

Patterns in Art

Pattern: The repetition of an element or elements in a work through the use of color, line and form.

“Art is the imposing of a pattern on experience, and our aesthetic enjoyment is recognition of the pattern.”

-- Alfred North Whitehead

English Mathematician & Philosopher



Kente Cloth from Ghana, Africa



Swedish Folk Art Pattern

Pattern has been an important element of design throughout art history all over the world.

Rhythm, regularity and movement are all implied by pattern. Pattern can be used as the underlying structure of a composition, or it can be used as a detail in decorative embellishment.

Pattern can be used to represent or enhance texture.

Any element can be repeated to create a pattern. Artists often use a motif, which is a symbol or theme, in their work to make a pattern. Patterns can be based on shapes that are geometric or organic in origin.



Roman Geometric Mosaic

Islamic art has a strong tradition of pattern dating back to the 7th century A.D. Pattern was popular because many Muslims believe that depiction of the human image is a form of idolatry that is expressly forbidden in the Qur'an. Known for geometric floral designs, Islamic artists often employed the arabesque.



Arabesque Pattern at the Alhambra Palace in Spain

Arabesque: A decoration based on rhythmic linear patterns of scrolling and interlacing elements. The Arabesque often consists of a single design that can be tiled over a larger area. The Arabesque symbolizes the transcendent, infinite nature of God.



Tile Mosaic at the Alhambra Palace in Spain



15th Century Islamic Shrine in Iran



18th Century Inn in Damascus, Syria

Aubrey Beardsley:

An English author and illustrator that lived from 1872-1898.

Beardsley was part of the Art Nouveau Movement and used pattern in his high contrast graphic designs.



William Morris: An English artist that lived from 1834-1896. Morris was an important figure in the Arts & Crafts Movement, employing pattern in his work on wallpaper and textiles.



M. C. Escher: A Dutch artist that lived from 1898-1972. Escher explored mathematical themes in his work, and was influenced by Moorish architecture and design while visiting Spain. At the Alhambra Palace, Escher discovered elaborate tiles in tessellated patterns. He explored the boundaries of this technique in his art. To Escher, circle tessellations represented infinity on a two dimensional surface.



Tessellation:

The tiling of a plane using one or more geometric shapes, with no overlap and no gaps. "Tessera" is Latin for "small stone cube," and mosaics were referred to as "tessellate." There are 17 variations of tessellation, based on 4 forms of symmetry on a plane: translation, reflection, rotation and glide reflection.

a shape is slid across the space and drawn again in another place with the original alignment preserved.

Reflection: A shape flipped on the x or y axis or at an angle.

Rotation: The spinning of the pattern around a fixed point. A rotation always has a center and an angle of rotation.

Translation: Where



Glide Reflection: Reflection & translation used together with no rotation.

