EXPRESSING [LIFE] THROUGH ARTIFACTS

Designing while printing. Traditionally, [master / artist] works out a pattern using a selection of blocks, some or all of which have been crafted for use with a particular pattern family. This, at least, is how I understand traditional blockprinting, as akin to surface design, a planned activity which leads to desired results. The ~~requirement~~ goal is to create exact repeats within a length of yardage, from end to end; the reason is a ~~requirement~~ to demonstrate mastery of the craft.

Examining cloth, especially at the higher levels and pattern complexity, one strains to see error, the tiny irregularities that expose that a human hand crafted this. Secondarily / possibly only subliminally, the eye-brain notices, and enjoys the minute misalignments.

What happens, deep in an era computer-aided design and reproduction? How much education do you need to see and understand, when looking at traditional block printing, the tiny shifts within the pattern, the moments that demonstrate, through their miniscule irregularity, the mastery of the printers? In effect, and distractingly, humans compete with machines for dominance. While this may not be a lost battle, it is fought within a limited arena. The resurgeance of craft, a movement perhaps, nevertheless connects on the whole to the space of perfection.

What if the goal, instead, is continual interaction with and within the process, engaging human judgement and emodiment? What results from this? (Because we do exist, we silly humans, so how do we live? How do we express our life through our artifacts?) How do we fully engage creativity? Manipulating icons on a screen using mostly fingers and perhaps some wrist motion, struggling to notice the way software constrains not only movement but decisions—why else do we see so many 90° gridded repeats?—this drives design toward those constraints.

Rules and choices of constraint. Every design, creation, artifact comes with its maker's rules, logic for proceeding, as everything grows out of decision-making (what do I make? what materials do I use? what is the first and then next steps? can I change my decision / path once I've started? can I shift the constraints? the decisions can be broad, inclusive or minute and limited, wandering or linear, as the maker's intelligence, education, interest, intuition, imagination, etc.*)

What I call rules can be flouted by the rule-maker and, ideally, by her [colleagues/ partners in crime], to varying degree depending on the goals—different for bridge design than surface pattern, clearly.

What happens when you work within a set of rules? what happens when you first accept then begin to change them? when the rules don't cover all contingencies or when the rules themselves generate problems or flaws?

What qualities do you require to understand and work with that process? And, if your pal the computer scientist or mathematician were to model the results of irregular process, how could they understand the results?

Noticing, especially or merely, units and movement of repeat, the method and pathway of pattern generation. (Ref: Pattern dictionary). A computer-aided design is likely to push designer toward repeats along grids, and strict ones at that. An exception is where design functions more as illustration (Marriott Crystal Gateway carpets, for example).

* Any of these qualities can be helpful or an impediment. Sometimes education and some kinds of education can bedevil a project, just as some "gut feelings" are wrong or distracting, etc. How any creative person learns to deal with the different aspects of their chararcter is a separate topic, right? [Refer the reader to someone here??]

CHOOSING

Evaluation and judgement. When we set up a print, we generate it by following certain guidelines. Some of these are straightforward enough as to, apparently, absolve the printer from real choice. For example, a regularly repeating stripe pattern with, moreover, regular intervals between each stripe, apparently precludes the printer's personal imprint (as it were). A pattern such as the Run Around with its open rule (see illustration) asks something more attentive and intentional on the part of the operator. One requirement is judgement, a slippery or at least evolved quality.

In the midst of making and deciding, the results don't always stand for themselves. We have generated patterns that were "no good," then months (or a year!) later, find the pattern is, actually, "good." Some of this has to do with the resistance of some patterns, hard to make they are also hard to see, to parse. Perhaps one needs, at times, a different set of skills, or eyes, to evaluate. The iterative process is generative, we produce our variations (willy nilly).

Change your mind. While in the middle of something. But only sometimes (see previous paragraph). This can be dangerous! Right? How will we get it made, finished, and, moreover, desired? Yet the possibility for change or shift, especially where the stakes are low—in prototyping, say, not in the middle of a production run.

> Hannah noticed, as I was pinning a border panel to a tablecloth sample, that the edging's "wrong" side, with less dye penetration, softer shade, more spotty coverage, gave the central panel less visual competition. It showed up more. So I changed my plan, then changed it again when I folded the hems outside so the darker side showed up for a bit along the edge.

In a system based on non-standardization, how many of these micro-decisions can happen within a production framework? We don't want to slow down work all the way or all the time for any possible decision. So, individually and a as a team, we build understanding about where and how to play the rules straight, when to interfere, how to adapt when the rules don't cover a situation.

Joy and suffering. I worry about large batch production. I have noticed that objects, artifacts, the things amongst which we live, are better with this kind of care and attention.

Not only are they not standardized [dulled] they each expose, share or even celebrate humanity. Being surrounded by carefully made things is like being surrounded by love. Perhaps, concurrently, is there suffering implicit in mass-produced, anonymous objects: made by whom? under what conditions? with what kind of spirit? in a quantity that asks what of the earth?

Most of us no longer animate the inanimate with spirits. There is a rush to find comfort through acquisition. The speed precludes fostering sensitivity. So fucking what. Preachy new age bullshit. The thing is, there is something about the way my fabric is printed that says this, the flow of design spells it out. If you compare my cloth to mechanially printed pieces, even those based on drawings or paintings, you see the difference. Then perhaps you begin to notice this elsewhere, you see I printed on machine-woven cloth. Then you feel the hand-woven cloth. Then you wonder who made your kitchen table. You ask the rug under your feet who tied all those knots? You have a conversation with the painter's apprentice, just a short one, before your house is painted.

All that surrounds you: let it bless you with the joy of its maker.

At ease? The prints that resist any kind of print flow are the hardest to look at. The ease of the work translates, apparently, into the pleasure of the design.

And how about the mistakes?! Beautiful! Included for the same price though we should really charge more. Our mistakes are further evidence of the human being making this cloth, for you. The printer, in the middle of a complicated set of moves, allows her attention to wander. That moment may be forever set in the cloth. Meandering, made visual.

Endless variation, little and big. Like leaves on a tree. Like trees in a forest. Shifting from printer to printer in elusive ways.

Why does each particular design require certain colors? How do we go about finding them? How far can we mess with what is "good" to get something weird and delightful?

Everything has associations, that is always a starting point, sometimes of inspiration, sometimes of resistance, sometimes of both together.

EXPRESSING [LIFE] THROUGH ARTIFACTS

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Craft. Style. Personalization. Developing a personal vision. Here are things we do that I'd like to imagine add value, while wondering, really, if it's possible to monetize exploratory design desicions and actions.

1 Design while printing—we agree on some rules, with varying degrees of looseness / freedom within them, then print accordingly allowing, encouraging, needing felxibility to imaginatively solve places in print that original rules don't cover.

[ALL SORTS / BORDERLINE — clumps of stripes, monochrome, mostly quadrilateral, but not all, border not touching]

2 Allow ourselves to change our minds while in the middle of something. Crazy dangerous— not only to getting something made (to sell, to make money to keep going, right?!) but also to sanity.

So, deciding-while-doing has to be used carefully, with discretion. ~~Just today [no date!] I was pinning edging sections to a tablecloth. Hannah noticed and brought to my attention that the "wrong" side (non-printed side with visble dye bleed-through, copious on this thin line) of the edging fabric is beautiful. And, lighter of the verso separates visually more clearly from the center panel. So I flipped all the border pieces over then hemmed them with 2 or 3" hems to show some of the "right" side.~~ See section that begins Change Your Mind.

Enjoyable, this made me worry / reflect on larger batch production. The objects are better with this kind of care and attention. Not only are they not standardized, dulled, each individually celebrates or just plain exposes the humanity of making. And, perhaps, concurrently, point at the suffering implicit in many if not all mass-produced objects: made by whom? under what conditions? with what kind of spirit? in a quantity that asks what of the earth? with what plan in place to restore original material extraction and contend with object when no longer wanted?

3 ~~embed~~ different kind of design because of the requirements of the work. Okay, this is a difficult one to explain or describe

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3a There ia mathematical modeling that takes place empircally—especially as a printer is explore a new block or new layout. Printer as algorithm: how many of *these* can I fit here while generating a desirable look? how would I explain or quantity that look? desirability??]

An algorithm (mathematical not human) could tell you all the ways to fit these blocks and lines and line sequences in this space. Could the algorithm control for the minutely and irregularly shifting intervals between blocks and sections?

3b The printer, in her body, responds to the print as she makes it. Her physical and mental condition and the familiarity or difficulty of a pattern play into what happens, in how that iteration of the pattern unfolds. A trainee may successfully complete the same pattern as the master, yet the less experienced hand will show to a trained eye. period or question mark.

Mostly, we notice when the printer is at ease—fed, enough sleep, mastery without over / excess production which would leap, perhaps to boredom (or a mediative state?!)—has space within the printing pattern rules for curiosity and experimentation (as in, what if I leave more space here...or use a different color there...)—the print is happier, easier to look at! (NB experience says this is a falso connection, the ease visibility fades with time.)

4 Mistakes! Beloved and included—printed right there for all to see... sometimes leading to other prints and patterns, foster endless variation—within an actual design/plan and in the possibilities for new designs.

Really, with modular block printing, and the particular means we use to get the dye onto the block and from there onto the cloth, means that even a simple single block stripe has endless variation. Ratcheting up the complexity then means the changes and differences increase ... exponentially?

4b becasue each printer herself will have her own, likely expanding, range of interests and choices, her version of a given pattern will be, within a range, particular.

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DIFFICULTY

It's really hard to cut up the cloth even when we've laid it out for scarves or what not.

AND

they are all paintings, unrolling, unfurling. Cut them off? Are they then lesser paintings?

NOTE:

Designs and even particular blocks requre certain colors, or, not all colors makes sense even if the colors themselves, apart from the patterns, "make sense" together. Whatever that means.