Using Digital Resources to Develop Responsible Design: ART-CHERIE Project

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Textile designers have the opportunity to select and use archival collections to develop contemporary designs. The Design Library in New York is an example of a such a company offering source material that professional designers or brands might choose to pay to make use of. Student designers need to be encouraged to exercise responsibility when exploring global cultures in the appropriate appreciation and use of historical textile resources. As in many universities, designers within the BA (Hons) Fashion Textiles course are introduced to the responsibilities of social design at the beginning of their course. Through such study students consider inclusivity and diversity, social responsibility and sustainability as fundamental to developing their designer identity. This alternative poster/ installation will introduce the Art Cherie project, (Achieving and Retrieving Creativity through European Fashion Cultural Heritage Inspiration), a pilot online course aimed at professional/ student designers, that draws on digital archives as a design resource. The resource applies a mixed method research approach based on a methodology outlined by Jules Prown (1982) and Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim (2015) explored through demonstrations, case study examples and self-directed activities. Trend forecasting is introduced within the resource as a process of looking at wider social, cultural, political and economic factors occurring internationally at any given time and how these are applied to areas of the fashion industry. Consideration of cultural context as part of the research process seeks to avoid a Eurocentric approach. The alternative poster/ installation will include textile samples and research source data to illustrate how such a resource might be used within the curriculum to develop deeper understanding of appreciating and sharing cultural responsibility and support the development of responsible designers.

Keywords: Design, digital, archive, embroidery, global, inclusivity

Introduction

Achieving and Retrieving Creativity through European Fashion Cultural Heritage Inspiration (ART-CHERIE) was a 30-month collaborative project, funded through ERASMUS+ with participating countries: Belgium, Greece, Italy, and the UK. This was a collaborative project with Professor Jose Teunissen as the University of the Arts London (UAL) lead with contributions from UAL and London College of Fashion (LCF) staff and the project’s European partners including Prato Museum of Textiles. Full details of contributors to the project is available from ART-CHERIE website (www.artcherie.eu).

The project proposal identified that the “Fashion industry is characterised by a high level of creativity and innovation and quick changes in trends. This industry is constantly reinventing itself, responding to consumer needs. Inspiration comes from culture, societal changes and from old designs and garments.”

A member of the project, Meletis Karabinis, General Director of the Hellenic Clothing Industry Association identified of the project that:
“ICT-based vocational and educational training tools on fashion cultural heritage are still missing. The European fashion industry needs inspiration and learning from a glorious past in order to add value to its products and boost its competitiveness internationally. ART-CHERIE will improve and extend the provision of high-quality learning opportunities tailored to the needs of fashion designers. This project, [ART-CHERIE], enables us to better anticipate current and future skills needed in the textile, clothing and fashion sector.”

ART-CHERIE Project: background

“The purpose of the online ART-CHERIE course was to offer EU designers and students in fashion schools, the chance to participate in an innovative fashion design training scheme. The aim is to improve the competitive advantage of the fashion sector by encouraging a new contemporary reinterpretation of the fashion cultural heritage, which in turns supports innovation and research into product design and hones the skills, know-how and creative inspiration of the designers of tomorrow.”

In 2017, Professor Jose Teunissen attended the Fashion Digital Memories EUROPEANA Fashion symposium where she delivered a paper on the ART-CHERIE project and talked about the new challenges fashion designers have to face at a time where there is an abundance of images on the internet and a variety of consumers’ data captured.

The main objective of the project was how best to make use of digital archive sources for inspiring creative innovative fashion and textile design. This submission focuses on examples from the project and how, although being European focused and industry based, responsible design is fostered through the opportunity of using non-Eurocentric exemplars and potential linking to supporting curriculum units.

Considerations were that the identified audience was varied and that the course was aimed primarily at training for industry professionals, who may or may not have studied at a Higher-Level Institution (HEI). However, the project was also intended for potential implementation as an innovative blended learning tool for HEI fashion students in the final stages of their study. In terms of subject knowledge the resource was to include beginners as well as the more experienced designer and also non-subject specialists; for example a fashion designer might work through the unit Fashion Embroidery to learn about possible embellishment processes to then outsource designs, or alternatively, an experienced embroidery designer may simply wish to refresh their approach.

Student projects using museum-based and archive resources are described in existing literature (Britt & Stephen-Cran, 2014). Pierce (2017) notes that

“Examples of new artefacts produced by art and design practitioners working from archives exist, but minimal insight is provided into the rationale behind item selection or utilisation of this type of source material in the creative process.”
Pierce’s research practice focuses on the use of textile archives. In her paper *The Fabric of the City, Archive textiles inspire a collaborative project in contemporary design and innovation*, Pierce identifies the theme of “reinterpretation rather than appropriation” as being key. viii

The underlying objective therefore for the collaborating team was to provide research materials and to introduce and demonstrate research approaches using these resources for a variety of users; encouraging through exemplars interpretation rather than appropriation whilst fostering the development of responsible design practice.

**ART-CHERIE Project Methodology**

The UAL-LCF project team discussed a range of research methods and identified Visual Research, Contextual Research and Object Analysis as most relevant to the design disciplines for the course to focus on. These three different approaches are explained in the first unit by an introductory lecture followed by a set of workshops that include a combination of taught material and self-learning activities.

The first unit, Unit 1, explores the research process in design, incorporating context (social, historical, theoretical processes) and focuses on womenswear. Further proposed units would focus on colour, pattern, fashion print, menswear (with a focus on deepening and applying the exploration of object analysis incorporating social, historical and theoretical contexts) and fashion knitwear with consolidation of the learning from the course to produce a creative portfolio.

Two units, Womenswear and Fashion Embroidery were selected to embrace the specific strength of both London College of Fashion, for contents related to education and industrial experience, as well as the Prato museum archive for its impressive garment and textile collection. Prato Textile Museum provided advice on the selection of appropriate items and in-depth contextual information on the garments and textiles used from their collection.ix

**Unit 1: Womenswear overview:**

Three examples of women’s fashion items were selected that would offer a breadth of scope for exploring the selected research methods. The research approaches, Visual research, Contextual Research and Object Analysis, based on a methodology outlined by Jules Prown (1982) and Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim (2015), are introduced in depth in *Unit 1: Womenswear*, and revisited throughout the course. Research approaches are explored through demonstrations, case study examples and self-directed activities. This unit also includes an example of applying research and analysis from one of the garments studied towards the design of contemporary womenswear xii.

**Unit 5 Fashion Embroidery overview:**

In close discussion with Prato Museum collection, objects were selected that would offer scope to explore both the research approaches and a range of embroidery techniques to provide inspiration. The objects were selected for their particular style of detail being colour, pattern, or surface texture. The techniques: stitch; beading; appliqué; cutwork and quilting were selected as most appropriate to textiles and fashion for inclusion within the project’s timeframe limitations plus the related technique of laser cutting.xiii

In addition, objects were deliberately selected to add diversity by drawing significantly on both western and non-western sources from the Prato Textile museum
collection rather than textiles of perceived European origin or manufacture. Samples are selected from global locations to avoid eurocentricity: India, Proto-Nazca Culture, Peru, 200-100BC and 1200-1476AD; the Sephar Jewish Community, Morocco (Azemmour), ca.17th century; the Kuba Culture, Congo, Central Africa, 20th century; and Prato and Como (20 Century), Italy. The selected museum pieces are not all embroidered and, as such, also demonstrate how diverse objects within the museum can be used to inspire contemporary fashion embroidery. Emphasis was also placed on the global context for pattern development.

The Trends section (LCF) and contextual information texts (Prato Textile Museum) allow further opportunities for the encouragement of responsible design through these research approaches.

Fashion and textile designers find inspiration from a range of sources, amongst which, influences from historical costume and textiles are often identifiable. For example, the work of iconic designer Vivienne Westwood has regularly referenced historical dress, informed by a focused study of the structure of historical costume in museum archives (Wilcox, 2004).

“By referencing historical dress, designers do not simply copy the designs; instead they learn about the garment and the context in which it was created, extracting elements which form the inspiration for contemporary interpretation.”(Gaimster, 2011)

Textile designers may make use of archive sources as inspiration for contemporary textiles in different ways. These different approaches in using archives for textile design vary from a commercial approach, where professional designers or brands may pay fees to use archives as a reference for reproducing historical collections, applying some change such as recolouring to current trend predictions, to designers using the archive for a more in-depth investigation as inspiration with a more creative focus or intent. The Design Library, New York, is an example of a company offering source material which professional designers or brands might choose to pay to make use of (Koepke, 2018).

Cultural significance: linking to the curriculum
Students are introduced to consideration of the cultural significance of research through a variety of units and opportunities at LCF. The Textiles Research checklist within Unit 5, Fashion Embroidery, based on Prown (1982), Mida & Kim (2015), focuses on direct observation to support recording through drawing to initiate design development. Library inductions at LCF however use the more in depth Institute of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (ILTlTHE) How to read an object exercise sheet (2018) within their student inductions in Stage 1 to explore and encourage responsible use of research sources by student designers.

The following extract is from the ILTlTHE document for student reading of an object:

You are about to do an activity that will assist you in reading an object. The questions are based on a methodology outlined by Jules Prown (1982) and Ingrid Mida and Alexandra Kim (2015). Prown (1982) believed that objects were the raw data for the study of material culture and suggested approaching the object in three stages – description, deduction and hypothesis. Mida and Kim (2015) took this further by applying Prown’s ideas to fashion garments.
If this ART-CHERIE unit is used within the curricula further considerations/discussions could be added within lessons as suggested by Prown (1982), Mida & Kim (2015) to include: personal reactions to purpose and function, context and history, cultural significance and spiritual and artistic significance, to question if the object conforms to dominant ideas of taste and cultural value and/or if these ideas are Eurocentric. Such observations would allow for the development of consideration of fashion contexts such as gender expression, heteronormativity, or engagement with inclusivity or exclusion.

This approach to research is reinforced at LCF through Cultural and Historical Studies units underpinning undergraduate courses: Introduction to Cultural and Historical Studies, Stage 1, Cultural Studies Options, Stage 2, and Contextualising your practice, Stage 3. The unit Better Lives, Stage 1, additionally engages students with consideration of diversity, sustainability and social engagement.

Responsible design: diversity and inclusivity, sustainability and environment

The Introduction to Trend Forecasting section, written by Jenny Leikes, previously Assistant Academic Support Librarian LCF, further develops consideration of sustainability and cultural significance. The unit’s Introduction defines the difference between trends and trend forecasting with activities to identify initial research areas in embellishment and textiles design looking at trend research stages of environment, market and product. Opportunity is taken within the introductory lessons with the activity Creating a Mind Map, to provide an Ethnic-African textiles example and image.

The Environment trends section that follows considers how socio-economic, cultural and political trends impact design, in terms of short-term trends (triggers) and long term trends (shifts). Activities focus on identifying 1 global trend that will be big in two years-time and the related trigger and shift that have made this trend emerge.

Social responsibility is introduced as an example of an environment trend with the trigger of increased power and influence of global companies and the shift of ethical implications of new technologies.

Product design development is considered through focus on Color, Design and Materials as parts of the Product Development process. Materials trends deconstructs what materials forecasting is and the impact on design practice, introducing information resources to find a selection of materials that best represents the designer’s environment trend and target consumer.

Information resources (i.e. journals and magazines, trend forecasts, websites, trade shows), designed to be an entry point into the topic areas are discussed, whilst designers are expected to find their own information resources that meet their information needs. Within reference examples presented are journals and websites that encourage consideration of the use of sustainable materials, for example the journals Ecotextile News and loTex. Activities encourage responsible design through the task of exploring these or their own resources to find 1 new or innovative material and 1 sustainable material that their target audience will like.

Color trends are situated and influenced by the same macro and micro sociocultural, economic, political, environmental and technological influences affecting society as a whole.

Resources such as Pantone View Color Planner as well as websites such as Intercolor and Color Hive are introduced. Activities for the Color Trends lesson ask the designer to use the resources discussed to select 3 colours that best
represent the designer’s environment trend and chosen consumer, and to create a title for the palette and a sentence descriptor.

The example color palette xxvi presented is based on an environment trend social responsibility, discussed earlier within the ART-CHERIE trends section, continuing the responsible design focus.

![Color Palette](image)

**Figure 1. Name:** Wild Frontiers
**Description:** ‘Wild frontiers’ energises and inspires connected communities to push their creative boundaries to the limit

Further opportunities to respect cultural significance and support inclusivity and diversity were presented through the contextual information provided by Prato Textile museum. Some examples of this consideration of the global nature of textile design are discussed below. Prato Textile Museum provided critical and historical essays on selected topics as part of contextual background information to the unit. Within the essay ‘Stylised Florals, Notes on Floral Textile Patterns. Nature on Display’, Sara Paci Piccolo discusses “the representation of Nature, flowers, trees, leaves and fruits, [as] of the utmost antiquity, being already present in ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Chinese art” and references “The art of embroidery [as] one of the oldest performed all over the earth... developed also in conjunction with geographical, social and technical knowledge.” xxvii

Piccolo references current environmental concerns when discussing that “Nature, and all its expressions, was seen as a reassuring constant in any period, especially during times of social, political and psychological tensions. It might not be[en] casual that today we are so much concerned about the effect of global warming and pollution: Nature is still strongly present in our deep imaginary as a personification of our own survivance on Earthxxviii, and our reciprocal bonds are becoming more and more evident as times pass by.” xxix

The essay emphasizes the archetypal nature of motifs of flowers, fruits and vegetation and their omnipresence across different cultures where “Every culture, from different places and different eras, developed their peculiar use of flower ornament, in connection with the evolution of artistic styles and technologies.” xxx
Piccolo uses the sample of beetle wing embroidery produced in India for the English market as an opportunity to reference growing contemporary ethical concerns in fashion. “Luxury can be expressed through the application of golden threads or egalitarian materials – like the beetle wings – but also by a careful planning of which materials to use in fashion, which is nowadays one of our rising concern[s].”

In ‘Critical and Historical Notes on Geometric Textile Pattern. Symbolic Geometry’, Piccolo notes that we may use geometric pattern to represent the world referencing similar concepts in different cultures. She cites Dhamija Jasleen (2014), in Global Textile Encounters, who considers textiles as an expressive non-verbal language playing a fundamental role in rituals in many cultures, from India to West Africa.xxxi

Figure 2: Teaching aid regarding sample tests Prato, 1928. Image Prato Textile museum

Figure 3. Shoowa (panel; Kasai velvet), woven raffia with velvet effect embroidery, Kuba Culture, Congo, Central Africa, 20th century. Prato Textile museum image and caption.

Students from the Technical Textile Institute in Prato were required to learn the theory of plain weave, and then to analyze and reproduce by drawing the textile scheme of different types of fabric samples, this one relating to Art Deco style
between 1920s and 1930s. Piccolo identifies that the motif, although apparently very modern for its highly dynamic tensions emphasized by the use of dramatic and contraposed colors - yellow, dark blue and red - is actually referring to an ancient dynamic pattern, called Triskele, which we may find in the Mediterranean area since Classic Greece time. The Triskele, of probable Indo-Arian origins, is thought to be connected with the Sun or the Moon symbolism, and spread from Asia Minor to Greece, to Italy (Sicily), to the Celtic area (Isle of Man), leaving many tracks of itself on monuments, and later transferring even into heraldic symbolism.xxxii

This panel is obtained by a mixed technique of weaving and embroidering raffia threads. The warps and wefts of the fabric are interwoven with other raffia fibers, which are later cut to obtain a ‘hairy’ effect, like in velvet.

Piccolo’s information again here continues to emphasize the inter-related global nature of textile design origins:
“The motif, highly geometric, is here imitating a ‘never-ending’ knot, a very ancient and well-known ornamental pattern which we may find in many traditionsxxxiii, usually expressing the mystic relationship between humans and gods.” xxxiv

**Conclusion**

The unit includes consideration of the designer’s process. Selecting objects from varied global locations by itself encourages inclusivity and diversity. The unit’s supporting text, identifies attributes within the selected object that are valued by the designer and have informed their design development, further focusing awareness towards respecting different cultural textile traditions whilst demonstrating reinterpretation not approbation. Below is the summary for one of the designer’s lessons on cutwork design from the unit:

Summary: this sample uses these influences from a mixed method research approach:

- The design remains geometric although not an exact copy of the original.
- The irregularity of hand worked woven process.
- The appearance of cutwork is used to suggest technique development.
- The velvet effect of the African textile is referenced through the use of dense Cornely moss stitch (looped stitch).
- The emphasis on materials in the sample is related to artists with a materials focus to their practice.

![Figure 4: Andy Kenny, London Embroidery Studio, 2018.](image)

*Cutwork, appliqué and devoré sample detail.*

The resulting sample illustrates the application of a mixed methods research approach using an African textile object as research source, producing a richly layered and
textured, contemporary fashion embroidery design reflecting the richness of the original piece.

This text supporting the alternative poster/installation of textile images and research sources from the ART-CHERIE project references how opportunities may be introduced into training/learning resources to foster responsible design. This through not only developing awareness of sustainability and sustainable materials, but also appreciation of cultural responsibility, the responsible use of the archive, to encourage 'reinterpretation not approbation' and how such a resource might be used within the curriculum towards the development of responsible designers.

Further examples of applying such research approaches can be seen within the ART-CHERIE online resource as well as the essays, supporting texts and case studies. Image credits, references and bibliography can be accessed for each lesson and unit from within the online resource.

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www.artcherie.eu (accessed 4/11/19)
ibid.
ibid.
ibid.
ibid.


[iv] Visual research involving extracting observed details from a textile or object in response to colour, texture, pattern or materials and demonstrating how these might become potential design influences. **Contextual research** exploring the wider influences relating to the object-related historical, social and industrial details that could become further design influences. **Object analysis** is the physical study of an object through observation and handling. Within this context object analysis is introduced as a potential research approach to understand for example how studying the reverse of samples may inform design influences.


Definition Eurocentric ‘Focusing on European culture or history to the exclusion of a wider view of the world; implicitly regarding European culture as pre-eminent’. https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/eurocentric (accessed 4/11/19)


Leikes, J. www.artcherie.eu (accessed 4/11/19)

ibid.

ibid.

https://www.pantone.com/

https://www.intercolor.nu/

https://colourhive.com


Piccolo, S.P. (2018).www.artcherie.eu (accessed 4/11/19). See, f.e., the 2016 movie “Moana” where Vaiana, the young protagonist, has to work hard to set peace again between a raged and inflamed Nature (*Te Ka/Te Fiti*) and Mankind. Only when the “heart” is returned, Nature returns to her loving and caring nature, and – needless to say – the world is save.


Ibid.


Clay seals with a similar pattern are known since the Çatal Hüyük II-IV Culture, Central Anatolia, second half of the VIIth millennium B.C., cfr. Marjia Gimbutas, *Mother Earth.*


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