a design can not only show the meaningfulness behind the motif but can also inform the spectators a great deal about the maker and their personal story too.

Having a narrative and a story behind artwork is important in the design industry particularly when working for a customer because it shows the communication between the artist and the artwork through the materiality, colour, and design itself. An abstract behind a design allows the designer to write up their thoughts through the journey of the project which not only does this bring much more meaningfulness to the design but it also authorises the maker to pitch an ideal imaginative story that the artwork will bring to the customer allowing them to understand what it is like to be in the same thought process as the artist and will persuade the buyer to want to purchase the product more. Harvard Professor Logan Chierotti says, “...we should still focus on the features of the product. But we must also sell the lifestyle and the feeling. The key is to highlight the emotional response a consumer will achieve by using the product.” This leads back to the idea of how certain ways artists work to produce their work through the colours or use of line can all add up to a narrative of its own. “It can speak to us through its style; the way in which the representation or abstraction is painted makes an essential contribution to its meaning.” (McLeod, 2016, p13.) Consequently, to further this essay I want to investigate into a historical designer and a modern designer to find whether the narrative behind artwork has always had an importance to the design industry.

Chapter 2-William Morris

William Morris was a textile designer, artist, social activist within the Arts and Crafts movement, poet, novelist, and translator from Britain. Morris passed in October 1896, but his work remains to be just as popular in today's design world as it has been re-coloured to fit today's market and remains to be sold by the national trust foundation and by many wallpaper companies. While growing up the designer always had a passion for the environment around him and being outdoors due to being brought up in a wealthy family, he would always spend his time surrounded in their large gardens at home, there was also a library at his home where William Morris would sit and read in depth information into plants and flowers to educate himself further; "Among his favourite books was a copy of John Gerard's 'The Herball' or 'Generall Historie of Plantes', which was first published in 1597. It remained a much-loved reference book throughout his life." This is a book that shows illustrations of different plants showing their families and information about them individually. As Morris grew up him and his siblings were each given their very own garden area where he was able to plant anything he wanted. In 1860, The artist moved into his very own home known as 'Red House' in Bexleyheath with his wife Jane Burden this house was designed especially for him with all the things he was drawn to by his friend who was an architect called 'Philip Webb'. "The House and it's garden were designed as complementary parts of a world all of its own." Tessa Wild, William Morris & His Palace of Art at Red House.

Figure 1: National Trust, Red House, (William Morris Home, 2021)



Red House is still open today and is available for people to book and visit where it displays all work of William Morris as it's very own gallery. The garden is also still maintained currently by the national trust where they plant all his favourite flowers and plants that appear in all his designs such as: Lilies, Larkspur, Tulips, Irises, Hollyhocks, Roses, Honeysuckle and Jasmine. The garden is also open so that people can visit and walk through to view the beautiful nature that Morris's first designs and inspiration were gathered from.

The overall story behind William Morris' creations was to bring his garden indoors and that idea of bringing not just plants and nature itself but also the feeling that nature gives us inside too as well as outside. Most of his designs each tell their individual narrative within this. For example:



Figure 2: Morris, Wallpaper, (Strawberry Thief, 1883)



Figure 3: Morris, Closer View Wallpaper, (Strawberry Thief, 1883)

Figure 2 is one of William Morris' wallpaper designs called 'Strawberry Thief', this is a mirrored repeat design that shows many interesting motifs of multiple different leaves, florals, and birds. Figure 3 shows a closer view of the design where you can see a Thrush bird with its beak open as if to eat food, the narrative behind this is that in Morris's Garden he was growing strawberry plants and birds kept stealing and eating his strawberries. The design title for the wallpaper allows the customers to be able to under pick this narrative themselves as the illustrations almost tell this story itself. Furthermore, the colours in this design are dark and cooler tones which gives off a historical, vintage effect that works well with the imagery used in this piece. The mirrored repeat also works well to add to this effect and allows the piece to look much more valuable for a higher market audience.

Colour can create a narrative itself as it can relate us to the feeling of a particular time due to colour trends constantly changing within the design industry and through colour theory. Werner's book on 'Nomenclature of Colours' is a book whereby the author names colours in a way of his vision and connects it with an animal, vegetable and a mineral. Werner would suggest that the background colour in this design is an "Orpiment Orange" which he reflects this with "The Neck Ruff of the Golden Pheasant, Belly of the Warty Newt." (Syme, 1821, unknown) The way Werner relates this colour to the living world tells a tale within itself. Furthermore, an interesting factor from this is that Morris' wallpaper design shows a motif of a bird and Werner's connection to the main colourway in this wallpaper was also a description of a bird and these two individuals also were around the same timescale which shows that the colourway could hold a purpose for the narrative. "Colour illuminates, inspires and is a guiding force that helps us to express ourselves by colouring our thoughts, feelings and language." (McLeod, 2016, unknown) This quotation infers that colour in design holds importance and can change the perspective of the print due to the tones used, designers can use colour as a means of expressing what they want their story to tell others.



Figure 4: Morris, Wallpaper, (Pink and Rose Archive II Morris & Co Wallpaper, 1890)

Figure 4 shows another wallpaper design of Morris created in 1890 that shows roses and carnations which again Morris had chosen these flowers as inspiration from his garden. This design was printed by hand using two sets of wood blocks to create a vertical repeat. The florals in this design are all coiled together layering and overlapping one another to show the busyness of the artist's garden, this print is available to purchase in 4 different colourways Morris wanted to produce this design in multiple colourways because his garden contained so much colour and he wanted to bring that colour inside the home through his work. Although the design is available in various colours all the colours used in this collection are light, pastel tones of colour. The whispering colourways all give off a delicate, gentle effect which I feel relates well with the designer's floral elements in the work because flowers themselves are frail and contain shades of soft colour. Werner would describe this colourway as "Wild Primrose, Pale Canary Bird." (Syme, 1821, unknown) Which again reflects William Morris's design perfectly with the floral motifs and 'pale' whispers of colour.



Figure 5: Morris, Wallpaper, (Newill Melsetter Morris & Co Wallpaper, unknown)

Figure 5 displays William Morris's wallpaper design 'Newill Melsetter' this design was inspired by an embroidered duvet cover from 1905 that was stitched by Mary Newill who was an associate of May Morris from art school. The designer created this wallpaper design as a half drop repeat that represents a journey of his walk through the countryside capturing the nature as well as the animals. The swirl motifs added in this piece stood out to me as they all flow together naturally this could represent the journey/pathway that the designer took almost like a map joining up all the motifs together. The swirl placements could also correlate back to the idea of roots from plants and the growth of the natural environment if you look closely, you can see baby birds in a nest as well as bigger birds again showing the relationship of growth and a journey. The colour hues used in this design create a vintage feel but are much brighter tones this colour pallet reminds me of spring colour tones which works

pleasantly alongside the proposal of growth due to the seasonal transition between winter and spring.

Chapter 3- Michael Angove/ Liberty London

Michael Angove is a designer from Wales. Growing up in Wales and living around the coast really influenced Angove to engage with nature and the environment around him allowing this artist to form a personal narrative and connection that has driven all his design ideas. "Disused buildings were bustling with mosses, little ferns, birds' nests and Buddleia shrubs. Whilst the Teasel-edged, dark waters of the dockland were home to lonely jelly fish and dragon flies." Angove uses this small narrative as his description on what he describes that growing up in Wales was like. Furthermore, Michael Angove also translates his connection to nature within his work another way by adding hidden objects that he has gathered himself from his surroundings this translates a deeper meaning behind the story of his artwork relating back to semiotics and how artists and designers use hidden symbols within their designs.



Figure 6: Angove, Photograph, (Netflix, The Crown, unknown)



Figure 7: Angove, Photograph, (Netflix, The Crown, unknown)

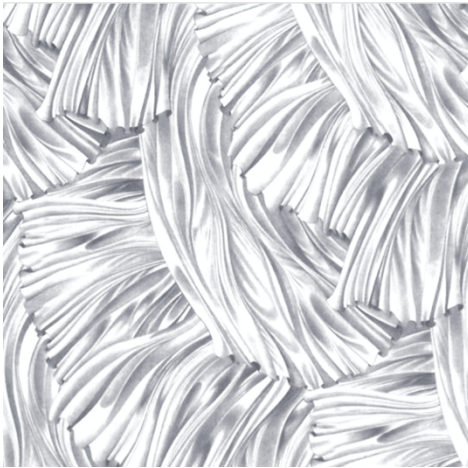


Figure 8: Angove, Design, (Liberty, unknown)

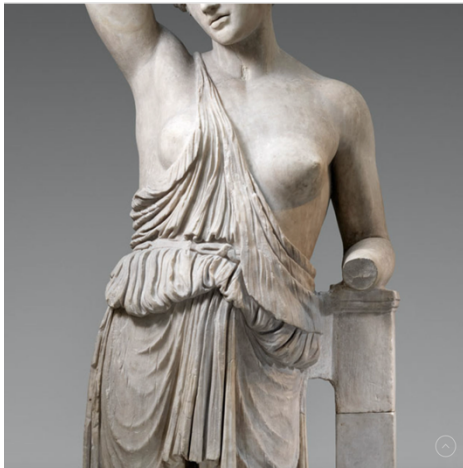


Figure 9: Unknown, Marble Sculpture, (Greek and Victorian, unknown)

Figures 6-8 as shown above were designed by Angove for Liberty Prints. The images in figure 6 and figure 7 show Vanessa Kirby wearing the artists design on a silk dress for the Netflix TV Show 'The Crown' as she plays the role of Princess Margaret. In Figure 8 you can see the design from a close viewpoint, this print was rendered in coloured pencil and was inspired by the marble structure shown in Figure 9. This print shows texture through the ruffles and pleats that the marble presents through its shadows which creates a delicate effect. Angove states on his website that the inspiration behind this design came from classical Greek and Victorian marble sculptures to add deeper connection with this historical time the artist decided to create this design all by hand without any use of computers. This brings the work much more value and really shows that the artist has put thought and time behind his art.

Liberty Prints London was originated in 1875 by Arthur Liberty but it is still well known today for it's beautiful prints. The company is highly acclaimed for its heritage and still brings this into many of their designs. "Each of their pieces has a timeless nature, which is proven because the designs are still produced and loved just as much today". (Fabrics Galore London, 2018). The idea of the prints having a 'timeless nature' has a narrative within itself however, each of the designs also tell their very own unique tale for example:



Figure 10: Liberty, Print, (Liberty London, 2021)

Figure 10 shown above was taken from Liberty Fabrics, this design is called 'Tapestry Tana Lawn' this print comes from the collection for Autumn/Winter 2021 and unfolds to tell multiple stories as stated on their website. "Bohemian, Stately, Modernist and Folk – the Liberty Fabrics collection reflects the exquisite craftsmanship of decorative arts, from brocade and gilt to sculpture, pottery and weaving. The New Collectables is a celebration of the beauty and individuality of artisanal designs, and the creative people who bring them to life." (Liberty Fabrics, 2021). This design is a mirrored repeat which reflects the same motif placement on the left as it does on the right, this Liberty London design caught my eye because of the repeat pattern as it reminded me of William Morris' designs. For example, Figure 2 William Morris' 'Strawberry Thief' as shown above is also a mirrored repeat both these designs allow you to visualise how they would look as they are placed in a repeat structure. The use of colour in this design- Tapestry Tana contains 2 tonal whispering shades of green and 2 tonal shades of pink oranges these colours work nicely alongside one another that allow this piece to look much more modern and contemporary in comparison to William Morris' design in figure 2. This is a proven example of how colour hues and tones can allow a piece to look more modern/historic, the mirrored structure also works to 'reflect' the collection of beauty and individuality throughout different processes and culture's showing how two opposites can attract and complement one another in a successful manner that is aesthetically pleasing but has also been confidently experimented with and allows it to convey a purpose too.



Figure 11: Angove, Fragrance Packaging, (Jo Malone, 2014)

Figure 11 was taken from Angove's website which is a design that he produced for a perfume collection that they are also able to wrap their home products in for Jo Malone in 2014. "The home products include Jo Malone London's candle, room diffuser, scent sachet and soap." (Jo Malone London, 2014). The designer produced multiple different designs for the Jo Malone perfume house as an interactive piece and behind each design there is hidden objects as you can see in figure 11 the more you look the more insects you are able to find such as cockroaches, butterflies, scorpions. Angove says, "You might think you spotted all of them, but we guarantee you will have missed at least one" (Angove, 2014)., While reading further into the reasoning behind these motifs I gathered that the artist purposefully wanted the motifs to blend in with the background and appear as hidden to give the collection a narrative of its own. A narrative for this collection is important as a strong story captures the attention of customers and clients this is always used in fragrances as it gives each scent its own purpose and allows the customer to feel a particular mood etc. The hidden insects in this design represent 'secret ingredients' that are used in each fragrance of Jo Malone and that allow each scent to be unique. The idea of secrets and mystery within this design is an important factor as it allows each customer to feel the relationship between this scent and design and allow the customer to feel mysterious and unique. Finally, the hidden objects will catch the attention of customers as they will want to look at the design for longer and want to find all the motifs hidden allowing Angove's work to become much more appreciative and popular in our current design world.

William Morris and Michael Angove are both surface pattern design and textile artists who mainly are known for their wallpaper designers and although William Morris is an historical artist both designers share many similarities. The biggest analogy these designers share is their passion for nature and how the inspiration from their designs all come from their surroundings and the beauty and emotion that nature provides us with. Morris and Angove both have personal meanings behind their work and make their narrative known through the design as well as speaking up about it too this allows people to have an open mind while

viewing the designs but then also being able to research in to the intentions is helpful and inspiring particularly for new designers like myself as it allows people to understand how having a narrative behind a print makes the work much more appreciative to people as they are able to see it from the designer's point of view. From researching into both designers, I have chosen to compare Figure 5: Morris, Wallpaper, (Newill Melsetter Morris & Co Wallpaper, unknown) of William Morris' design and Figure 11: Angove, Fragrance Packaging, (Jo Malone, 2014) of Michael Angove's design discussing whether the importance of narrative's stand the same in today's design world in comparison to the historic design world.



Figure 5:
Morris,
Wallpaper,
(Newill
Melsetter
Morris & Co
Wallpaper,
unknown)



Figure 11:
Angove,
Fragrance
Packaging,
(Jo
Malone,
2014)

From researching deeply into both these surface designer's I have found that both these designs contain floral elements that have been subtracted from nature but have both been applied in different ways. Morris shows this through vines and swirls to captivate his journey while he was on a walk adding florals and foliage of what he could comprehend around him the artist does this in an illustrated way showing simple shape drawings and outlines in comparison to Angove's print whose fruit plant design is drawn in a much more detailed approach creating a more realistic design piece. Adding to this point further, Angove uses much darker and strong colour tones in this design whereas Morris uses lighter more pastel tones that create a gentler positive mood the colour use in these designs are very different to one another. My interpretation of this is that Figure 5 William Morris could have perhaps been in a more springtime and summery setting whereas Figure 11 Michael Angove's could have been produced more around autumn or wintertime. However, the time scale of when the work was produced could be to do with the use of colour chosen by the artists due to trends in colour at the time the work was produced. Werner would describe Figure 5 William Morris's wallpaper as "Pale Canary Bird, Under Disk of Wild Rose Leaves Stamina of Honeysuckle' (Syme, 1821, unknown). In comparison to Figure 11 Michael Angove's wallpaper which he would relate to "Eyes of the largest Flesh Fly, Upper Disk of Leaves of Woody Night Shade, Breast of Bird in Paradise" (Syme, 1821, unknown). Both these small narratives of the colour palettes inferred by Werner give off two different moods through the way they are described just by their colour use. Angove's work creates a much darker,

mysterious narrative through colour use which relates well with his intentions whereas William Morris's design creates a much more uplifting and positive mood through the tale suggested just using lighter and more muted shades of colour. Moreover, William Morris uses his artwork as a visual way to tell his story which the same way that Michael Angove does too. However, the narrative behind Angove's design is shown in a much more creative approach whereby he has added motifs in a discreet way as his 'secret' not only is this an innovative way of grasping more attention from customers, but it is also an intelligent means of showing the relationship between the brand and the story that shows this designer has pushed the narrative as far as he could. This could be due him being a contemporary artist meaning he has access to researching into the history of previous artwork produced that could inspire him further whereas Morris would not have had the same benefit because narratives behind artwork are now more spoken about in today's design world and more and more people are becoming aware of this. In addition, the time these designs were produced are also a big factor of how different they are to one another again due to trends and what people were more drawn to at the time. I would observe Michael Angove's design as a much more luxe, expensive design in comparison to William Morris's design because it is illustrated in a much more detailed approach and has richer colour tones.

Relating back to the research question to summarise I think that the narrative in both today's surface pattern and textile design world and in the historic design world both held importance because it is what gives the artwork it's meaningfulness and shows how the artist communicates with the audience specifically when working for a customer or a certain audience because the narrative would need to be shown to fit the needs of the spectators. Although in both timeline's the story has been important, I think that a narrative behind work is becoming more important in the contemporary design world as more designers are selling their work and working for customers and having to produce work to their preference meaning they will need a reasoning to the material use and colour they use as well as needing to back this up as a story when they meet with the customer to show the work. Adding to this, the world we currently live in always wants to know why? and particularly in the design industry a big question that is always asked is 'What makes art, art?'. With this question being a regular ask designer's will always need to know why they did certain processes, why they used a certain colour pallet, what inspired these choices and what they want their work to show/influence people which is why experimentation through work is necessary in our projects today, so that we are able to reflect on what best communicates our ideas that we want to achieve. On the other hand, although I may believe that the narrative within the art and design/ creative industry is holding much more importance this research question is still open for further research into the opinions of what others believe and the discussion of whether time has changed this because it is a huge topic of discussion that will always be open for ongoing investigation as the design world and trends are always changing.

Overall, after investigating into the importance of narratives behind artwork it has taught me to be more mindful about why I am doing certain things while working on my projects whether this may be through materiality, imagery, or colour. Taking this on board, for my live brief I am working with Rolls Royce with the title of 'Mindful Luxury' to create three designs for each of the surfaces in the Phantom car- this is the picnic table, the curtains, and the gallery using natural materials such as wood, glass, stone, silks, and leathers to emphasise on

the narrative being in connection to the natural environment. My colour use is also going to be taken from the natural world using earthy tones of greens and browns with an accent of gold to add to the modern luxe feature that the Rolls Royce brand brings in to fit to the needs of the customer. These colours will be able to tell a story through the light and whispering shades that will leave the customer feeling at peace and comfortable in the vehicle. My design imagery will consist of the textures from nature focusing mainly with leaves and crystalline structures- I have chosen these two elements because they capture detail and different qualities of texture that work well alongside one another. I will also play around with the essence of light creating silhouette outlines of leaves that I find along my journey throughout the transition of autumn to winter and the delicacy of these silhouettes will be shown through line drawings and laser cut due to the fragile state they hold. Exploring through the textures and forms of nature I will be focusing on the growth and transition of the environment through photosynthesis and how nature needs light and energy re-connecting this back to us as humans through biophilia and how we use the natural environment as alternative therapy as ways of healing.

Figures

Fig 1 – National Trust (2021) *Red House*. Bexleyheath.

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/red-house>

Fig 2- Distinctive Rickmansworth (1883) *Strawberry Thief Wallpaper* [William Morris]. Morris & Co.

<https://distinctiverickmansworth.co.uk/product/strawberry-thief-archice-ii-morris-co-wallpaper/>

Fig 3- Distinctive Rickmansworth (1883) *Strawberry Thief Wallpaper* [William Morris]. Morris & Co.

<https://distinctiverickmansworth.co.uk/product/strawberry-thief-archice-ii-morris-co-wallpaper/>

Fig 4- Distinctive Rickmansworth (1890) *Pink and Rose Archive II Wallpaper* [William Morris]. Morris & Co.

<https://distinctiverickmansworth.co.uk/product/pink-rose-archive-ii-morris-co-wallpaper/>

Fig 5- Distinctive Rickmansworth (unknown) *Newill Melsetter Wallpaper* [William Morris].

Morris & Co. <https://distinctiverickmansworth.co.uk/product/newill-melsetter-morris-co-wallpaper/>

Fig 6- Michael Angove (unknown) *Photograph* [Michael Angove]. Netflix The Crown.

<https://www.michaelangove.com/portfolio/liberty/>

Fig 7- Michael Angove (unknown) *Photograph* [Michael Angove]. Netflix The Crown.

<https://www.michaelangove.com/portfolio/liberty/>

Fig 8- Michael Angove (unknown) *Design for Liberty, Netflix the Crown* [Michael Angove]. Netflix The Crown. <https://www.michaelangove.com/portfolio/liberty/>

Fig 9- Michael Angove (unknown) *Greek and Victorian Marble Sculpture* [Unknown]. <https://www.michaelangove.com/portfolio/liberty/>

Fig 10- Liberty (2021) Tapestry Tana Lawn Print [Liberty] London. <https://www.libertylondon.com/uk/tapestry-tana-lawn%E2%84%A2-cotton-000729126.html#pos=2>

Fig 11- Michael Angove (2014) Fragrance Packaging [Michael Angove] Jo Malone. <https://www.michaelangove.com/portfolio/jo-malone-london/>

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