

Proposed question for Independent Inquiry:

Is consumer culture responsible for the devaluing of cultural art in interior design?

culture
craft / hand
storytelling
relationship

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Surface Pattern Design

In research of my Independent Inquiry, I have picked five keywords in order to entwine my ideas together by referring them to my own practice throughout. By delving into the *culture*, *craft*, *storytelling* and *relationship* within textiles, I have researched the analogy it has with text, the constant narrative that lives within the weave, that being the weave of threads or the narrative built from water and clay. Craftsmanship stems from *culture*, which defines ‘the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively’ (Oxford English Dictionary, 2020), it is the very foundation of our existence. The arts and values within various cultures are usually passed down to new generations allowing them to be shared and introduce artistic practices such as; painting, sculpture, music and literature. In Raymond Williams’ (1921-1988) *Culture and Society* (1959), he explores the forever changing meaning of ‘culture’, primarily meaning the “general state or habit of the mind”. These arts often represent social change and “a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual” (Williams, 1959) which impacts the values of both society and the individuals within that culture. Essentially, art is used to communicate and express certain feelings since the Mesolithic age, when humans carved stone using marks such as curved lines and dots. Patterns and codes as simple as these would represent things like the configuration of stars, each stone implement owned a unique symbolic purpose and remain as “magnets for story” (Cohen, 2015) manifesting the presence of skill and craft since the beginning of human history. These patterns made by craftsmen once told a story have completely evolved and have since then made their way into interior spaces such as modern homes and public spaces. The hand has always acted before the mouth could speak words as it was the combination of the eye and hand that built houses; cooked food; crafted tools, which proves how endless the possibilities are as the hand speaks its own language.

Craft demands “paradigms of authentic experience and the process of memory” (Leslie, 1998, pp.5) all through the use of the hand. It is the hand that creates, feels and grasps its objects by maintaining a practical role in life. Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) binds memory, dreams and text together in *The Storyteller* (2016) as he deciphers the distinctive affinity text has with weaving. Incidentally, the latin word for ‘text’ is *textum* meaning something that is woven (Edmunds, 2003). Benjamin also discusses his notion of *aura* and authenticity in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (2008) which includes a sensory experience of distance between the reader and the work of art. It is said that the aura is an effect of a work of art being uniquely present in time and space, connected to the

idea of authenticity. Authenticity lives in every cultural object as if the sense of aura holds the viewer's interpretation of the artwork, I hope to continue researching this as it will help support my further writing. In this authentic way that every piece of cloth carries its own story that is interlaced within the thread, it is almost as if to say the thread acts as a chain of words. The interrelation between 'text' and 'textile' can be seen in the way ideas and traditions are passed on from one culture to another, similarly to how the warp and weft rhythmically move in opposite directions whilst being woven. Storytelling is the strong basis for many cultures and this is revealed in the thread that is woven by the creators in order to retell their story for future generations. Many believe it is important to communicate these woven stories to not only keep the objects alive but also the culture it belongs to.

However, the communication and stories portrayed in craftsmanship celebrates how an object is created, for instance the construction of a piece of cloth is simply the "subtle interaction of soul, eye and hand", the simplicity of this coordination helps us decipher the extent of what the hand and mind can create together. Once again, the craft of storytelling is an alike process as the "storyteller clings to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel." (Benjamin, 2016). This statement juxtaposes the two things as the clay vessel will last forever as a 3D object, whereas the story told by someone will be retold and changed time after time. In my mind, the story is incised within the ceramic vessel as it is made from earthenware until it is fired which then reveals a completely different story. This idea of trusting the process in which the result acts almost as if it is a secret and what is made by the hand could potentially come out as something completely different to what is expected, instead of *the fear of the unknown*, it is the *joy of the unknown*. I would like to research this further as I plan to read Ostermann's *The Ceramic Narrative* (2006) to hopefully learn more about the value of ceramics and its cultural aspects.



Figure 1. *Bayeux Tapestry* (1070s)

The earliest, most literal use of storytelling using thread surfaced in the form of tapestries. Dating back to ancient times the historic Bayeux Tapestry is made from embroidered textile from the eleventh century and is still intact today having survived time of incessant fighting, thus proving the immense quality of thread and its great value (Dimitora, 2010). By depicting the Norman attack on England, it introduces line and colour in a way that thread hadn't been used before. The different colours used in all 68 metres of the piece represent individual stories which happened in each scene, as demonstrated in Fig. 1 the journey is portrayed in a precise storyline which leads the viewer's eyes through the battle, line by line. The length of the tapestry demonstrates how long and dreary the battle went on for, which probably coordinates with the lengthy process of the moving hand that crafted it. However, only the craftsman who embroidered the piece truly knows what happened at conflict, giving each character colour and position. By stitching the story, it allows people to read the story of thread for themselves, holding a real sense of ambiguity as interpretations differ, allowing the moving hand to create endless conversations.



Figure 2. *Heriz Persian Rug* (1880)

The moving hand tells another story in Fig. 2 as it illustrates a composition of sumptuous colour and texture, often depicting folk and ancient tales such as the 'gabbeh' Persian rugs woven by the nomadic Qashqa'i tribe (Beck, 1991). The design simply justifies intricate craftsmanship, not to mention their investment value and have found their way into households and interiors globally, many of whom are likely unaware of its storytelling qualities. The woven carpet is made by the women within the culture who weave stories that portray joy and sorrow, mirroring the lives of historical women who continue to tell their stories (Erami, 2015). The weave usually begins at the bottom of the rug with a mother and newborn daughter, which then precedes to the daughter growing up and starting her own family. This illustrates the importance of the chain of storytelling as it is passed from generation to generation, taught like any craft, proving the value of something so special crafted by the human hand.

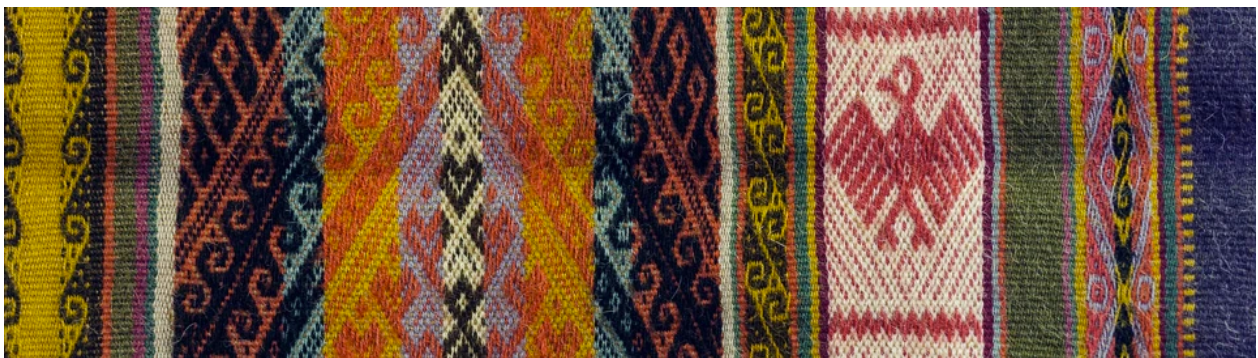


Figure 3. Incan textiles

In this sense of weaving, craftsmanship urges communities all over the world to express and share their culture with the power of colour, texture and pattern which helps people to feel the emotions poured into each handcrafted object. Fig. 3 exhibits Incan textiles originate from the Peruvian culture, known for its storytelling using Quencha symbols. The geometric patterns that are woven often signify aspects of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism by using riots of colour, every detail conveys complex stories of the interaction between the craftsman and their natural environment. Some have different interpretations of what the textiles signify, theorists such as Julio. C. Tello (1880-1947) suggested that Incan textile showed calendrical connotations in the thread (Gundrum, 2000) with dragon-like figures representing the sun, moon and other deities. Accordingly, the Andean

societies strongly believe in the solar and synodic lunar calendar with the spiritual presence evident in their woven cloth. Again, this sense of recording science or history woven to cloth seems far greater than something that is written down on paper. As a surface pattern designer, it is important to know the origin of patterns and symbols that are featured in interior trends, especially if they are considered something luxurious in a home that hides the deeper meaning that many of which believe.



Figure 4. Chunghie Lee (2012) *NOVELTY LONGEVITY DURUMAGI*

Figure 5. Piet Mondrian (1921) *Composition with Large Red Plane, Yellow, Black, Gray and Blue*

Cultures vary all over the world, although the essence of thread remains the same for many. The Korean patchwork seen in Fig. 3 is a Bojagi piece by Chunghie Lee, a form of weaving that has been made for centuries by provident and restrained women. Traditionally, Bojagi are pieces of fabric, scraps that have come from domestic life which are then reused or woven again in piecing the materials carefully into a larger fabric. Furthermore, the use of symbolism is significant in this culture's textile as 'Chogakpo' is about extending

the life of old clothing which expresses hope for a long life, storing special objects in the cloths signify the retaining of happiness (Flynn, 1999). It is also used as a metaphor for the hidden life and dreams of Korean women, due to their oppressed position in a society ruled by subordinate male dominance. I made a visual connection with Mondrian's *Composition with Large Red Plane, Yellow, Black, Gray and Blue* (1921) portrayed in Fig. 4 by spotting a similar tessellation pattern used in the painting, tessellation is 'the process of tessellating a surface or the state of being tessellated' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2020). This technique is frequently used in pattern making and could frankly be a metaphor for what life is about, piecing things together. Perhaps the lines used in Bojagi depict the borders around the lack of opportunities for Korean women, using soft colours within the squares signify their helplessness over the centuries. However, the handicraft and quality of the thread proves otherwise as it metaphorically retains their strength as people. In comparison to how Cubism was brought to life, painters like Mondrain focused on this aesthetic in order to modernise the convention of standard painting (Ambrosio, 2016). His piece exhibited in Fig. 4 depicts an abstracted tessellation which is what Cubism is known for, perhaps it also demonstrates a simpler, far less complicated way of life as neo-impressionist painters changed modern art forever.

This then led me to another connection to the tessellation of stained glass windows that are beautifully constructed in churches, bits of glass that are pieced together in which messages of the Christian faith are expressed. The tessellated layout comes together to communicate the story being told. With the stories being portrayed solely through imagery, colour is the most influential factor and gives churches a beautiful aesthetic, especially when the light shines through. By depicting various scenes, characters and messages from the Bible, it also empowered people before literacy was introduced which allowed them to interpret the artworks. Similarly, culture is about interpretation with a great diversity of meanings on any topic. It is also about emotions as well as concepts and ideas which can be read and understood by other people. I hope to research further the transition that cultural art has made into the pages of interior design magazines, now recognised as an essential ingredient to a modern home. I will also look at the relationship between art and interior design in ways that are aesthetic for designers and homeowners. I would like to expand my learning further by reading a list of books before I begin to write my Independent Inquiry, subjects regarding interior spaces and how cultural pieces function in that environment. This focus will help refer back to my own practice as I begin to propose my own ideas. In order to gain theoretical knowledge, I will read *The Fold* (1992) by Gilles Deleuze

(1925-1995) as he discusses the concept of monad as folds of space, movement and time. He also interprets the world as a body of infinite folds that weave through compressed time and space (McDonnell and van Tuinen, 2010, p.12). The other three books are *Interior Design and Identity* (2004), *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture* (2006) and *Objects of Containment* (2018). This has finally guided me to the question for Independent Inquiry, '***Is consumer culture responsible for the devaluing of cultural art in interior design?***'.

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Further Reading

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Images

Figure 1. Vincent, A. (2018) 'Bayeux tapestry loan: is the world's most famous embroidery actually British?', *The Telegraph*, 17th January, p.1. available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/art/what-to-see/bayeux-tapestry-loan-french-actually-british/>

Figure 2. Heriz Persian Rug (1880) available at: <http://www.payvand.com/news/12/feb/1229.html>

Figure 3. Incan Textiles, date unknown, available at: <https://threadsofperu.com/pages/quechua-symbols-patterns>

Figure 4. Lee, C. (2012) *NOVELTY LONGEVITY DURUMAGI*, available at: <http://www.ornament-magazine.org/blog/chunghie-lee-volume-385>

Pi Mondrian, P. (1921) *Composition with Large Red Plane, Yellow, Black, Gray and Blue*