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Design Crafts BA

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Pattern, Colour and Anthropomorphism

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My Question:

How do we define and perceive the  
relationship between animals and  
humans?

In this essay I will be exploring ideas and principles that have interested me and informed my practice in a more theoretical context. I intend to carry these ideas and principles over to my next year where I will be exploring my chosen question and trying to answer this in my chosen discipline. The words I have chosen are Pattern, Colour and Anthropomorphism. These three words I am specifically linking to nature and how it relates to my practice and what inspires me about the natural world. I will be discussing theories from Itten's colour theory, Fibonacci's rule of thirds and the link between human and animal relationships. Some of the themes and artists will include finding connection between repetition and order, language and symbolism of colour and how we can interpret human emotion through animals and relate to them through artists such as William Morris, Ernst Heackle and Beth Cavenor.

Fundamental to the way that my neurodiverse brain perceives and interprets creative ideas is the formation of pattern with its regularity and reliability. Pattern can be defined as "a particular way in which something is done, is organized, or happens: a regular arrangement of lines, shapes, or colours." (Cambridge Dictionary). In my creative space I am often at odds with the notion of regularity and organisation. There is a true irony to the fact that my brain needs expression and artistic output, but 'patterns of behaviour' restrict me and confine me. Researching pattern within the natural world pushes me to see, feel and express a more contained and organised approach to my work. I wanted to explore 'pattern' as it is something that has organically influenced my work over the last few months. I have become particularly interested in pattern that occurs in nature. This has been a key element of design since the dawn of man. As humans we choose designs that are attractive to us because of their repetition, colours and shapes. Often patterns are chosen out of a want rather than a need simply for aesthetic purposes, however in nature pattern always has a scientific or evolutionary explanation behind why it occurs.

Patterns can be found everywhere within the natural world. While one might think of patterns as uniform and regular, some appear more random yet consistent. The definition of a pattern in nature is "a consistent form, design, or expression that is not random" *Cambridge University Press*.

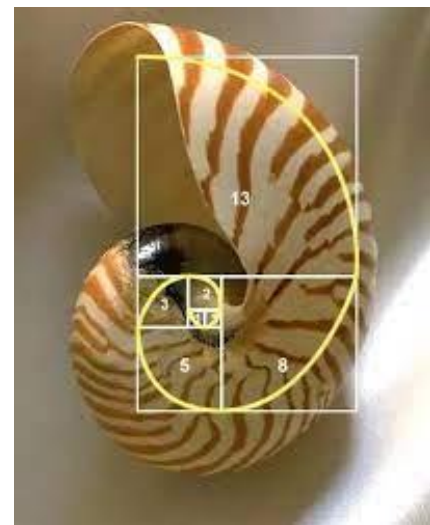
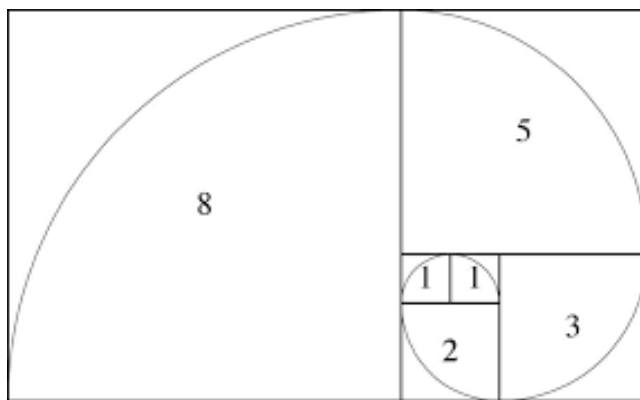


Detail Acanthus Wallpaper designed by William Morris. Manufactured by Jefferey & Co 1875

Influential to my recent ceramic pieces, William Morris, the British designer, conservationist and activist whose approach to craft practice as a rebellion to industrial techniques lies in line with my resistance to using crafting aids such as throwing wheels. His observation of pattern around us is interesting because he saw the need to order in aesthetic work but was opposed to technical machinery which would create order and controlled pattern. He stated, "Ornamental pattern work, to be raised above the contempt of reasonable men, must possess three qualities: beauty, imagination and order." (W. Morris) His ideologies seem at odds which is often how I feel when trying to engage in the creative process. Morris believed that all design should be based on nature which he saw as the "spiritual remedy to the inferior standards of art and design". I relate to his ideals and have tried to use such principles in my own hand building craft practice.

"There are multiple causes of patterns in nature. Some patterns are governed by mathematics. These are called the "Golden Ratio", this is a rule that describes a specific pattern in nature. This mathematical formula is seen in spiral patterns such as a snail's shell or the whorls of a lily." (*Lassiter. P, 2021*)

Artists and craftspeople throughout history have used this mathematical reflection of the natural world to create what is perceived to be art that has balance and beauty and directs the eye to a focal point. The Italian mathematician, Fibonacci, found a link between the order of natural spiral patterns and a mathematical equation which enabled artists to create compositional allowances around a 'Rule of Thirds'.



Spirals are a recurring theme in nature- nautilus shell, artichoke, it seems that artists have over the centuries chosen to use this compositional aid to create a perceived notion of what is beautiful. Is this at odds with what inherently is a natural pattern? Surely using an equation to create an ideal of aesthetic beauty is not aligned with nature's creation of pattern. However, nature is not random. Every pattern in nature, everything you see is governed by an organism and these organisms are controlled by a scientific process. Consider a honeycomb. There is mathematical precision to the construction of this pattern. Insects and other creatures instinctively know how to create pattern such as bees in a hive or spiders in a web.

A Harvard biologist named Peter S. Stevens published a book entitled "*Patterns in Nature*" in which he claims that "there are only a finite number of ways that patterns can be structured" (*Jirousek, 1995*). These modes of creating pattern can be seen and interpreted into art works: flow, meandering patterns, branching, spirals, packing and cracking like collections of cells. Many artists have used pattern formations that depict these natural modes. The Austrian artist Gustav Klimt springs to mind for his flowing, organic lines that almost swallow up the human forms. Repeating cell like rectangular forms and spirals which I feel create a kind of ordered chaos. In this image of the 'Tree of Life' the spiral forms undulate and dominate. I like the way that this is almost like nature finding its way to overpower man.



*Gustav Klimt 'The Tree of Life' 1905*

An artist who optimises my interest in both the zoological world and the aesthetics of natural pattern is Ernst Haeckel. His passion for depicting the beauty, intricacies and symmetry within marine life through detailed illustration, keys into my own practice which has been shaped by beginning my creative path in illustration initially. These images were way before the invention of macro photography, so their vivid depiction of organic matter is just incredible.



*Kunstformen der Natur* (1904), plate 85 (Photo: Wikimedia Commons [Public domain])

There is a need to create decoration, but structures and forms and the tactile nature of clay has led my work in a direction that is beginning to encompass both form and pattern as creative allies. His passion for the planet and all its beauty under the guise of a microscope has captured my imagination and I hope will inspire my further practice. He stated, "As our mother earth is a mere speck in the sunbeam in the illimitable universe, so man himself is but a tiny grain of protoplasm in the perishable framework of organic nature." (Haeckel. E, 1899)

Also, when we think of patterns, most of us envision a pattern that we can see. However, there are patterns in nature that are not detectable to the eye but are there directly under our noses. Pattern forms the basis for most of my work. The influences from nature's repetition can be seen more recently in my experimentations with clay. This direction gives me the scope to work on organisation and the mathematics and chemistry of working in ceramic.



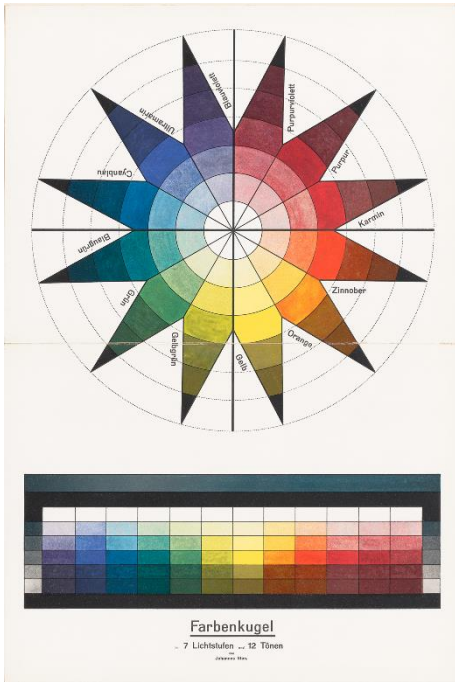
My second chosen word is 'colour'. The importance of colour both in its visual sense but also its meaning and scientific composition is something that I enjoy and seek to experiment and explore in all my creative practices. Even the process of creating colour scientifically and with measurement is a worked skill that I have been learning through glaze mixing.

Colour is something I feel resonates with me strongly because of my neuro- divergency. I am more sensitive to the symbolism and effects of colour than a neuro-typical person. We associate colour with emotions and feelings, an example of this “would be when we think of nature, we often see green. This colour is prominent in nature, as we can perceive it in the grass, trees, and fields. This instantly makes it easy to associate this colour with renewal and growth, imbuing organic or natural qualities.” (Okafor.J, 2023) Colours in nature can convey everything you and other animals need to know about that individual or said species. Many animals that display bright colours will fade if they are stressed or unwell, the same goes for plants turning brown or yellow when sick. Often bright colours are a symbol to potential mates of health, strength and fertility. Colour can convey whether an animal is toxic to its predators and be used as



camouflage from them too. There is an irony to the vivid colour palette reflected on many animals given their inability to often recognise colour. But somehow, evolution understand colour theory and abides by its principles regardless. Animals see colour completely differently than we do which is why to us their bright colouration might not make sense as they stand out and are vulnerable to predators in our eyes. However, their predators can see

different ranges of colour than we do and even amongst humans we all see colour differently “If one says ‘Red’ (the name of a colour) and there are 50 people listening, it can be expected that there will be 50 reds in their minds. And one can be sure that all these reds will be very different.” (Albers. J, 1971)



This is fascinating to me. The fundamental principles of colour theory were famously explored by Johannes Itten, "Itten identified seven fundamental categories of contrast: hue, light-dark, cold-warm, complementary, analogous, saturation, and extension. The colour star modelled several of these. Itten explained how the star could be used to study colour contrasts: "reading outward, we have the zones of tints, the zone of pure hues, and the two zones of shades, with black at the extreme points of the star" (Bauhaus)

In nature, certain categories of animals follow inherent genetic rules regarding colour. For example, most mammals' stay within certain ranges of hues, normally neutral tertiary tones such as browns, oranges. That is because they do not have the pigmentation in their genes. It's like mother nature's own version of the colour wheel-

analogous colour tones. In opposition to this palette, I also find that creatives who use the stark contrasts between monochromic neutral tones with vivid and often conflicting colour, very aesthetic. Ceramicist Clementine de Chabenieux creates almost whimsical characters with monochrome palettes and pops of colour. She plays with the contrast in colour and shade as well as emotion, her sculptures often looking sad or stoic with bright pops of colour that make it come to life. This contrast of emotion really sparks my imagination and empathise characters as I often feel monochrome but surround myself with colour.

I want to bring that wonder and beauty of the natural world into people homes so that they can see and feel that array of colour and complexity that exists at a distance so that people can feel and appreciate the beauty of natural colour. I believe contemporary design has suffocated the fluidity and organic nature of the natural world. I want to resurrect and integrate the natural world within everyday homes.





The recognition of human qualities in animal beings or form has been a visual influence on artists and craftspeople throughout the ages. A theme that has reoccurred in my work since childhood hence my final choice of word is Anthropomorphic. The definition of the term is "the showing or treating of animals, gods, and objects as if they are human in appearance, character, or behaviour:" (Cambridge Dictionary Press)

From the demonic goat like presence in Goya's Witches Sabbath, one of the first influences on my work at A level following from a visit to The Museo del Prado. To the grotesque yet playful mashed up creatures in Hieronymus Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights and the stilt laden elephants in Salvador Dali's 'The Temptation of St Anthony'

*Witches Sabbath by Francisco de Goya (1798)*



*The Garden of Earthly Delights by Hieronymus Bosch (1490-1510)*



*The Temptation of St Anthony by Salvador Dali (1946)*

The historical representation of anthropomorphism has been evident throughout art history. The juxtaposition of animal and human form has been a theme that dips back into my work on a regular basis. Perhaps connection and relationships with animals and watching their behaviours, is something that I find more empathy with than human interaction. My recent ceramic piece of an almost human like horse was heavily influenced by childhood memories riding horses and feeling an affinity with them. There is a reassurance

and a sentimentality to these recent themes in my work and some obvious connections with change and body dysphoria linked intrinsically with my transgender identity.

From Greek mythology, Egyptian culture and African deities, anthropomorphism in three-dimensional form has been present in both ceramic form and written narrative. I can relate this influence further back to childhood favourite literature and film making. I was obsessed with The Wizard of Oz with its 'Tin man' and 'Cowardly Lion'. Even before realising the hidden meaning behind the adjective descriptions. Animals as humans, humans as animals-mimicking behaviours. Even as a teenager, after reading Yann Martel's Life of Pi with its apparent animal characters in place of raw human experience.

In the book Pi says that he "anthropomorphised the animals [in his father's zoo] till they spoke fluent English" (Martel. Y, 2012). The use of almost human like expression and emotion through art that has an animal form is a style of work that I find best relates to my own personal connections with the natural world. The way I see and feel the emotion in a creature's eyes that cannot verbally express feeling is almost hypnotic to me.

The use of anthropomorphic art has become more an influence rather than a method of creation, design and output. I feel that art that depicts animals in a more humanly expressive way is an area that currently feeds and inspires my work. My recent porcelain creations of horses that express human like facial emotion are so directly inspired by the likes of artists such as Beth Cavener whose three-dimensional sculptural pieces of wild animals demonstrating human emotion are both powerful and thought provoking. Cavener says of her recent work.



*Forgiveness by Beth Cavener (2017)*



*L'Amante by Beth Cavener (2015)*

"The sculptures I create focus on human psychology, stripped of context and rationalisation, and articulated through animal and human forms. On the surface, these figures are simply feral and domestic individuals suspended in a moment of tension. Beneath the surface, they embody the consequences of human fear, apathy, aggression, and misunderstanding. Both human and animal interactions show patterns of intricate, subliminal gestures that betray intent and motivation." (Cavener. B, 2015)



*Tribute by Beth Cavner (2017)*

The connection to animals is almost spiritual to me. I feel that humans read and understand each other by how they emote and verbalise whereby my autistic nature means that I read emotion more through body language and movement. Which enables me to be far more in tune with animals as life is not complicated by words.

I also feel a sense of envy towards animals being able to have the freedom to not meet expectation, answer to societal pressure etc.

Our human animal relationships upon this planet have often been researched and explored through psychology. "Since the late nineteenth century, two trends spurred by the Darwinian revolution have underscored human-animal commonalities rather than differences. The first trend considers "the human as animal" and hence, obeying the laws of the entire animal kingdom. The second trend, exemplified in studies of animal cognition, language, and emotion, explores the "animal as human," assessing the extent to which certain animal species such as parrots and non-human primates exhibit abilities thought to be uniquely human." (Melson. G, 2002). I feel that my own practice is developing in such a way that the natural world and animal kingdom will play an integral part in my journey to finding my style, meaning and sense of self. Anthropomorphism has seductively and quietly crept into the very essence of my work as an artist.

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