

Foreword

In February 2008 we started to programme exhibitions in a former Marks & Spencer store on Margate High Street. The expansive and unreconstructed space has offered us a very different context in which to programme and think about exhibition making.

This exhibition was always intended to create a sense of celebration, of joy and delight. The artists in this exhibition engage with pattern in very different ways. Some make use of a systems approach to pattern whilst others are much more fluid and organic. The visual stimuli of pattern and colour can impact on all our senses and in particular our mood and how we feel. The Western relationship with pattern and colour over the past century has not been easy – should we embrace it or deride it?

Ramsgate, a few miles round the coast from Margate, was the home of the great nineteenth-century architect and designer, A.W.N. Pugin. His love of patterns based on stylised natural forms and his call for a return to the Gothic style is well documented. For Pugin, the Gothic style had deep-rooted associations and his arguments for its return to fashion were closely linked to religious belief rather than merely aesthetic considerations.

Today numerous artists work with pattern, colour and repetition. This exhibition showcases the work of nine artists. It has been a pleasure to work with all of the artists, many of whom have made new work specifically for the exhibition, creating interventions and responding directly to this large space. The mass of patterns, interweaving with the structure of the building both inside and outside, pull and push the viewer in many different directions and I hope, offer each of us new ways of thinking about the space. Pattern can dominate our reading of work but all of these works, whilst relying on pattern for their visual impact, have other perhaps more subtle meanings contained within them.

We are very grateful to all the artists for their time and commitment to the exhibition, Louise Taylor for her thoughtful essay and Fraser Muggeridge studio for the design of this delightful catalogue. As always, the team at Turner Contemporary, led by curator Sarah Martin, has worked tirelessly to make the exhibition possible.

Victoria Pomery
Director, Turner Contemporary

Pattern, Pleasure, Pain

Louise Taylor

In summer 2008, viewers worldwide watched the spectacle of the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics. A sea of rigorously ordered humanity, supremely graceful in its nonetheless ruthlessly choreographed movements, vividly harnessed the visual effects of mass and void on a grand scale. On the screen, close-up, individual performers became single pixels, 'people units' of moving colour; from a distance we were mesmerised by the power of pattern.



Opening Ceremony, Summer Olympics, 2008
Photo: Heinz Kluetmeier © Getty Images

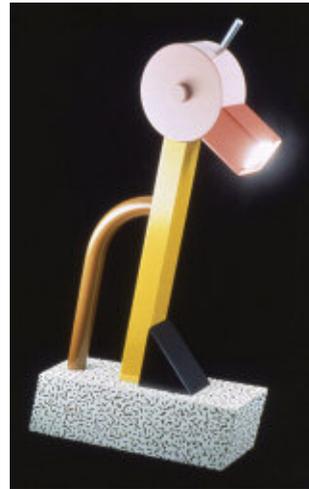
Elsewhere, the mental image of the 'fearful symmetry' of massed ranks is imprinted in our brains from powerful wartime images of soldiers. In Beijing we had something new, and yet no one could miss the message of authority, planning and discipline. Making pattern requires absolute control.

Some of the most influential historical books about pattern come from the theory and critique of design, architecture and the applied arts, from A.W.N. Pugin and John Ruskin in the nineteenth century, via Adolf Loos in the early twentieth century, to contemporary designers such as Karim Rashid, whose project 'Digipop' in 2005 harnessed computer technology to investigate the communicative power of pattern. If, as Ernst Gombrich has suggested, the theory of twentieth-century abstract painting owes more to the nineteenth-century debates on design than is usually allowed¹, then we must also look at the relationship between the fine and decorative arts in the twenty-first century.

Today the role of pattern is being rethought by architects, designers and artists.² Design is providing a resource and a ready-made language to renew an investigation of the decorative within art. Our design choices as consumers are not bound by old rules; instead we can express our individuality – 'anything goes'. And given that design and art have moved closer together³, we can more openly look at some of the motivational platforms, which both disciplines share, in the context of pattern.

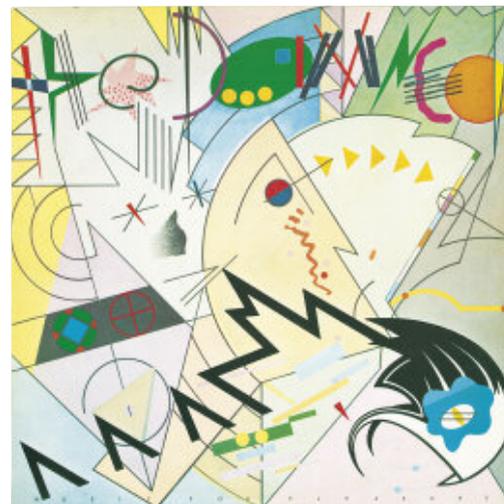
The particular and timely aspect of this exhibition is its focus on artists who share an interest in design, mass production and hand-making, exploring connections and crossovers. Their work for *Superabundant* is largely site specific, a thought through response to the interaction of people with the interior and exterior of the gallery.

Artists such as Jacob Dahlgren, Richard Woods and Daniel Sturgis are overt in their references to design but in different ways. As a painter, Sturgis is interested in the way that graphic design from the late 1970s and product design, especially the Italian 1980s design movement, Memphis, took forward the ideas of abstract art in new ways and to a new audience, breaking down barriers between popular culture and high art.



Tahiti table lamp designed by Ettore Sottsass for Memphis, 1980s
© Memphis

Ettore Sottsass' Tahiti table lamp is a good example of the colourful and playful iconoclasm of Memphis design. Within graphic design, Sturgis quotes influences such as Barney Bubbles⁴ with his Pop art versions of abstract masterpieces.



Barney Bubbles, album artwork for The Damned, *Music for Pleasure*, 1977
Photo: Courtesy Rat Scabies/Dave Vanian/The Damned. From *Reasons To Be Cheerful: The Life and Work of Barney Bubbles* by Paul Gorman. Published by Adelita Ltd

Sturgis looks over the fence to design as an alternative and balancing framework to the language of painting. As Tony Godfrey says, "The position he is in today, between art and design, between visual overload and reflection seems a crucial one."⁵

The idea that the language of abstraction continues in contemporary product design is picked up by the Swedish artist Jacob Dahlgren. He makes patterns by arranging lots of the same or similar objects together. In *Heaven is a Place on Earth* over four hundred red, blue and white Ikea bathroom scales are arranged on the floor as a dynamic chequerboard, on which visitors are invited to walk, as if to test, literally, the mass of humanity. Just as with Carl Andre's modular floor sculptures, people are often too inhibited to do so. Or is weighing yourself just too personal an affair?

The most important association for Dahlgren is to everyday life, though of course there are also direct references to the history

of modern art, minimalism and abstraction, and artists such as Daniel Buren. In the new sculpture *From Art to Life to Art*, budget brand food cans, with their coloured labels, are threaded like beads onto a metal armature whose modular units twist and turn at ninety-degree angles in three dimensions, like a Mondrian-meets-Escher maze through which visitors can walk.

Dahlgren has an obsession for wearing, collecting and photographing stripes. In *Signes d'abstraction*, a performance where many people wearing striped clothes congregate in a public place, he subverts the formal, image-making power of uniforms; the visual effect is about enjoying spontaneity and difference as much as similarity. The effect of systems and the interaction of people is integral to Dahlgren's aims.



Jacob Dahlgren, *Signes d'abstraction*, Stockholm, 2005

In a related way, Paul Moss' *Danger Paintings* call upon the fundamental association of stripes with danger and authority. The title refers both to Moss' use of the red and white plastic, non-adhesive tape which is strung up to warn passers by of road works, and to the danger he perceives as an artist in making a two-dimensional, patterned art object. The decorative always was a touchy subject in high art. During the making of the pieces, Moss describes a tension between setting out to make a pattern and flipping the process when it gets 'too decorative', playing with design by cutting and rejoining the tape, overlaying it thickly or more thinly, changing the direction. Moss wants to determine what the ideas are which will connect a chosen material and form to a particular place or group of people.⁶

The hazard tape is a pattern ready-made but by the time Moss has wrapped metres of it around a wooden stretcher and hung it as a painting, it is possible we won't recognise it any more. Instead the 'canvases', shown together as repeated units, fill our field of vision like a massive city centre billboard and we are tripped into a red and white haze, as if we are looking at a Bridget Riley painting. As Moss says, he is interested in the moment when "a trashy material gains imposing validity".⁷

Walking past them, the 'paintings' flicker like glimpsing the gaps between the bars of a fence. We are caught up in an exchange between outdoor (holes in the road) and indoor (paintings on a wall), street life and high art. Just like the street menders, Moss is saying 'don't fall in'.

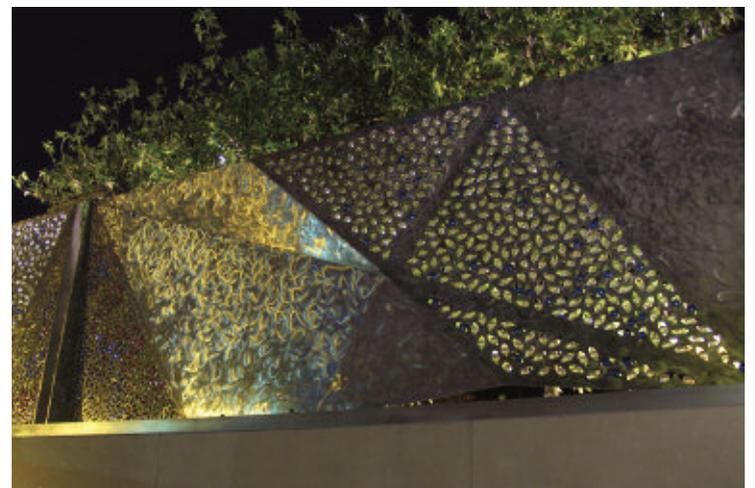
The surface of things is of great consequence to Richard Woods who "always deals with notions of aspiration. That's what decoration often is."⁸ He revels in the realm of the decorative,

the world of William Morris, asserting that everyone has a right to it, even if only by the quick fix. Instead of traditional art formats, he adds new fascias and façades of colourful pattern to the interiors and exteriors of buildings. Over the years, Woods has built up a stock of woodblock printed patterns drawn from real things such as bricks, planks and tiles, to form a repertoire which he reuses. Woods marries the concept of repetition with the realities of batch production. The outside of the Turner Contemporary Project Space is treated to a makeover by Woods, its austere, civic exterior domesticated by a new, hand painted tiling scheme, whose saturated colour and wonky edges remind us of the craze for handmade Mexican tiles which swept into kitchen design in the 1990s.

It is a brilliant example of the way Woods uses illusionistic depth and changes in scale and colour to disrupt and disturb. This is in direct disregard for the rule of another great nineteenth-century design reformer and architect, A.W.N. Pugin, that "illusion should not be in conflict with function"⁹. Pugin objected to three-dimensional representation in the decoration of walls and floors, which would conflict with real effects of light and shade in rooms. This debate grew and involved many other critics such as John Ruskin and the organisers of the Great Exhibition of 1851.

By flouting this rule in his *Flat stack sculpture*, Woods reminds us of its logic. "I am interested in the idea of pushing and pulling and attaching things together; and I think that that can be done by reusing and photographing my existing pattern works",¹⁰ Woods explains. *Flat stack sculpture* is literally an artful layering of planks, colourfully painted and printed with three-dimensional woodgrain, like a mock game of Pick-up Sticks. At a certain distance it tricks our eye into thinking it is a flat surface; in reality of course we would fall flat on our faces – which is exactly what Pugin was worried about.

Jacqueline Poncelet has worked with pattern her whole career. As she says, "I do not have a minimalist aesthetic. I believe that complexity can enrich our lives but should not overwhelm us."¹¹ In the last decade, her work has gained an influential platform through her collaborations with architects and works for public spaces, which in turn has opened up the possibilities of scale and material. Significantly, as the history of ornament in public space has for so long been kept in check by architects, she observes a new willingness among them to incorporate pattern. This she attributes to the availability of certain materials, such as coloured glass, and processes, such as digital printing, making innovative projects more affordable.



Jacqueline Poncelet, *only here only now*, Grammar School Court, Leicester, 2006
Commissioned by Hammersons. Photo: Susanna Heron

Jacqueline Poncelet's work for Turner Contemporary is a site-specific installation in which four pattern designs, collectively titled *push-me-pull-you*, are wrapped round a 'forest' of slender columns throughout the gallery. They are among the few figurative, illusionistic patterns within the exhibition.

The motif, a wooden lay figure and hand, is reflected, inverted and rotated and forms through this repetition a symmetrical, sinuous, flowing design, which borrows the structure of the classic 'drop repeat' pattern of fabrics and wall coverings.¹² Asexual, eyeless and featureless, the mannequin can act as a surrogate for the universal human condition. Gripped by the bigger hand, going round and round, and shown against a featureless background, it has no control over its own destiny. The tension and contortions suggest mental and physical struggles. In the Dr. Dolittle stories, the *pushmi-pullyu* is a double-headed antelope; when it tries to move, both heads go in opposite directions.

As we look, we start to perceive different shapes – spiders and crustaceans emerge like images out of a Rorschach inkblot. "Patterns have to have an impact and you only get that by repetition", Poncelet says.¹³ The effect is also strikingly three-dimensional, sculpting and changing the way we read the space and architectural elements.

Wim Delvoye, a Belgian artist for whom styles of ornamentation are a constant reference point, suggests that pattern comes round cyclically in art, without actually shaking off the modernist taboo against decoration. With ambivalence, he is suspicious of ornament done only to enhance the prestige of an object. "Pattern used by artists has to be one part of a rich and deep story."¹⁴

In the last few years he has begun collecting books on pattern and decoration from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, which provide rich source material. "Whether he is supervising the production of tattooed pigs, combining gas canisters with Delft patterning, or turning ironing boards into heraldic emblems, Delvoye is always making connections between things which have no apparent relationship prior to his aesthetic hybridizing."¹⁵ So it is with his *Marble Floor* series, where slices of salami and other cold meats simulate the intricate patterns of Arabic tiled floors. Seen casually or from a distance the simulation is incredible – it may only be the glimpse of an occasional imperfection or gap which tells us that things are not what they appear to be.

With *Marble Floor* Delvoye achieves a surrealist contrast, from shiny tiles to greasy meat, from the pleasing to the abject, which links to his lifelong interest in the clash between high and low art. The trick lies in the discovery and marvel of the deceit.

Labour, toil and sacrifice are ideas which are inseparable from decoration. These were vexed subjects for nineteenth-century reformers of ornament such as John Ruskin and Adolf Loos. For Ruskin, one of the key reasons we enjoy ornament is "the sense of human labour and care spent upon it".¹⁶ Loos, in his infamous lecture of 1908, *Ornament and Crime*, equated ornament with an injurious waste of "human labour, money, and materials. That is damage time cannot repair."¹⁷ How long something has taken an artist to make is still one of the most popular questions; it is a ready reckoner of value.

Making processes and materials are of specific importance to each of the artists in this exhibition, whichever country, cultural milieu or artistic tradition they come from. Several talk about making in terms of time spent in concentrated, sometimes physically punishing activities. In a quirky revelation, Wim Delvoye emphasises that the *Marble Floors* are handmade not computer-generated. Having laboriously sliced salami and chorizo, as many as eight people might be needed to construct the pattern, which has been previously drawn, by hand, onto paper. As he says of the Gothic Perpendicular style, "It is so intricate, so well done mathematically. An ornamentation takes a lot of engineering."¹⁸

Henna Nadeem has made a new series of photo-collages for the exhibition, in which hand-cut patterns are superimposed on found images of glorious, deeply coloured sunsets. This has been partly inspired by Turner's paintings of sunsets and his connection with Margate. Picking up from her piece *Four Sunsets* made in 2005, the work is a continuation of her investigation of landscape seen through a screening layer of pattern. "My early experiences as a British Muslim growing up in semi-rural Yorkshire determined the cultural and stylistic motivation of my practice. Nature and landscape formed the backdrop to my childhood, but it was nature viewed through a window rather than experienced directly."¹⁹

Nadeem has worked with all periods of pattern styles, such as 1960s psychedelia, but in this work comes back to Islamic-derived patterns, more Arabesque than geometric. The patterns usually come from her large collection of papers, pictures, books, magazines. "I tend to use sections of a pattern so it doesn't always look like there is a repeat, although some of the motifs might be repeated within the work. The pattern is often cropped, enlarged, reduced, adapted to work with the image. Most of the patterns I use are placed off centre to play with the idea I'm zooming into a micro view of nature (albeit very stylised) mixed with a macro view of nature (photographic images of landscape)."²⁰

The physical endurance required to make the cuts and the looming danger of a mistake are vivid and may lead to the damaged work being discarded. This makes us appreciate even more the three-fold increase in scale Nadeem is using for the first time for *Superabundant*.

Talking about techniques and labour help to contextualise Nadeem's work but her photo-collages also carry a strong narrative element and emotional power. The cut-out repeats, cropped and interrupted, are like visual interference, producing a restlessness which pulls and pushes our senses, as if trying to force a choice – in or out, near or far, figure or ground, real or imagined – that can never actually be resolved.

Time, repetition and the tension between chaos and control are at the core of Lesley Halliwell's mandala-like, tonal drawings. Having chosen pieces from her 1970s drawing set, the Spirograph, she selects what colour pens she will use, in what order, knowing from experience how long each will last. Even biros, cheap, everyday classics of product design, are still a signifier of time and value. The artist becomes one cog in a bigger system. Driving the point home, Halliwell titles her work with the number of minutes they have taken to make. *Fanatic* required approximately four thousand repetitive, cramp-inducing, solitary minutes.

During the making mistakes inevitably happen, paper tears, pens run dry and it is this irregularity within the order of her system which increasingly interests Halliwell. “The ink in bic biro is surprisingly rich and when it is layered intensively becomes incredibly lush and sticky.” She plays with letting go control so we gain a window into the process. Halliwell has studied the concept of repetition and refers to Gilles Deleuze’s 1968 book *Repetition and Difference* in questioning how desirable perfection is anyway – “it is the change that runs through repeated series that interests him so much” and to Halliwell, gives “life, intensity and value to the work”.²¹

Daniel Sturgis enjoys revealing to some degree how his paintings are made. He makes hand-cut templates, such as a petal or a dot, and reuses and recombines them within a painting and across a series, so that they become a familiar motif. He likes the obviousness and human scale, and these are effects he makes use of in his works for this exhibition, the site-specific wall drawing *Personal Vista* and the 1999 painting *Special to You*. In the painting *Special to You*, from 1999, he unsettles the decorative order of the composition with off-centredness and offset elements in order to let the viewer participate actively, “putting right the slipped repetition in their own heads”.²² This painting was made in Rome where he became interested in the Baroque, especially the architect Borromini – “not just aesthetically but as a way of incorporating discordance”.²³ Sturgis often adds pencil lines at the end in order to call attention to certain areas. Each element, such as a single petal, will need seven to eight layers of paint to create the subtle tones he favours, the colours and combinations often derived from found images or objects. The painstaking nature of this process is at apparent odds with the ‘wonkiness’ of the design. Being free of the demands of design for production, he doesn’t nail things down, rather he is after a quality of looseness. He uses the language of hand-making to show that determining the level of perfection is a specific decision.

The spirit of community and shared ideals, as well as cross-disciplinary practice run deep in the American artist Jim Drain’s work. For many years he was a member of Forcefield, the Providence based artists’ collective, involved in music, performance and all kinds of impromptu happenings for which he often provided bizarre, all-over, knitted bodysuits in stripes and patterns. He says he always used colour really well and it was a natural step to work in knit and textiles as a form of subversion but also of knowing differentiation from dominant ideologies. It has turned into a consuming, enjoyable and ever-expanding approach.²⁴ While he has explored the effects of pattern for a long time, this exhibition provides a new and focused context for his work.

In Drain’s new sculpture *Hex* we have a nine-foot tall, larger-than-life embodiment of the delight and aura of cloth, print, beadwork, colour, texture and pattern. Though constructed with care, the piece is more about chaos than order. He is using pattern randomly, creating interference: white noise, but in colour. Pattern is energy. He says “Interference is a third space – in a way it is a mental camouflage. Noise, mud, wrongness, chaos. It undoes pattern. But it can also be neutral – not committing – whereas pattern often is a constructive thing, takes a position, has intention, seeks to order or allows for order.”²⁵

The title *Hex*, meaning curse or enchantment, hints at the dark side. But the intricate beadwork and the absurdist white

wig take the edge off. While one can connect Drain with his acknowledged influence, artist Mike Kelley, in terms of the critique of junk culture and the idea of an antidote to consumerism, Drain does fetishism with less of the nihilism and more of the pleasure.

On one level, as parents raising the Gina Ford generation, we tend to value the security of routines. But our patterns of behaviour could also be our Achilles heel, if we pay heed to Martin Lindstrom, ‘boy wonder of branding’, who has shown how comprehensively our individual desires can be captured and exploited through brain mapping and neuro-marketing.²⁶

Ultimately, the rejection by artists in this exhibition of absolute authority, replacing it with playful, questioning and rebellious pattern, is enlivening and necessary. It reminds us that it is part of the human condition to seek out structure but then to find creative ways to break out of its confines.

Louise Taylor is a freelance curator and writer and former director of the Crafts Council.

1. E.H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order*, Phaidon, Oxford, 1979, p. 62.
2. At the time of writing at least three other survey exhibitions relating to pattern in contemporary art were in preparation in the UK, in London, Wales and elsewhere.
3. Witness the success of Established and Sons’ gallery and products; SCP’s collections with artists; the DesignArt show, etc.
4. Colin Fulcher, aka Barney Bubbles, 1942–83, is best known for his graphic design contribution to the independent British music scene in the 1970s and early 1980s, producing sleeve designs for bands such as Hawkwind, The Damned and Elvis Costello and the Attractions.
5. Tony Godfrey, *Equal Minds* (exhibition catalogue), 2007.
6. Author’s interview with Paul Moss, November 2008.
7. Ibid.
8. Marco Livingstone and Richard Woods, *Richard Woods*, University of Oxford in association with Lund Humphries, 2006, p. 12.
9. A.W.N. Pugin, quoted by E.H. Gombrich, *ibid*, p. 34.
10. Richard Woods, interview in Anna Douglas (ed.), *Richard Woods: As Big as a House...*, ARTicle Press Publishers & iXIA PA Ltd, 2006, p. 77.
11. Jacqueline Poncelet, artist’s statement, www.poncelet.me.uk
12. The ‘drop repeat’ pattern has been in use in fabrics and wall coverings in the West since the fifteenth century. Naturalistic imagery with a strong illusion of depth and sinuous lines of repeating hourglass shapes are characteristic of this style which is discussed in full by Michael Snodin & Maurice Howard, *Ornament: A Social History Since 1450*, Yale University Press & the V&A, 1996, pp. 184–9.
13. Author’s interview with Jacqueline Poncelet, November 2008.
14. Author’s interview with Wim Delvoye, November 2008.
15. Wim and Vigour: an interview with Wim Delvoye, Robert Enright, in *Border Crossings*, Issue No. 96, 2005, p. 21.
16. John Ruskin, *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, London, 1849, VIII, pp. 81–2.
17. From a translation of the original 1908 lecture, published in Adolf Opel (ed.), *Adolf Loos, Ornament and Crime – Selected Essays*, Ariadne Press, California, 1998, p. 169.

18. Author’s interview with Wim Delvoye, November 2008.
19. Henna Nadeem, artist’s statement in Alien Nation exhibition catalogue, ICA & inIVA, London, 2007, p. 37.
20. Email from the artist to the author, November 2008.
21. Lesley Halliwell, *Endurance and Repetition*, Repeat Repeat Conference Paper, University of Chester, 2007, reproduced in full at www.lesleyhalliwell.co.uk
22. Author’s interview with Daniel Sturgis, November 2008.
23. Email from the artist, November 2008.
24. Author’s interview with Jim Drain, November, 2008.
25. Ibid.
26. Martin Lindstrom, *Buyology: How Everything We Believe About Why We Buy Is Wrong*, Random House, London, 2008.