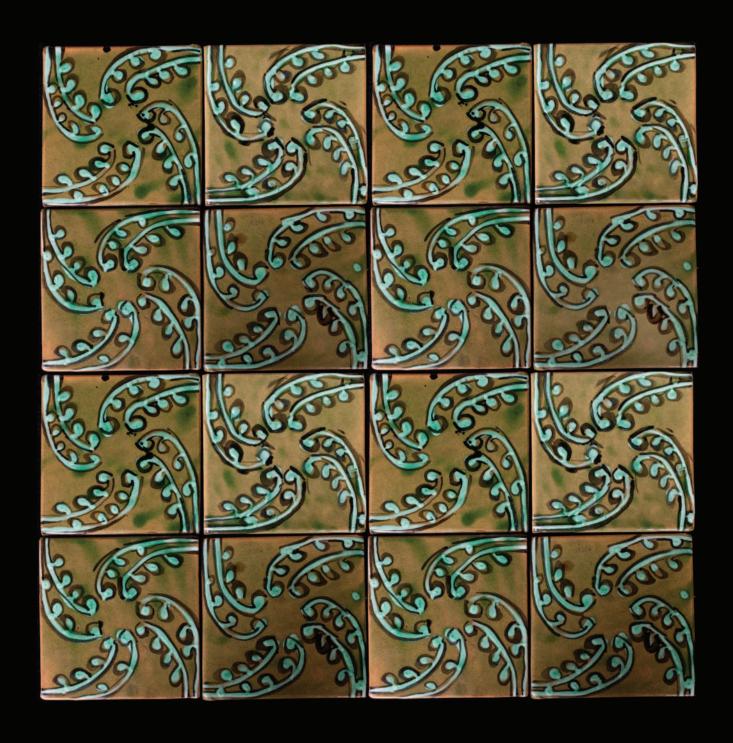
# Ubiquitous: Aspects of Contemporary Pattern

30 June — 1 Sept 2012



## Ubiquitous: Aspects of Contemporary Pattern

## **loana Gordon-Smith**

Just as there are no societies that do not speak or count, so there are none that do not decorate, embellish or make patterns – David Brett<sup>1</sup>

David Brett,

Rethinking

Decoration: Pleasure

& Ideology In

The Visual Arts,

Cambridge
University Press:

Cambridge, 2005, p.7.

David Brett, a British contemporary authority on pattern and ornament, observes that pattern is as pervasive, perennial and, implicitly, primordial as language and arithmetic. Indeed, pattern can be found in every culture, every era and in every environment. Pattern appears in fields as diverse as fashion, nature, mathematics, tattoo art, software design and interior design.

In presenting this exhibition, Objectspace seeks to explore the enduring appeal of pattern and pattern-making for contemporary New Zealand makers. <u>Ubiquitous: Aspects of Contemporary Pattern</u> presents work by practitioners working across a wide range of media including design, craft, applied arts, sculpture, print-making and photography, demonstrating pattern's contemporary relevance.

The exhibition and this essay explore three themes; Pattern and Construction, Pattern and Identity, and Pattern and Knowledge. While these themes are porous and represent only a few of pattern's many properties, each theme demonstrates a different aspect and purpose behind the use of pattern. Common across all three themes is pattern's attraction as a device for exploring and expressing individual and collective concerns.

#### Pattern and Construction

The formal qualities of pattern and pattern-making are inherently concerned with the process of construction, through the replication of the individual unit. When units are repeated, patterns emerge. Ashley Allen working with Stephane Rondel, Joanna Campbell, Stephen Bradbourne, Richard Fahey, Andrew McLeod working with Dilana and Jasmine Watson all in different ways engage with the construction possibilities of pattern repeats.

Individual units of pattern can exist in one of two forms: either as a surface application or integrated within the substance of the object. Contemporary examples of integral pattern can be found in the <a href="Mokume Gane">Mokume Gane</a> technique used by Joanna Campbell, a Japanese process that embeds pattern into metal. Similarly, the Italian Murrine technique, employed by glass maker Stephen Bradbourne, integrates pattern into the material of glass. Campbell and Bradbourne use these processes to create works where pattern is indivisible from structure. In integrating the pattern within the material, the repeat is permanent and finite, contained within the object's structure.

In the work of Jasmine Watson, Richard Fahey and Ashley Allen working with Stephane Rondel, the individual unit is designed for limitless repetition. The formal property of the unit's pattern, in each of their works, enables the repetition and creation of larger units. Jasmine Watson's recent series of <a href="champlevé">champlevé</a> enamelled hexagon brooches are designed to be configured as a larger hexagon. This arrangement presents the possibility of scaled repeats towards infinity. A similar schema is found in Ashley Allen and Stephane Rondel's cladding design for the Metro Centre, Auckland. The individual unit is composed of curved aluminium lines set in a maze pattern. As the units are fixed in multiples to the exterior of the building, it is possible to trace a single continuous curve from one point to another, a curve that could extend indefinitely with the addition of further units.

Patterns applied to individual units, when repeated, lend themselves to subsequent, complex patterns that can only be discerned in repetition. The secondary motif in both sets of Richard Fahey's tiles only emerges when the tiles are assembled, revealing a complexity of one pattern overlaying another.

Some contemporary makers also engage with pattern repeats in unconventional ways. Andrew McLeod's <u>Kowhaiwhai</u> design for Dilana (2009) presents an entirely different approach to constructing pattern, utilising multiplication rather than repeat. Although the scroll motif is replicated, each instance is unique. Joanna Campbell, working with the ready-made patterns of lace, inverts the process of pattern-making, cropping the repeat to a single unit which is then framed within tension-set rings to produce a brooch.

Pattern, by its very nature, is a vehicle of expansion, creating complex compositions from repeating simpler units. The ordering systems can differ vastly. The formal qualities or organising principles of pattern are only revealed through repetition.

#### Pattern and Identity

Although pattern is universally pervasive, it is also culturally specific. By utilising local materials, motifs and ordering systems, pattern is employed as a tool of collective self-definition, an act complicated by conditions of global consumption and trans-cultural exchange. Gina Matchitt, Genevieve Packer, Leanne Clayton, Sandra Thomson, PaperHands, Robin White, Adrian Hailwood and Neil Dawson, each in various ways, employ pattern as their medium of exchange to define, modify and critique notions of identity.

Pattern plays a role in distinguishing and branding collectives, identifying a group by either material or design, or both. Associating Scottish tartan patterns with a specific clan, for instance, historically results from the use of local plants and berries for dying. Similarly, tukutuku panels in Maori meeting houses hold a story or history specific to the local iwi, the pattern thus acting not only as a mnemonic device, but also as a mark of difference. Existing patterns are often modified as groups and cultures continually re-define and re-present themselves. Gina Matchitt's panels, which reference tukutuku panels, use a customary Maori Patikitki pattern, 'woven' with black and white computer keys. These combine a visual and ancestral mode of communicating with technological, exoteric media to re-brand the way Maori communicate as a negotiation between the traditional and the contemporary.

As the propagation of national branding outstrips personal knowledge of the cultures they purportedly represent, branding can create external perceptions at odds with actuality. Genevieve Packer's Flock (2007) design, an all-over sheepskin pattern on vinyl and leather, presents a satirical take on the disparity between the sheep-focussed national branding evident in exported goods and tourism and its divergent domestic status. The design in many ways pokes fun at its own inauthenticity; the pattern is engraved on cowhide, a distinctly different animal product, and the tight repeat of the pattern emphasises its faux nature.<sup>2</sup> The application of Packer's Flock pattern to traditional sheepskin items, including slippers and purses, echoes the substitution of branded souvenirs for the original product.

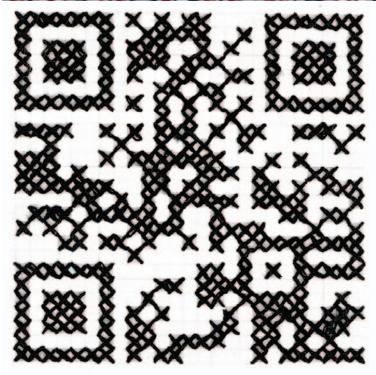
The potential to misrepresent a group's culture and identity underpins the controversy surrounding appropriated patterns. A pattern of recent artistic and academic interest has been the Samoan tatau or tattoo. Although the tatau has been practiced on non-Samoans by Samoans for more than 200 years, the use of tatau on palagi, or non-Samoans, outside of a Samoan cultural context is still contentious and has raised issues around cultural property, reinterpretation, globalisation and control. The exchange of patterns also flows in the other direction from the global centres to the peripheries. New Zealand born Samoan artist Leanne Joy Lupelele Clayton has adapted William Morris' Fruit (1864) wallpaper pattern (also known as Pomegranate), substituting his pomegranate motif for a pattern of oranges and lemons in her Bitter and Sweet (2005) screen print.

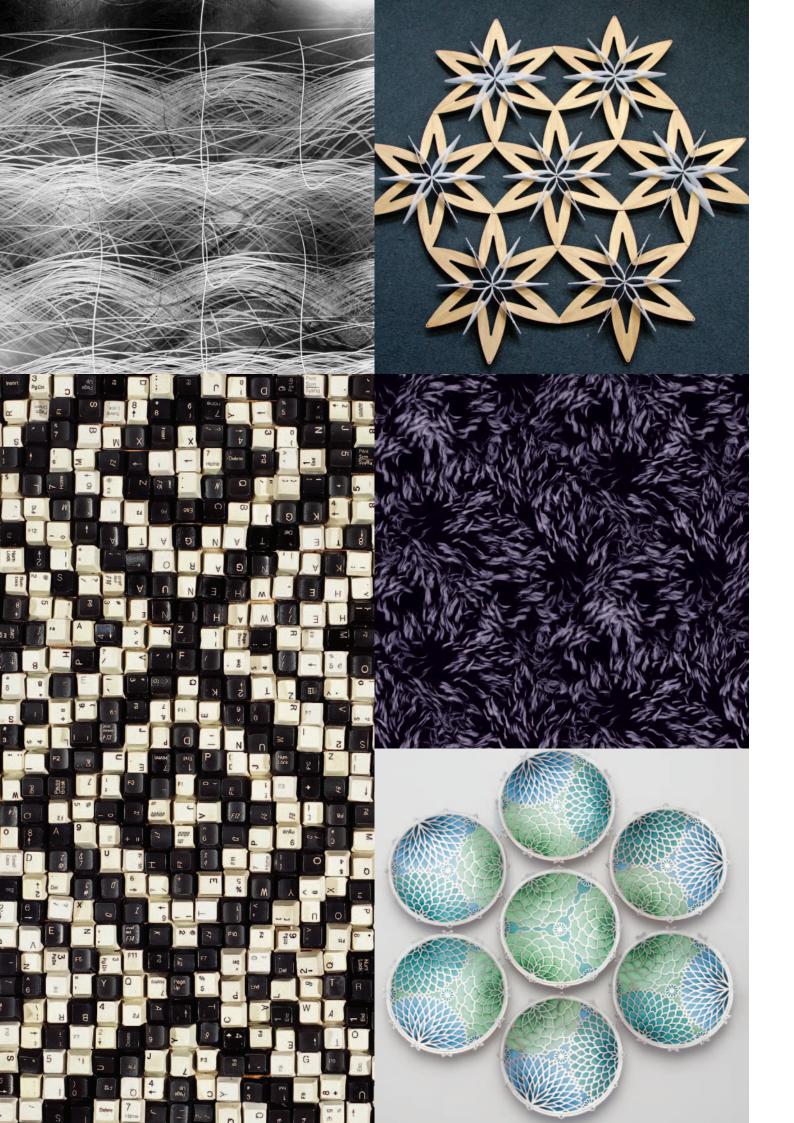
- 2.
  Genevieve Packer,
  Double dipping,
  crafting nostalgic
  resonance, Massey
  University:
  Wellington, 2007, p.28.
- 3.
  Sean Mallon
  'Samoan Tatooing,
  Cosmopolitans,
  Global Culture' in
  Sean Mallon, Peter
  Brunt and Mark
  Adams (eds.), <u>Tatau:</u>
  Samoan Tattoo, New
  Zealand Art, Global
  Culture, Te Papa
  Press: Wellington,
  2010, p. 21.











4.
Gillian Neale, <u>Blue</u>
<u>and White Pottery:</u>
A Collector's Guide,
Milners: London,
1973, p.10.

Perhaps the most enduring example of appropriated pattern is Blue Willow. First appearing in the 1780s in England, the Blue Willow pattern has been in production without pause for over 200 years. Contemporary examples of the Blue Willow pattern — from Dame Robin White's <u>Braveheart</u> etching (2011), to Adrian Hailwood's screen printed fashion garments (2010) and Neil Dawson's <u>Old/New/Borrowed/Blue</u> sculptures (2008) — demonstrate its enduring appeal.

5.
Al Bagdade and
Susan D. Bagdade
Warman, English and
Continental Pottery
and Porcelain,
Krause Publications:
Wisconsin, 2004,
p. 337.

Many factors have contributed to the longevity of the Blue Willow pattern, foremost among them is the development of the pattern as part of British culture. The Blue Willow pattern was produced in response to a huge demand for blue and white Chinese ceramics. As tariffs on Chinese products increased and tax on tea was dramatically cut, the Blue Willow pattern took root in England and was increasingly identified as an authentic local product. By the 1830s, over 200 manufacturers were working with underglazed Blue Willow in England.<sup>5</sup> Blue Willow was also produced in New Zealand with Crown Lynn manufacturing its own line of Blue Willow in the 1970s and 1980s. Originally popularised as a commodity of cultural exchange, the now iconic British pattern is employed by many contemporary makers for its recognisability and cultural resonance.

In addition to defining and reinforcing cultural identity, pattern is also employed to critique and expose characteristics of political and religious groups. The persuasiveness of pattern's repetitive nature and the metonymic qualities of its motifs provides an effective tool for political commentary. Sandra Thomson utilises pattern to critique right-wing religious views. Disown (2010) addresses the religious right's censorship of scientific knowledge, specifically the denial of evolution. Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you can make you commit atrocities (2010) calls attention to the justification of violence as divinely ordained. Screen printed on a fabric drop are three sets of motifs; a circular arrangement of grenades; intertwined handguns; and missiles set in a concentric formation, all presented as substitutes for military medals. Coupled with the imagery of angelic wings and heavenly skies, Thomson unnervingly conveys the honour that is used to convince others to commit violent crimes in the name of religion. Vices; Juniper, Hops, Cocaine, Tobacco and Coffee (2012), a wallpaper design by PaperHands, presents a pattern of politically-charged motifs of a more humorous nature, amusingly re-contextualising the titled plants with a political profile within a pre-existing tradition of botanic-patterned wallpaper.

Presenting a visual identity is fraught with issues of authenticity and exchange. The use of pattern by a wide range of cultures from a plethora of positions speaks to the adaptability and appeal of pattern-making as an instrument of expression. The repetition of motifs within pattern's design, coupled with the repeated use of the same pattern, emphasises the represented characteristics as central to a group's identity. While specific patterns are often laden with political, cultural and religious overtones, pattern-making itself is a neutral and democratic device.

#### Pattern and Knowledge

In order to understand our environment, we look for repeating qualities in phenomena around us in order to discern the reasons underpinning the repetition. Pattern, as a series of repeats, is thus the site of much contemporary enquiry. Within this area of pattern and knowledge, Peata Larkin, Briar Mark, Andrew Last, Tim Main working with Dilana, David Trubridge and Darren Glass show an interest in pattern as a means of organising and transferring information.

Recognising pattern in natural and man-made environments is a process of much interest to psychologists and neurologists, providing insight into the human need to organise random stimuli into an orderable schema of similarities and differences. Darren Glass, a contemporary New Zealand photographer, extends the field of information from the traditional still image to data collected across space and time. Hefty Roller, a 105 apertured pinhole camera, was rolled into the crafter of Maungawhau (Mt Eden) each day for five minutes over the course of a year. The resulting contact print March 2010 – 2011 Hefty Roller 12:45 – 12:50 pm (2010-2011) is a pattern of light steaks capturing the motion of the camera in relation to sunlight. The image, a condensed record of both time and space, prompts questions of how we perceive phenomena across the distance of time.

Once a pattern is perceived, further knowledge can be found in the relationship between the individual elements. Evident in the patterned objects of many contemporary practitioners is a concern for the mathematical translation of pattern structures. Andrew Last's <a href="Phiball Light">Phiball Light</a> (2005) and <a href="Xiphi Bowl">Xiphi Bowl</a> (2004) reflect an interest in the pattern found in the growth patterns of sunflower seeds, known as phyllotaxis, and its relation to the mathematical Fibonacci sequence; a sequence beginning with 0 and 1 where the following number is the sum of the preceding two numbers. Since the Fibonacci sequence explains the pattern in ratio terms rather than a finite number, it is possible to scale the pattern and find the same sequence in both Last's large structures.

Contemporary makers also engage with pattern as a means of transmitting information from one source to another. Pattern can act as a conduit to memories and surroundings. Like a familiar scent, pattern can evoke recollections of people and places. Peata Larkin employs the mnemonic device of Maori tukutuku patterns in Tuhourangi Rose (BLK Poutama Version 3) (2010), depicting a step pattern that alludes to her iwi's association with the famous Pink and White terraces. Referencing New Zealand flora, Tim Main utilises perhaps New Zealand's most recognizable flower for his Dilana rug design Pohutukawa II (2009). David Trubridge has also employed a flower form – reduced to a stylised, universal shape – to form the pattern in his Manuka Screen (2011).

The esoteric nature of most patterns limits the reach of any iconographical reading, and in a techno-savvy world, most information-dense pattern is now transmitted through digital, rather than interpersonal, means and deciphered with minimal

Andrew Last, 'Vast Terrain: Exploring uncommon ground', <u>Junctures</u>, 5, 2005, p.58. participation. Peata Larkin also alludes to this fact through the pixelated nature of her paint application in <u>Tuhourangi Rose</u> (<u>BLK Poutama Version 3</u>). A recent and prolific example of digital pattern is the Quick Response (QR) code, an advanced version of the barcode which can be read by smart phones and converted to a web link using barcode-reader application software. Briar Mark's <u>QR code</u> (2012), an embroidered QR code design on card, conveys the immediacy of information transfer via a QR code by drawing a distinction between this and the time-consuming, hand-crafted cross-stitch method employed in its making.

The multifarious aspects of pattern provides a means of exploring a variety of information transfer processes, from stimuli to order, order to mathematical sequence, and one source to another. The array of visual codes in pattern used by contemporary makers demonstrates that there is no one definitive way that pattern transmits information.

#### The enduring attraction of pattern

7.
Ernst Gombrich,
The sense of order:
a study in the
psychology of
decorative art,
Phaidon: London,
1984, p. vii.

Art historian Ernst Gombrich observed that the difficulty in approaching pattern lies in its very generality. Ubiquitous:

<u>Aspects of Contemporary Pattern</u> has similarly approached contemporary pattern from the position that it is boundless and defies definitive categorisation. The three themes offered, Pattern and Construction, Pattern and Identity, and Pattern and Knowledge, are not an exhaustive survey, but a series of observations based on the works of these contemporary practitioners.

Within the works considered, we can draw two general conclusions. First, pattern is enduring. This selection of works demonstrates an ongoing engagement with pattern and pattern making in the practice of these makers.

Second, pattern is inherently adaptable. Pattern is employed by contemporary New Zealand makers in various ways for different ends. These practitioners work with pattern across a wide range of media and scale, each with a different purpose, ranging from exploring pattern repeats to defining, reinforcing and critiquing positions of identity, and to transferring encoded information. Seen together, the works of these practitioners demonstrate the many uses of pattern and pattern making and its continuing attractiveness as a vehicle of expression for contemporary makers.

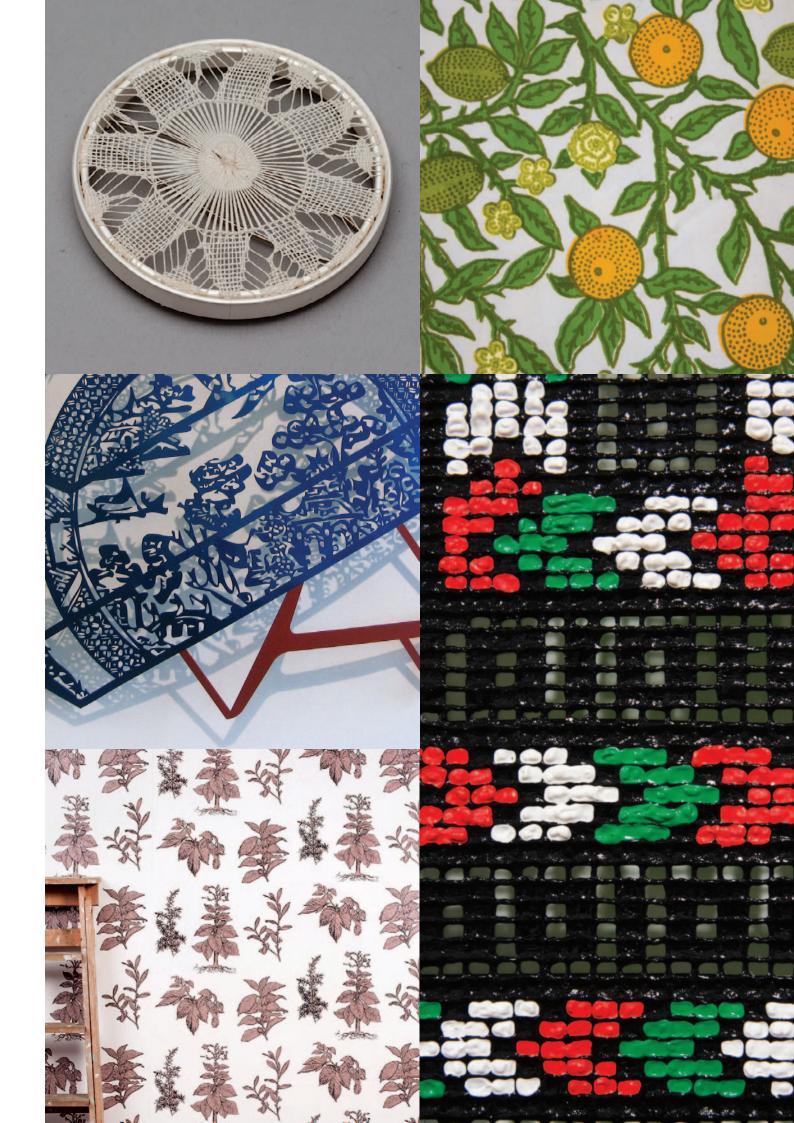
# How to decorate

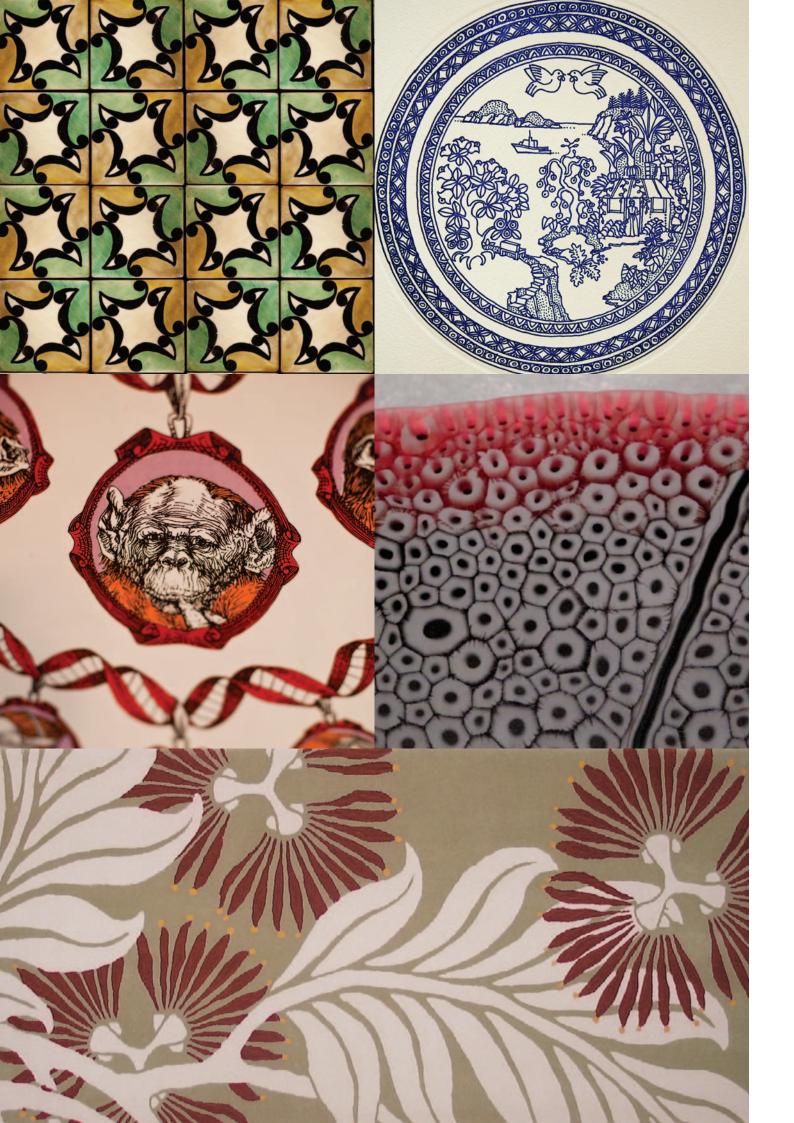
### **Anna Miles**

How to decorate a motorway is a contemporary kind of question. Unadorned brutalism, relieved by boxy retaining walls and native plants, is no longer a favoured option. And so Transit New Zealand finds itself in the business of ornamental design. Transit is not on its own in reviving a practice largely dormant for the last century. The contents of our homes, wardrobes, and underwear drawers—all the things of the designed world, excepting Air New Zealand's uniform—witness an appetite for pattern. Now the last bastion of utilitarianism and least likely contender for heritage preservation has been taken: the concrete lining of our commuter corridors.

The recent expansion of Auckland's central motorway comes with an ornamental system. En route to Newmarket, wric-wrac wriggles made of multiple Rangitotos race along concrete sides. Northwestern motorway wall panels carry allusions to eels. At Freemans Bay, where Southern races towards the bridge, an ungainly pohutukawa achieves the visual thwack of a potato print. Nature is the ornamental source par excellence, but does Transit New Zealand's promise of 'keeping with history, culture and landscape' have to be so predictable? What of motifs less age-old or touristic? Ornament based on mag wheels and bumpers? A homage to the Massey Ferguson tractor?

If we lived in a pre-motorway century, we might have been better equipped to rise to the challenge of embossing patterns in concrete. The Victorian creative industry didn't ask whether there should be ornament, but what kind there should be. Treatises and lifetimes were devoted to developing appropriate decoration. Chicago skyscraper pioneer, Louis Sullivan, who coined the maxim, 'form follows function', based an ornamental grammar on the exploding seedpod or cotyledon. In England, Augustus Pugin's advocation of flat emblematic pattern resulted in the startling Palace of Westminster wallpaper. The race was on to define reasonable ornamental principles.





According to design reformer Ralph Wornum's 'Ornamental Abominations' truth to materials is a decorative fundamental. A bell made of hard clanging metal should not be cast as soft velvety leaf. A vessel designed to hold water should not be impressed with leaky basket-weave pattern. We may no longer believe in the efficacy of catch-all design principles, but these ornamentalists were onto it. There are designers out there who work daily with these issues. Many would probably have regarded the motorway assignment as a dream job, but Transit failed to see beyond the most plodding solution.

Auckland jeweller Joanna Campbell specialises in embossing one material into another. Her rings, cuffs and bracelets carry textures of clothing - crosshatched silk or mysteriously cropped fragments of Chantilly lace on the verge of crumbling. The technique destroys the fabric while preserving its pattern. Campbell's approach is guided by the location of jewellery on the body. However for all their understatement, her jewels have a connection with the world of motorways and Brutalism. Their textural appeal is akin to that found in the traces of wooden boxing on concrete surfaces of Le Corbusier buildings. In addition Campbell's gold rings embossed with the crepe-like texture of Silky Oak shavings convey a pleasure in duplicitous surfaces that would make a Victorian design reformer shudder.

Another Auckland jeweller, Ilse-Marie Erl, has a different but equally deep appreciation of material. Her gems mix concrete and car headlight plastic with the diamonds, mother of pearl and silver of conventional jewellery. Her more magnificent jewels depend on the most minimal interventions. The only thing added to a bangle made of concrete core from Mt Eden prison is a silver edge. One side is polished pebbly concrete, the other is striped red by an 'X' originally sprayed to indicate where a hole in the wall should be bored.

The work of Erl and Campbell was included in <u>Growing Up</u>, a recent exhibition at Auckland's Objectspace, marking twenty years of the Jewellery programme at Unitec. The teacher behind this rare and impressive instance of New Zealand tertiary craft teaching is jeweller Pauline Bern. One of Bern's particular interests is in the fashioning of 'findings', those well-engineered details that attach jewellery to the body. An assignment she regularly set students is to observe findings on objects in the world of a scale far greater than jewellery. In 'Motorway Art as Cultural Communication', the fourteen pages of information supplied to me by Transit, no designer was named responsible forthe concrete panels. Perhaps Transit's recent and unexpected entrée into the world of ornamental design might have been enhanced by consultation with those known for work on another scale altogether – jewellers.

<u>How to decorate</u> was written in 2006 and is previously unpublished. Another version entitled <u>Ornamental as anything</u> was published by Metro magazine in 2007.

Anna Miles established Anna Miles Gallery in Auckland in 2003. She teaches part-time in the AUT School of Art and Design. Anna curated <u>Bespoke: The Pervasiveness of the Handmade</u> (2006) and <u>A Lace Life: The Alwynne Crowsen Collection</u> (2008) for Objectspace.



ADRIAN HAILWOOD
Willow
2010
digital print on silk
840×670mm
Courtesy of the artist
and Catherine
Hailwood Collection

ANDREW LAST
Phiball Light
2005
aluminium
1200mm diameter
Courtesy of the artist

ANDREW MCLEOD & DILANA
Kowhaiwhai
2009
dye injected 80/20
wool nylon 1400
grams per m²
4000×1800mm
Courtesy of Dilana

ASHLEY ALLEN &
STEPHANE RONDEL
Cladding design
for the Metro
Centre, Auckland
1998
high-grade
aluminium
500×500mm per unit
Image courtesy of
Walker Group
Architects, Auckland

BRIAR MARK

OR code

2012

350 gsm fabriano
watercolour paper
and embroidery
thread

360×420mm

Courtesy of the artist

DARREN GLASS
March 2010 –
2011 Hefty Roller
12:45 – 12:50 pm
2010-2011
contact print, gold
and selenium toned
418×1418mm
Courtesy of the artist
and Anna Miles
Gallery, Auckland

DAVID TRUBRIDGE
Manuka Screen
2011
bamboo plywood,
polycarbonate,
nylon clips
2450×1750mm
Courtesy of the artist
Photograph: David
Trubridge

GENEVIEVE PACKER
Souvenir:
Flock wallpaper
(black sheep)
2007
digital print on vinyl
3000×1300mm
Courtesy of the artist

Patikitiki I & II
2006
plastic computer
keys on board
1820×300×35mm
Courtesy of the artist
and the Bell/Park
Family Collection
Photograph: Mary
Newton Gallery

**GINA MATCHITT** 

JASMINE WATSON
Enamel bowls,
Subsequence series,
limited edition of 12
2012
sterling silver,
champlevé enamel
11×60×60mm
Courtesy of the artist
Photograph:
Studio La Gonda

Nanduti Lace brooch
2011
bleached sterling
silver, antique
Nanduti Lace,
stainless steel
5×60×60mm
Courtesy of the artist
and Anna Miles
Gallery, Auckland
Photograph:

Sam Hartnett

JOANNA CAMPBELL

LEANNE JOY LUPELELE CLAYTON Bitter and Sweet 2005 screen print on paper, acrylic paints 335×32×590mm Courtesy of the artist

NEIL DAWSON
Plate 6 (2008)
2008
painted steel
1050×1070×110mm
Courtesy of the artist
and Milford Galleries
Dunedin
Photograph:
Courtesy of Milford
Galleries Dunedin

PAPERHANDS
Vices; Juniper, Hops,
Cocaine, Tobacco
and Coffee
2012
water based ink on
paper
3600×535mm
Courtesy of the artist
Photograph:
Jet Productions

PEATA LARKIN
Karu Hapuku 101
(black)
2011
acrylic on mesh on
plexiglass, frame
512×512×60mm
Courtesy of the artist
and Milford Galleries
Dunedin

Photograph: Courtesy of Milford Galleries Dunedin

RICHARD FAHEY
Wallware
2004
ceramic tiles
160×160mm per tile
Courtesy of the artist
Photograph:
Sam Hartnett

DAME ROBIN WHITE
Braveheart
2011
ink on paper
405×305mm
Courtesy of the artist
and Peter McLeavey
Gallery, Wellington

SANDRA THOMSON
Disown
2010
textile ink on fabric
4050×1170mm
Courtesy of the artist
Photograph:
KM Photos

STEPHEN
BRADBOURNE
Black and Red
Cellular Leaf
2012
kiln-formed, hot and
cold worked glass
95×480×205mm
Courtesy of the artist

TIM MAIN & DILANA
Pohutukawa II
2009
3000×1000mm
hand tuft Dilana
workshop 100% wool
4500 grams per m²
Courtesy of Dilana

#### **Acknowledgements**

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