LINE, SPACE AND PLANE

A thesis submitted to the College of the Arts of Kent State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts

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First, I would like to thank my advisor Janice Lessman-Moss for always challenging me as a student and as an artist. I would also like to thank my family for all of their support, in particular my sister Carrie who has been on this journey with me my entire life.
LINE, SPACE AND PLANE

This body of work reflects my interest in exploring the parameters of screen printing on fabric in relation to the physicality of cloth. The tools and materials traditionally associated with the process—fabric, dye, and screen—are used to create a vocabulary of marks that are more reflective of brush strokes in their dynamic repetition. The method for repeating the unit is not mathematical as necessary for precise registration but rather intuitive revealing irregular systems and rhythms. Although the process is the primary motivator for the work, patterns, colors and presentation often evoke a playful presence. The patterns created are decorative and quirky suggesting games, puzzles and even doodles.

The pieces are an amalgamation of careful preparation and a stream of consciousness approach to composing. In psychological terms, stream of consciousness refers to the flow of thoughts in the conscious mind. This process also subscribes to the philosophical approach of the Abstract Expressionist movement and their belief in the role of the subconscious, serendipity, and spontaneity. Repeated marks or units are used to create an informal system which is then responded to in a more organic way. Each piece is a depiction of cause and effect.

There is a long history of screen printing on fabric used for repetitive design for functional yardage. Motifs are designed to create a seamless repeat horizontally and vertically across any length of cloth. My work uses the motif in a fluid arrangement
rather than in a perfect repeat. Units are connected or not according to a minimal visual plan that is established at the outset of each project. The printed shapes set up a relationship on the surface of the fabric that is used as a framework for embellishment in the form of drawn or painted marks. A composition with a balance of elements that uses pattern to create a field of activity contrasted with solidity is ultimately the goal. The way in which the fabric is configured on the wall or in space is meant to complement the image on the cloth.

Influences

My interest in screen printing began in high school. Inspired by the work of Andy Warhol, a seminal figure in the pop art movement of the 1960’s who used screen printing to reproduce images in repetition to express ideas of consumerism, consumption and American life. After printing the initial images he used embellishment as a way to bring the touch of the hand to this mechanical process. He would paint over it, draw on top of the image or add glitter or other ornamentation to the surface of the piece. His prints were often gritty, unpolished and lacked the slickness of commercial printing. This was done purposely to reinforce the physical presence of the object. When using repetition in his work he wanted each image to retain its identity as a separate unit to reinforce the notion of accumulation and excess.

Marimekko, a Finnish textile design company that specializes in fabric printing provided another strong influence for my work. Known for their use of bold motifs, line,
color and unconventional approach to designing fabric, they were at the peak of their popularity in the 1960’s providing fabric for fashion and interior decoration. Marimekko founder, Armi Ratia was trained in textile design and the industrial arts, but the design team consisted of various artists with different backgrounds. Many of these artists had no formal education in textile design so were not restrained by traditional training. Their designs were fresh and experimental. Consisting of stylized lines, shapes, and graphic patterns often the motifs are so large in scale that they don’t appear to be in a repeat. A garment may contain only a portion of the motif that is printed. In the beginning, all of their fabrics were printed by hand using traditional textile screen printing methods.

Surface

The process used in this thesis work began with limited variables. Two different units were created within a triangular format. Hand drawn horizontal lines were used to fill the first unit. The second triangle contained thick horizontal lines created with black electrical tape. These units were developed first on acetate and were then transferred to the screen using photo emulsion. Through this process the mark of the hand drawn and collaged lines are captured on a screen and may be reproduced as often as required to achieve a desired effect. By manipulating the screen on the field and applying color through the open areas of the motif, a range of movement and color saturation is possible. The units function like brush strokes as they are composed within the edges of the cloth.
The triangular contour of the unit allows for numerous variations in the arrangements. The diagonal edge also lends to a more dynamic composition in contrast to the measured order of the grid, which provides the foundation for most repeat patterns.

Drawing and Texture

Printing onto the fabric provides the framework for the composition. It is a skeletal structure in which to respond. The surface is then doodled onto with markers, opaque pigment, or gold/silver leaf. The word doodle was chosen because it is inherently playful. All of the materials added serve several purposes. These materials are intended to enhance, dissect or create a tactile quality within the composition. It is a continuation of mark making and the reinforcement of the touch of the hand which is integral to each piece. The grey fabric marker was chosen to create the drawn lines because of its pencil-like quality. It shows each mark, stroke, and line that is drawn onto the surface depending on the amount of pressure applied. This quality creates movement and volume. For example in Green, Grey and Silver (Fig. 8) the grey fabric marker is used to accentuate details as well as create shapes that move directionally with the twist in the fabric. Stenciling is also used in the application of the embellishments. Masking tape is used to block out or create shapes among the printed units. Marker, pigment or gold/silver leaf is then applied within those areas. While the printing creates negative space the stenciling fills that space; or in some instances covers it, essentially creating different shapes. For example, in Red, Orange and Gold
(Fig. 6) the negative space between the printed objects as well as the areas of stenciled gold leaf create irregular shapes.

Color

Color is important to each piece as well. All of the pieces are named for the colors that are used within their particular composition. A color palette is formulated based on color seen on TV, movies and in fashion magazines. All of the colors are manufactured or manipulated by the sources in which they derive and suggest a filtered, artificial or unnatural quality. This lends itself to the surreal nature of the objects.

Color swatches are developed based on an interpretation of the colors observed. These swatches are created with gauche or ink on paper and serve as a guide for mixing the dyes. The colors created are combined in unexpected ways in the finished pieces. Edgier colors are used for some pieces, while others contain mild, soothing, or whimsical colors. In Red, Pink and Orange (Fig. 5) color of the orange fabric marker is very sharp in contrast with the pink and red tones. This creates tension between the shape of the object and the shape of the composition created by the motifs. There is a contrast between vibrant color and neutral colors. Neutral color causes the vibrant color to really pop while it recedes. This contrast creates visual depth and a constant shift between figure and ground.
Ground and the Physical Plane

Negative space plays an integral role in each composition. The white surface of the cloth reads as negative space between the shapes and colors. In many instances it becomes an extension of the wall due to its color. The fabric drapes well, like silk but has a dull, matte surface. Some of the pieces retain the quality of commercial yardage by their elongated, rectangular format. Others are trimmed at the edges creating a more organic unusual form.

Cutting into the surface emphasizes negative space and affects the drape of the cloth. It is also meant to enhance certain parts of the composition and reinforce the shapes that are used in each piece. In Golden, Yellow and Green (Fig. 4) shapes are cut out of the fabric which accentuates the printed and stenciled shapes. These cut outs are then strategically filled with vertical threads which provide functional support as well as another linear design element. Cutting is also used along the edges of Red, Pink and Orange (Fig. 12) as well as Golden and Silver (Fig. 7).

The physicality of the object is further emphasized by the way the pieces are draped on the wall. For example in the piece Green, Grey and Silver (Fig. 8) the fabric is printed on both sides in order to twist the fabric in the middle and have it drape in the center. In Red, Pink and Orange (Fig. 5) the piece is pleated to accentuate the print. This type of manipulation features the natural properties of the material.
Each object is greatly influenced by fashion and interior design. Pleating and draping techniques, commonly used for apparel and furnishing fabrics are used to physically transform each piece into a peculiar, undefined object. These techniques give each piece volume, shape and dimension while referencing familiar domestic or wearable items.

Conclusion

Initially, this series focused primarily on pattern and the process of composing a surface. As the series progressed the physical form or sculptural aspect of the cloth has become increasingly important. Originally fabrics were stretched or draped on the wall to enhance the character of the pattern. In the later pieces the fabric is more deliberately configured through cutting and sewing. Red, Pink and Orange (Fig. 5) and Golden and Silver (Fig. 7) are two examples of this. This connection of the printed composition and the manipulated and sewn fabric plane provides fertile ground for future exploration.
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