

ART DECO FABRIC DESIGN

A Report of a Senior Study

by

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Major: Fine Arts, Graphic Design

Maryville College

Spring, 2009

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Faculty Supervisor

Date Approved _____, by _____

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ABSTRACT

As a graphic designer I am intrigued by Art Deco design, especially fabric patterns of the period. For my senior study, I have created a series of fabric designs representative of the Art Deco period. Each of the five designs is inspired by pieces of vintage fabric that date later than the Deco period, yet each contain some element that relates to the style of the period. In my designs, I have taken the Deco elements found in each inspiration fabric and created my own Art Deco patterns. I have relied heavily on reference materials concerning Art Deco textile designs to guide my translation of each pattern.

Not only did I research the design history and aesthetic of Art Deco textile design, my study also included a review of the printing process of fabric design. In addition to the creative design process of this project, I was also responsible for overseeing the screen-printing of each design. Through this project I have been able to learn the process of fabric production from beginning to end.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following for their help in the completion of my design work:

Thank you, staff of Red Letter 9, especially Zack for doing the actual printing of my patterns and for your patience and willingness to help. Thank you, Brian for allowing me to print at your warehouse, without you and the staff of Red Letter 9, I would not have been able to finish so quickly and easily. Thanks to all those at Red Letter 9 who were involved in the process of preparing the images and screens for printing.

Thanks also to my parents and grandparents for the financial support of the whole process, and to my friends and family for all their encouragement and support. Thanks especially to my grandfather for helping me with the framing of the pieces.

Last, but certainly not least, thanks to my advisor, Adrienne for all the advice, proofreading, and help along the way.

CHAPTER I

PROPOSAL

Every design characteristic from the peak years of Art Deco style fascinates and inspires me as a graphic designer. I have become particularly interested in fabric patterns designed during the time period, especially those depicting simplified, stylized flowers and botanical objects. For my thesis, I will study and create floral Art Deco fabric patterns and use as inspiration scraps of vintage fabrics designed after the period of Art Deco, and not necessarily Deco in classification, but which show some element derived from the design period. The goal of my thesis is to take specific non Art Deco fabrics collected by myself, identify the Art Deco influence in each, incorporate the Deco elements of each fabric into my interpretations of the patterns, and create floral patterns that are more Deco in their representation than the original inspiration fabrics. Because the style of the inspiration fabrics is not specifically classified as Art Deco, I have relied on books about 1920s textiles to provide actual Deco patterns to help me accurately translate the inspiration fabrics into the more Deco-stylized patterns I have created. The fabrics I have used for inspiration, though not from the same period, display certain elements and characteristics in their designs that show the influence of 1920s Art Deco. In my own designs, I will not only include each reference pattern's prominent Deco elements, but I will attempt to create new patterns that can be categorized as Art Deco in

form. My collection includes five floral themed patterns that have been designed in Adobe Illustrator, screen-printed by hand onto cotton muslin, and then framed over pre-stretched canvases. From May 4th through May 15th my collection will be on display at Maryville College in room 201 of Bartlett Hall.

I have chosen to design five floral-themed, three-color fabric patterns for a variety of reasons. Floral pattern designs interest me because flowers have traditionally been depicted in artwork and decoration since the beginnings of visual communication. For thousands of years, artists have relied on the natural world for inspiration, especially designers of pattern in our modern world(Meller 27). The artists of the Art Deco style, despite their emphasis on geometric rather than organic line, followed in the long-standing tradition and placed great importance on the floral motif in fabric patterning. In fact, at the peak of Art Deco, over half the fabric designs produced depicted floral imagery, most of which was treated geometrically (Hardy 2003).

Besides just pulling together the floral patterning design aesthetic of the Art Deco period, I was also interested in learning some of the screen-printing process. Taking into account the time that it would take to print multiple colors, and also with the awareness of my aesthetic preference for fewer rather than more colors, I decided to limit the color palette to just three colors per design. This kept the project less complicated and also allowed myself, and the viewers, the ability to focus on the design elements of each piece without being distracted by overly extensive color choices. In a design where specifically three colors are used, shape and depth are created that give character to the pattern in a way that more or fewer colors cannot. Furthermore, by limiting each design to only three colors, each design's elements and primarily flat, geometric shapes of color are

emphasized which is an important element of the Art Deco style. In order to best understand and thus successfully communicate the spirit of Art Deco in my designs, my thesis will answer the following questions:

- What is Art Deco? What types of colors, shapes, and floral patterns represent the Deco style? How do the inspiration fabrics classify as Art Deco and/or what design elements within each piece can be traced back to the Art Deco period?
- How were floral patterned fabrics designed and printed during the first half of the twentieth century? What is the difference between the traditional process used in printing fabric and the modern screen-printing process that I have used?
- How did the availability of “common” cotton fabrics (such as the inspiration fabrics) found in most department stores of the early to mid twentieth century help connect the middleclass to the elite world of avant-garde style?

The vintage fabrics that are used as inspiration were found in antique stores and are similar in style and condition to fabrics that date between 1930 and 1950. I have decided to use these particular patterns for two reasons: first, because they each include graphic elements that are reminiscent of what was developed and used during the Art Deco period, and second because each uses only three colors in its design. The inspiration fabric used for Design 1 is a non-directional, striped, repeat of two different flower motifs—a larger pair of flowers and a smaller pair. The flowers are arranged in a diagonal grid format with each diagonal line containing a repeat of large-small-large-small-etc., flowers. The flowers are set on a double stripe background, two small stripes grouped together and repeated with a wider space between each group of stripes. The colors used in the original fabric pattern consist of dark blue for the background stripes

and some detail in the flowers, and red and light pink, which are used for the flowers' petals. Although the fabric dates probably later than the peak years of Art Deco, certain Deco elements can be seen in the design. The stylization of flowers, particularly the sharp-angled, geometric flowers and the prominent use of straight linear components such as a striped background are characteristics essential to Deco floral fabric design (Hardy 46). In my first design, I chose to incorporate the two Art Deco elements from the inspiration fabric and develop them a little further to create a more Deco design. I illustrated a pair of flowers (repeated throughout) that are stylized representations of a typical five-petal flower. At the center of each flower is a small, more geometric five-petal flower made with repeated circles, with a circle cut out of the middle, and with another red circle positioned in the cut out. The repetition of the circle shape is the geometric element pulled from the inspiration fabric, along with the stripes. The stripes in my first design are slightly different from those in the inspiration fabric design. The stripe pattern in my design consists of stripes that are thicker and have an even amount of space separating them, as opposed to slightly thinner lines grouped two together and evenly spaced between every group of stripes which is how stripes are used in the inspiration fabric. I chose to use larger and evenly spaced stripes due to their lessened visual vibration. I used the dot pattern in the background to create a diagonal crisscrossing line common in Deco patterns.

Adobe Illustrator has served as my primary drawing tool in the designing of each pattern. The patterns have been printed onto cotton fabric at a professional screen-printing facility. The printed fabrics will be stretched over store-bought canvases of

varying sizes, depending on the size of each printing. Thin pieces of painted wood trim will be nailed to the sides of the canvases to serve as simple framing.

The size of each final printed and stretched piece is the result of several aspects of the process. The initial size of each pattern was determined by the size of the screens from which these patterns would be printed. Each of my patterns had to fit within the 15 in. x 20 in. printable area of the screens; thus, each design is limited to such specified dimensions. When I initially began planning each pattern, I wanted to create large prints, from 24 in. x 24 in. up to 36 in. x 36 in.; however, the length of time it took to actually print each piece caused me to realize that my collection would be much smaller than I had hoped if I wanted it to be finished in the two days that I allowed for printing. The size of the final, framed pieces will be determined by the size of the finished patterns as well as the available sizes of pre-stretched canvases. Five final designs make up my collection, along with information regarding the screen-printing process of my designs. Due to the variety of color and sizes of my pieces, these two factors will influence the arrangement of my pieces. Each designed piece will be displayed with its inspiration fabric mounted on the right along with a short description below the inspiration fabric. Along with my work, I will in some way incorporate information about the process of the design and printing of my fabrics, and may include some pictures and elements to further explain the information.

The final outcome of my thesis will incorporate several facets of design that together will create an intriguing presentation. My designs will portray the process of interpreting an existing fabric pattern into one's own design while trying to meet the requirements of a certain historical artistic style. My patterns will hopefully educate my

audience of the major elements found in the Art Deco style and the ways in which the elite design was interpreted and filtered into the lives of everyday people through fabric design. Finally, my gallery presentation will include information about the technical process of screen printing. My gallery will visually represent every aspect of the process, from initial inspiration fabrics, to the printing process, to the final finished designs.

CHAPTER II

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Art has been my passion since I was a child. My family is made up of artisans who made sure that I was exposed to as many avenues for creative expression as possible. My family encouraged me to draw, color, paint, sculpt, and use my imagination which shaped my interest in art early in life. As a child, art was my favorite pastime—a way for me to imagine and create something beautiful, interesting, and fun to look at. Not surprisingly, art was always my favorite subject in school, and for projects requiring visual representation, I earned some of my best grades. My identity as an artist began early in elementary school and has followed me up through college where I have spent the last four years shaping my style and skill. Over the course of my Maryville College education, I have taken drawing, painting, tile-making, graphic design, web-development, and art history classes that have greatly expanded my knowledge, skill, and respect for the fine arts. I have found myself loving every artistic medium I have learned to use, but out of all these, the computer is my favorite design tool. I discovered graphic design in my first year of college, and quickly grew to appreciate its nearly limitless versatility, not to mention its clean nature (as opposed to painting or charcoal drawing).

My own style, which is still developing, is difficult to pinpoint and analyze, but similar elements and influences can be traced throughout most of the pieces I have

created for my Maryville College art classes. In content, most of my designs illustrate organic subjects and shapes; while in form, many of my pieces exemplify patterning and repetition, layering, movement, asymmetry, and an accentuated presence of the artist. Almost all of my graphic design pieces, with exception to more formal designs, include organic subject matter found in nature: many of my projects illustrate either the human, animal, or plant forms, at least two have utilized the forms of trees, while one in particular illustrates a pattern of sliced fruit. Those pieces that do not necessarily include organic subject matter often make use of organic line or color.

Patterning and repetition of a design element seems to be a recurring theme in many of my graphic designs, such as the *Organic Options* magazine cover, the glyphs portrait of *Audrey Hepburn*, and the poster for *World Environment Day*. I use pattern and repetition in many of my designs to create layers or backgrounds, adding cohesion, unity and interest to the works. I also use pattern and repetition in my designs to create movement and a sense of energy. Movement is also created by the arrangement of elements within a design, such as the design that I created for the *Pistol Creek Catch of the Day* logo, where a fish is formed by the letters in the phrase "Catch of the Day." In the instance of the band's logo design, both the arrangement of the letters and the vibration caused by bright orange on white create the illusion that the fish is wriggling on a hook.

In regard to the arrangement of my composition, another similarity in my work is that I work primarily with asymmetrical balance, usually with the main image to the bottom left of the piece, as is evident in the *Time* composition, the glyphs portrait of *Audrey Hepburn*, and the book cover redesign *A Death in the Family*. I find this

structural balance is more interesting and effective in certain instances; however, there are designs where symmetry is very important, as in the poster for *World Environment Day*. In this poster, symmetry became important as I designed the textual contents of the poster under a block of the repeated word, “emissions.” In organizing the design, I wanted to keep all the textual elements confined to the space below “emissions” in order to create a clean look—the main idea of the poster: Zero Emissions.

Much of my style has been influenced by a combination of artists such as Vincent van Gogh, Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, Paul Rand, Saul Bass, and Paula Scher, just to name a few, whose styles of painting, drawing, or graphic design I find particularly fascinating. What I find striking about van Gogh is that he unapologetically filled his paintings with swirling forms of vibrant color, making trees seem to sway in the wind and bringing breath to a portrait. Certain works by Paula Scher have some of van Gogh’s qualities in them as well; however, where van Gogh used paint and brushstrokes, Scher uses words and phrases to create movement.

Two other artists whose styles I am drawn to are Cézanne and Picasso (in his synthetic cubism stage), whose interpretations of a subject matter as being made up of a series of geometric shapes of color intrigues me. Saul Bass and Paul Rand seem to have interpreted elements of cubism in their styles of design, especially the cubist style of Fernand Leger’s who utilized bold shapes, colors, and outline in his works. After viewing images of a children’s book written by Saul Bass (*Henri’s Walk to Paris*), which includes charmingly simple graphics, Bass has become one of my favorite designers whose style I find very inspiring and hope to develop as part of my style. Similar to

Bass, Rand's designs also utilize simple, seemingly hand-cut vibrant shapes of color to compose works which reflect ideas of rhythm and movement.

Branching out beyond specific artists, I am also interested in design from movements such as Art Nouveau, Arts and Crafts, and Art Deco that I see in architecture, old movies, and in the anonymous types of things found in antique stores. My thesis is a direct result of this influence in my life, particularly my interest in Art Deco. The fabric pieces I will use as inspiration for my thesis came from antique stores, many of them from old quilting scraps that probably date to around the time of the Second World War, as they have much in common with fabrics from that time period.

All of these influences, plus countless others, have shaped and formed my view of the world and the way I see things. When I look at a tree, for example, I try to imagine how van Gogh would portray it; or when I see a mountain in the distance I think of Cézanne and how the mountain would look if he painted it. Even though some of my inspirational artists were not graphic designers, the design principles they employed can apply as much to graphic design as they do to painting or drawing. Some of my designs contain elements that can be traced back to these inspirational artists, but it is more likely that my future designs will show these influences in even greater capacity and in a more consistent manner.

CHAPTER III

STATUS REPORT

Over the 2008 summer, I began to get an idea of what I wanted to create for my senior gallery. I have always been interested Art Deco style and have for some time collected antique textiles portraying this style. Over the summer I began to take an interest in Deco fabric patterns and started collecting interesting pieces here and there. In August, when it came time to begin developing my thesis idea, I knew I wanted to create my own Deco fabric patterns using original pieces I had found as inspiration. For the remainder of August and into September, I worked on narrowing down my topic from a study of all styles of Art Deco fabric patterns to only floral, three color patterns.

After deciding what kinds of patterns I would use, I began collecting inspiration patterns. Throughout October, I continued writing and editing my proposal and artist statement and gathered resources for the research section of my thesis. By mid October I had gathered all possible inspiration fabrics and narrowed down which ones I wanted to use and why I wanted to use them. Once I decided which fabrics I would use as inspiration, I decided which piece I would start with and began designing. By the end of October I had my first piece designed and began working on the second, which I finished by November.

The following holiday months of Christmas and January were productive in that I finished my third design, or so I thought. I realized after I finished my design (at the end of January) that it was not a good example of an Art Deco-inspired pattern and thus had to be reworked. March 26th-29th I traveled to Tallahassee to print my patterns at a professional T-shirt company. Once I finish with the written portion of my thesis, I plan on gathering all the materials necessary for the presentation of my designs. I need to have a plan of exactly how my show is going to look, so by April 5th, I will have that all figured out; once I figure out how it will look, I will create invitations and begin planning my presentation. By April 12th, I want to have all of the pre-stretched canvases gathered so that by April 19th all the fabrics can be stretched over the canvases and framed. In the meantime, I need to write all the descriptions for the show and have those done before April 26th. Any graphics that I will be using for my gallery need to be done by April 26th as well. I look forward to finally seeing everything pulled together.

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Colorful fabrics digitally printed by Spoonflower - art deco beads_gold on teal blue. Petal Signature Cotton Design #3301972 42" wide, 4.3oz per sq yard 100% natural cotton fabric that's versatile, soft and easy to sew More White Estimated shrinkage: 2-3% in length and 4-5% in width Perfect for quilting, craft projects, costuming, toys and accessories. Add a pop of pattern with unique fabric, wallpaper & gift wrap. Shop over 850,000 designs. Colorful fabrics digitally printed by Spoonflower - Art Deco Rio De Janeiro. Petal Signature Cotton Design #964343 42" wide, 4.3oz per sq yard 100% natural cotton fabric that's versatile, soft and easy to sew More White Estimated shrinkage: 2-3% in length and 4-5% in width Perfect for quilting, craft projects, costuming, toys and accessories. Art Deco, sometimes referred to as Deco, is a style of visual arts, architecture and design that first appeared in France just before World War I. Art Deco influenced the design of buildings, furniture, jewelry, fashion, cars, movie theatres, trains, ocean liners, and everyday objects such as radios and vacuum cleaners. It took its name, short for Arts Décoratifs, from the Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes (International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts) held in Paris in 1925. The Art Deco style (from the French art déco, literally "decorative art") is an influential trend in the interior, architecture and decorative art, which first appeared in France in the 1920s and reached its peak throughout the world in 1930-1940s. The term Art Deco was given life by an exhibition held in Paris in 1925 under the title Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes (International Exhibition of Contemporary Decorative and Industrial Arts). An abundance of diverse textiles is usually present in the stylistic design of Art Deco. The fabrics are selected plain, with zigzag, geometric patterns, colored stripes or cells, "zebra", "leopard", "snake" prints are also suitable. Damask ornament, "crow's feet", meanders are also popular. The most commonly used fabrics are