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Ornament in Contemporary Arts
*The Methods of Application of Patterns in light of the Creations of
Contemporary Fine Arts*

DLA THESIS

2015

Subject of Research

This thesis discusses the presentation of ornament in contemporary (fine) arts. The word, ornament, according to literature, derives from the Latin *ornāmentum* (genitive: *ornāmenti*) that means decoration, embellishment, ornament (Heydrich, Trilling). Originally, ornament held a key role in architecture, in various branches of applied arts, in folk arts, in embellishment, and in the decorative design of objects. However, many researchers point out that the original meaning of ornament changed by the beginning of the 20th century (Heydrich) and it became the center of attention by the 21st century either as the symbol of intercultural communication (Trilling, Nikolenko) or as a definition or form of expression of fine arts before new designation (Levit, Moussabi - Kubo). To sum up, by virtue of its increasing substance and connotation, ornament has gone beyond its original function of embellishment. On the other hand, ornament is still known colloquially by its original definition (of embellishment) ordinarily, and based on this; its judgment shows a negative tendency. While the artistic value of ornamented objects crafted by diligence that requires a significant amount of time devolves in many cases, less elaborated and sometimes ordinary, readymade objects of utilization have and may have a peculiar implication and value of fine arts in a new environment.

In my thesis, I have joined the league of those researchers who investigate the altered role and judgment of ornament and desire to contribute to the accentuation of the significance of ornament. Nonetheless, I desire to do so by other means, contrary to these researchers. This thesis is not meant to list theories that reflect ornament, but I rather desire to analyze the peculiarly fresh power of expression bestowed on ornament in the various branches of fine arts. My research happens to verify that patterns have become a much favored visual effect of contemporary artists of fine arts by which artists express visual or social problems in lieu of (or in addition to) embellishment in many cases.

Method of Research

My research described in this thesis discusses diverse technical applications and methods of visual creation. Installations and artistic creations that consider the character of patterns, pattern-like forms and all carved ornament (openwork, ajouré work) have been included. Since my personal field of interest focuses on stylized floral ornaments, ordinary patterns,

various needleworks, such as crocheting, and patterned rollers used by painters, which are also visualized in my own art, this thesis is not meant to report on the creation of geometric patterns explicitly.

Although the artists of creations, paintings, and installations described in this thesis do not belong in the same school and are also hard to be categorized geographically, the methods of application of patterns by them allude to new trends and extraordinary concurrences. Such concurrences result in a set of criteria, based on which creations of contemporary fine arts can be structuralized. Therefore, said set of criteria is partly the result of and partly the method of research at the same time: by reading contemporary periodicals (*Új Művészet, Balkon*; Hung.) and paying attention to other channels of communication, including personal websites as well, that introduce artists of contemporary (fine) arts, I desire to contribute to the portrayal of the relevance of ornament and its contemporary visualization.

Such set of criteria (characterized explicitly in the specific chapters of this thesis) envelops the following: “Masked Patterns, the Camouflage Effect”; “Re-interpreted, Dysfunctional and Recycled Objects”; “The Patterns of Absence, All Carved and Crocheted Surfaces”; “Patterns from the Present and the Plane” (as the most recent trends of painting). After the description of the international stage, I desire to portray domestic examples which conform to the application of patterns by foreign contemporary artists. As to the set of criteria listed, I finally introduce my own artistic creations in order to delineate how the various connotations of ornament recognized in the case of international artists typically employing ornament are visualized in the process of my own artistic creation.

Of artists listed in my thesis, I shall refer not only to those who are the most renowned worldwide composing a sort of elite but also to those who, according to my judgment, are in fact impressive in view of the subject matter of this thesis and whose oeuvres complement and color the methods and fields of application of patterns known earlier. As a result, I feel obliged to refer to catalogues and descriptions available on various websites of many contemporary artists in addition to other sources available at libraries listed in the passage of this thesis titled “Acknowledgements”.

Objective of Research

After the introductory chapter, I desire to present the altered message of ornament. Ulteriorly, according to James Trilling who stated that the history of ornament scarcely shifted to a new tendency in consequence of the influence of individual creators, but instead change should be investigated in a direction how artists have mingled their new ideas and technical applications with knowledge which they practically have known already, I attempt to categorize the contemporary visualization of patterns, if preferred, the progressive ideas and individual solutions of artists on the basis of a scheme structuralized by me. By the assortment and presentation of contemporary chefs-d'oeuvre, my objective is to contribute to the understanding of the expanding significance of ornament.

This thesis is also written to find answers to the following questions: (i) What other functions of ornament, in addition to embellishment, are relevant to fine arts? (ii) How do patterns displayed on the creations of fine arts modify and/or enrich the content of their meaning (irrespective of their genre or technique of creation)? (iii) Can patterns convert or alter the conceptual background of objets d'art?

Structure of this Thesis

The introduction of this thesis mentions the distinct understanding of ornament. In addition to researchers of ornament, I also allude Alois Riegl's influence, an art historian of Vienna, who analyzed ornament in consideration of its convoluted historic context, contrary to any functional or materialistic approach. At the end of the 19th century, William Morris's oeuvre was predominant; he started his career as a painter but he turned his attention toward decorative arts actively. (In Hungary, *Gyula Benczúr* compiled a large volume of collection germane to the magnitude of ornament.)

After Morris, the renowned architects of the 20th century (Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos, Luis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright and Henry van de Velde) turned against ornament manifestly. "Ornament is a crime", pinpointed Adolf Loos, an architect of Vienna in 1910. This process was terminated by Gropius's work (who considered himself to be the follower of Ruskin, Morris, Van de Velde and Werkbund), the founder of the Bauhaus School in Weimar in 1914.

(Their oeuvres can be considered a single historic unit, to say Morris laid the foundation of a modern style and Gropius determined its ultimate character that still exists.)

By the end of the century, Owen Jones, an English-born Welsh architect, the predominant character of fine arts in Great Britain, became a key researcher of patterns. During his journeys, he collected patterns and published a collection of them illustrated by his own illustrations in his very influential opus titled the *Grammar of Ornament*. Artists of the ensuing ages consider his work as a source that provides ideas and a treasure of various designs and forms.

The subsequent section of this thesis discusses the applications of patterns and the theme of stylization, mannerism and naturalism. The following section titled “Ordinary Patterns” happens to unveil the pejorative understanding of the application of patterns: contrary to the finely crafted and very exquisite implementations typical of the preceding ages, ordinary patterns appeared in the forms of china figurines, home crochets, wall paper pictures, decorative painting rollers, and embroidered wall pictures.

The chapter titled “Masked Patterns, the Camouflage Effect” explains how patterns mimic and camouflage in and with each other. Examples of mimicry and camouflaging in the world of living organisms have been referred to as an introduction, because a lot of such examples can be identified there, nay, variants of the forms of appearance of mimicry and camouflaging can totally be astonishing to the human eye. After that I examined the ways of mimicry and camouflaging (the camouflage effect) in the case of artists of contemporary fine arts. I shall call attention to body painting techniques (Vera Lehndorff and Emma Hack), chameleon-like camouflage effect in the mass of a metropolis (Liu Bolin), or conceptual creation manifested in the attire of an “angelic trooper” (Lee-Yuong Beak). Parastou Forouhar, an artist from Tehran, also demonstrates the particular status of women by employing camouflage images. As regards mimicry and camouflaging, I distinguished between artists creating the so-called spaces of mimicry and camouflaging (Farid Rasulov, Anna Teresa Fernandez, Yayomi Kusama) who, in view of camouflaging (and patterns), compose a new class if compared with artists presented above so far.

The next chapter titled “Re-interpreted, Dysfunctional and Recycled Objects” describes examples of patterns of various materials that evoke distinct effects (Betsabeé Romero, Gunilla Klinberg, Imran Qureshi). The chapter recounts the application of many special materials of patterns, such as colored pulled or blown sugar and gum (Nicole Adrijevic – Tanya Shulcz, Mariella Mosler) and it also portrays Rasid Alakbarov’s light and shadow paintings. Another category of analysis comprises artists, such as Pravdoliub Ivanov, Farad Moshiri, Rashad Rana, Damian Hirst, who specialize in wallpaper, carpet, rug and tapestry art.

The chapter titled “The Patterns of Absence, All Carved and Crocheted Surfaces” categorizes creations whereas patterns, as a result of cut-outs, appear in a positive form of latticework. It has been categorized into two classes: planar and spatial creations. (Among many, Donna Ruff and Myriam Dion should be mentioned therein.)

The next category comprises creations that can be characterized by schematic formation, rather than by simultaneous effects. These are paper prints, in respect of which the works of Anette Schröter of the school of Leipzig should be spotlighted.

After that laced (jagged, notched) surfaces in space are disseminated through the examples of the following creations: tools (handbarrow, shovel) jagged by oxy-fuel cutter as the creations of Cal Line, and the giant, life-size heavy duty machines cut by laser from sheets of steel that recall the Gothic art as the creations of Wim Delvoye, and the crochet-coated objects and large-size sculptures created by Johanna Vasconcelos.

The chapter titled “Patterns from the Present and the Plane. The Most Recent Trends of Painting” expounds the most recent trends of painting (Pop-art, a Neo Geo and Pattern & Decoration) referring to the following artists: Andy Warhol, John Wesley (Pop-art), Ross Becklert, Phillip Taffet (Neo Geo) and artists of Pattern & Decoration (Miriam Shapiro, Robert Zakanitch, Kim McConnel, Robert Kushner, Rodney Ripps, Valerie Jaudon, Joyce Kozloff and Ned Smyth).

The chapter titled “Endeavors of Today. The Most Recent Examples of Painting anent the Application of Patterns” signifies a few very distinct examples of the application of patterns

in contemporary painting. First, the masterpieces of Liang Yuanweit and Rudolf Stingel that combine patterns and minimalism are adduced. Next, the diligently depicted semi-urban spaces covered utterly by organic vegetation created by Stefan Kürten are cited. Moreover, the paintings of Mickalene Thomas and Kehinde Wiley, who paint camouflage portraits, as well as the creations of Fred Tomasselli and Raqib Shaw, who fantasize visions of surrealism, are featured.

According to the set of criteria above, the final thematic chapter demonstrates the methods of application of patterns by Hungarian artists, among whom, the paintings of *Eszter Radák*, and the embroidery of *Zsófi Pitmann* and *Anna Makovecz* have been considered outstanding.

Eventually, I shall introduce my own creations that are built on patterns spontaneously in the beginning and consciously afterwards, thereby making my choice of the subject matter of this thesis reasonable.

Conclusion and the Results of this Thesis

The structuralization of artists in full conformity with the fresh set of criteria listed in this thesis shall be considered the most valuable merit of this dissertation. This particular categorization allowed me to associate the selected artists with their creations as regards patterns and to portray them as artists who have contributed to the creation of a new language of forms and to the converted purport of ornament. I explain the distinguished, polemizing reflections and methods of application of ornament in a way referred to above (Method of Research) and I also join the international and domestic discourse that seeks the contemporary judgment of ornament, its status and function. Contingent upon my scrutiny, it can be corroborated that patterns have a very powerful and rich inspirational drive to artists. Patterns have a gigantic set of collection which artists of contemporary fine arts evidently fancy to apply in their creative works.

Therefore, patterns have been separated from applied arts and architecture, and fine arts have been using them (as in the case of anything that fine arts have found worth applying). Fine arts have found correlations for ornament that no one has ever contemplated and would think of them as utterly alien at first glance. Fine arts made ornament to be capable of

communicating about social, political, gender and racial issues. Ornament has agitated for the protection of the environment, against the oppression of women, or in concern to illegal immigration or slavery, or against the horrifying actions of terror. Ornament has commemorated dozens of people who have departed. It has become capable of depicting bereavement in a way that it has called attention to the beauty of life at the same time. It has become capable of chronicling themes, such as certain affairs of human rights, the oppression and abuse of women, and imprisonment or execution for political reasons. It has done all this by using a refined language of forms, in a silent and ironic way, composed in an exquisitely crafted and aesthetic manner in many cases. Many times this is exactly the contradiction that connects artistic creations and gives them their power. Certain contents that enter our residences in the form of wallpapers on the walls or of the decoration on pillows in beds make us feel the unpleasantly aching effects of them on our own skin. Beauty, the feeling of a home, human aggression, or the showy glittering of the luxurious commodities of the consumer society are elements that are ostentatiously connected in an ostensibly peaceful proximity with each other (similarly to Meret Oppenheim's fur-covered cup). Under all circumstances can we sense that this sort of contradiction can be unified only in terms of design, and we can only hope that creations, and other similar works, presented herein would help people beget a better future.

The application of ornament, therefore, is no longer a "crime", just to respond to Adolf Loos's statement, but is in fact an excellent opportunity to connect contradictory qualities with each other, and to address serious problems, because it is capable of being the cohesive and triggering element of the creations of fine arts.