



Imagining the Orient: *Cultural Appropriation in the Florence Broadhurst Collection*

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This paper is a case study of Australian wallpaper designer, Florence Broadhurst, and The Broadhurst Collection and examines the motifs and printing techniques applied in the design process. By drawing on primary data in the form of interviews, as well as interrogating selected work from scholars from the fields of cultural criticism, anthropology, postcolonialism and design theory, this paper will discursively interpret the ways in which Florence Broadhurst consumed and rearticulated dominant signs - from Western discourses of art to decorative design and Orientalism. By considering the diverse interplay between the complex processes of 'appropriation' and production, this paper also raises the important issues of cross-cultural experience, cultural awareness, and social responsibility in the ways that designers address the politics and ideologies that inform their design processes and practices.

Keywords – Australian Design, Appropriation, Motifs, Orientalism, Wallpaper.

Relevance to Design Practice – Raises ethical issues and highlights social responsibility in relation to the appropriation of motifs and symbols from other cultures into a designer's own ideology and practice.

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Introduction

In 1959, Sydney-based entrepreneur Florence Broadhurst, who also went by the name 'Madame Pellier' and who at one time in her career declared herself of English origin, emerged on the Australian design scene with a collection of Japanese-inspired wallpaper prints after living and travelling extensively throughout Europe and Asia. The prints, which led to the subsequent creation of over five hundred signature designs, caused a sensation with a post-war Australian public that had previously purchased wallpaper largely from overseas catalogues and who had little choice in wallpaper variety. With a large dose of charm and determination, evident from the testimonials of the young designers and screen printers who worked for her, Broadhurst managed to momentarily dominate the design scene from her studio in the trendy suburb of Paddington, using her abilities as a businesswoman, trend spotter, and 'accidental' designer. Between 1961 and 1977, Broadhurst released a kaleidoscope of imagery into an isolated continent hungry for stimulation. "Everywhere she had been," states Helen O'Neill (2006) in Broadhurst's biography *Florence Broadhurst: Her Secret and Extraordinary Lives*, "everything she had seen [in her travels] would come to find a reflection in her sensual, funky, impulsive design range" (p. 69). Amongst the original motifs created were eclectic Art Nouveau and Art Deco swirls, abstract weaves and traditional tapestry designs printed on both wallpaper and interior fabrics. Broadhurst was always generous with her samples, which the American catalogues could not provide, and business boomed. In Gillian Armstrong's (2006) documentary-styled film on Florence Broadhurst, the designer was declared as being hard of seeing, which becomes the reason for some of her bold creations and colour plans – an amusing fact that only enhances and makes more intriguing the life of a woman

who seemed to irritate and alarm people and also invoke much affection in others.

Apart from the Armstrong film, the biography by O'Neill (2006), and another unauthorized biography by O'Brien (2004), not much has been written about Florence Broadhurst. Indeed, the fact that she reinvented herself so many times throughout her life gave her cause to avoid interviews and questions, and she seemed to have relied on an implied existence - that of a Sydney socialite who moved quickly from one life to another. It was rare that anyone knew she was not from France, that she could not speak French, that she was actually born and raised in the decidedly unglamorous Mount Perry in Northern Queensland, Australia, or that she was married to a trucking baron. Even as they investigated her murder¹, Sydney police were provided with at least ten suspects, including Broadhurst's own son, but found no evidence and no one to really shed light on the woman. It is only largely through interviews with people who knew facets of her that much is gleaned about the private life of the woman herself and her intentions for her business and design. It is the film, the interviews, and other sources, as well as a view of her designs from a cultural theoretical and design perspective, that

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this paper interrogates the work of the artist and the modern-day implications it brings.

In the 1990s, the owner of the printing company *Signature Prints*, David Lennie, salvaged the Broadhurst prints under copyright and facilitated a revival of Broadhurst's designs in Sydney's interiors and fashion scene. Such a revival, the use of her designs in most nightclubs and restaurants in Sydney and the feature of her prints in fashion design collections of Australian designers, including Collette Dinnigan, Timothy O'Connor, and Akira Isogawa, has prompted much speculation into the methods she originally adopted in her artistic process.

Nevertheless, her specific designs, those that are Japanese and Oriental inspired, are particularly fascinating, because they epitomize her life as a 'borrowed identity,' and, like the mystery surrounding her murder, raise issues of her intentions to and not to appropriate and illustrate the wider issue faced by most designers today concerning 'design authenticity.' If one examines certain cultural debates about design and cultural appropriation, one is faced with certain options: to support the concept that appropriation belongs to a series of mechanisms that include the assimilation and incorporation of *Other* materials or 'signs' into one's own culture; that appropriation enlarges, reinforces, and 'exoticizes;' or that appropriation should not be considered at all, as much as a designer's intentions should not be considered as part of the design production or process; and subsequently to acknowledge that the *raison d'être* of the designer is largely that of 'aesthetics.'

In response to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), John MacKenzie (1995), author of *Orientalism, History, Theory and the Arts*, argues that the Orient has too easily been seen as a negative, exotic one-dimensional *Other* for the West and serves to underline stereotypes and binary oppositions. In terms of art and design, MacKenzie (1995) seeks to reposition Orientalism as "but one of a whole sequence of perceived or invented traditions invoked by the restless arts" (p. 210). MacKenzie (1995) further stresses that design is a field where East-West relations have more often been based on admiration than subjugation and found the western attitude in the field of decorative arts and design even more affirmative than in the areas of culture (pp. 105-138). MacKenzie's claims appear valid in that Said's view of power is monolithic and intentional. However, MacKenzie's defense of Orientalism as a largely benign cultural practice within the field of design raises problems. The danger of taking up this position, which seems at most romantic and at the very least reductive, is that it posits the artist and/or designer outside culture and history,

which is to challenge the very purposeful existence of an artist or designer as a respondent to her or his cultural environment. Not least in the case of Florence Broadhurst, who was unarguably a respondent to the needs of Sydney's design culture, but at the same time used Orientalist techniques to create the designs and art to supply such an environment.

By drawing on primary data in the form of interviews, as well as interrogating selected works of Susan Stewart (1993), James Clifford (1993), and Edward Said (1978), amongst other scholars from the fields of cultural criticism, anthropology, postcolonialism, and design theory, this paper will discursively interpret the ways in which Florence Broadhurst consumed and rearticulated dominant signs, from Western discourses of art to decorative design and Orientalism. By considering the diverse interplay between the complex processes of the 'appropriation' and production of Broadhurst's designs, the aim of this paper is to raise issues of cross-cultural experience and raise questions surrounding the ambivalent nature of art and design.

Behind the Scenes

Until the mid-nineteenth century, wallpaper was predominantly imported into Australia from Britain, Canada, America, and France, with a few manufacturing companies, such as Morrison's and Gilkes & Co., producing quality wallpaper within Australia itself (see MacKenzie, 1995; McNeil, 1993; Turner & Hoskins, 1988). According to Helen O'Neill (2006), Broadhurst sought to inject the vibrant zaniness of the sixties into the veins of the Australian society. "There were other wallpaper-makers about, but none had her attitude or her energy. She worked as if she was on a mission, to destroy the drab and revolutionise the nation's palate" (p. 93). Broadhurst built a design studio that did just that – designing a proliferation of patterns with 'exotic' titles including *Kabuki*, *Oriental Filigree*, *Japanese Fans*, *Japanese Floral*, *Japanese Bamboo*, *Persian Birds*, and *Birds of Paradise*. Anne-Marie Van de Ven, Senior Curator of Decorative Arts and Design from the Sydney Powerhouse Museum² (as cited in O'Brien, 2004), claims that Broadhurst was differentiated from her contemporaries by the uniqueness of her work, "Australian [Hand Printed] Wallpaper was unashamedly global in both its sources of inspiration and its marketing force" (p. 146). Broadhurst's globetrotting thus enabled her to gain the appearance of authenticity in Sydney's local design scene and combined with her 'marketing force' in helping her create her wallpaper empire.

Born in Mount Perry, Queensland, in 1899, Broadhurst is known to have had the desire to escape what she believed was a mundane life in a small town in the Australian bush for a more glamorous and adventurous life abroad. Joining a colourful troupe of cross-dressing male performers called the *Smart Set Diggers* in 1922, 'Bobby' Broadhurst, as she called herself, set sail for Shanghai where she would eventually open the *Broadhurst Performing Arts Academy* and remain until Chinese Nationalist armies took control of the city in 1927.³ After returning to Australia for only a brief period of time, she booked a ticket on *The Orvioto* and set sail for a six-week voyage to England that included stops at Ceylon, Port Said, Naples, and Gibraltar.

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The twenties was a decade of visual change in Britain. There was a shift in style across the arts and modernist movements with its conflicting aesthetics across fashion, graphics, and architecture. Modernity itself was characterized by a blend of two stylistic influences, exotic materials and voluptuous interiors with influences emanating from France's *L'Art Déco* elite and the functional geometry of *Zigzag Moderne* that arose from art movements, such as French Cubism, Dutch de Stijl, Russian Constructivism, Italian Futurism, and German Bauhaus. But at the same time, the sinuous lines, sharp contrasts, and handling of space in Japanese prints became the formative influence of twentieth-century graphics.⁴ From the turn of the century, images of Japan and other aspects of the 'Orient' circulated through popular culture, such as via postcards that were sold at exhibitions and other outlets. Some of these were printed in Europe for the British market. This influence of Japonisme would later find a place in Broadhurst's wallpaper designs.

Arriving in London in 1928, Broadhurst set about establishing a new life for herself as 'Madame Pellier.' Gone was 'Bobby' the performer. Instead, Broadhurst presented herself as a sophisticated couturier who presided over a society salon on Bond Street, Mayfair. She married Percy Khan, who was rumoured to be a prince and stockbroker with connections to English royalty. The marriage did not last long, however, and in 1935, Broadhurst met and married financier and diesel engineer, Leonard Lloyd-Lewis. In 1939, she gave birth to her only child, Robert, before returning to Australia in 1949 to reinvent herself as an artist and wife of a trucking baron.

Despite her numerous transitions, Florence Broadhurst appeared to have been determined to succeed in business, especially the business of design. With entrepreneurial vision and marketing acumen, she established and maintained a loyal and influential client database, including Estée Lauder Cosmetics, Qantas Airlines, and celebrity locals like Australian model and *Women's Weekly* magazine identity, Maggie Tabberer, and comedienne Jeannie Little and her husband, interior designer Barry Little. With a pioneering attitude toward branding, whereby young designers were supervised to produce her designs and with a technology-driven approach to production, she deliberately priced her papers to compete with machine-made imports. Her personalized service, along with her flamboyant personality, ensured the continual demand and success of Broadhurst's wallpapers in Australia and abroad.

Meaningful Presence

There are three major features that make *The Florence Broadhurst Collection* unique: the sheer range of the collection, the large yet intricate hand-rendering, hatching, and detail within the designs themselves, and the fact that the prints lacked registration, which is typical of machine-made printing. It was first estimated that *The Broadhurst Collection* was made up of 120 designs, but after documenting and cataloguing, *Signature Prints* discovered close to 530 original designs of textile and artwork created in the sixties and seventies. To date, only thirty designs from *The Broadhurst Collection* have been released to the public (Gough Henly 2003, pp. 25-27).

On closer inspection, one notices uniqueness in the design element of the prints and sees that the majority of the designs incorporates a textured background that appears to change the dimension of the design itself. Lennie (as cited in Clifton-Cunningham and Karaminas, 2004a) describes the process as a 'layering of textures,' whereby fifteen textures were frequently used in the printing process from 90% background coverage to 10 or 20% or a combination of these, and then a more solid design printed over the top. Lennie points out:

If you think clever [sic] with your colors, you can stand back and you have [a new] dimension. Now, no painted wall can do that. The textual effects, including large areas of hand drawn hatching [within the artwork], softens the artwork and allows the base color to infiltrate areas of the design, which then allows each area to merge with the other, thereby adding dimension (p. 15).

The majority of *The Broadhurst Collection* comprises hand-rendered designs, which capture individuality. According to Lennie (as cited in Clifton-Cunningham and Karaminas, 2004a), "[It is] the hand drawn line [that] contains a soul" (p.15). The value of this was made certain when *Signature Prints* began to digitize a selection of the original Broadhurst designs but stopped due to a problem within its art and design software program, which straightened the lines within the design. This gave the design a "clinical feel" rather than one that contained "spiritual and emotional qualities" (Lennie, as cited in Clifton-Cunningham and Karaminas, 2004a). *Signature Prints* has since reverted to hand-rendering techniques once again, which is an important aspect of the collection. Now, despite small-scale mass production, the designs retain texture, depth, and a sense of individuality. This enables the design to indicate the aesthetic origin and cultural influence of the period.

Another feature of the collection was the mis-registration of the individual colour separations within the design or what Lennie (as cited in Clifton-Cunningham and Karaminas, 2004a) refers to as 'fucked-up registration.' This has become a trademark of *The Florence Broadhurst Collection* and is considered an idiosyncratic design feature that allows the textile prints to communicate depth. There is no doubt that the facilities Broadhurst originally utilized in her screen-printing factory made the designs 'mis-register' and that Broadhurst herself was not opposed to its presence. "Broadhurst's registration was a nightmare," says Peter Leis, who was employed by Broadhurst as a printer. Designs, such as *Birds of Paradise* and *Chelsea*, required several colours to be used. Each silk screen held a different colour, so each screen had to register precisely with the others; otherwise, the pattern was meaningless (O'Neill, 2006, p. 82).

Florence Broadhurst was particularly proud of her choice of colours. She established very early on, in the conception of her business, the need to introduce the Australian post-war consumers to vibrant colours. She believed the Australian taste to be conservative and found it difficult to persuade Australians to be more adventurous with colour and harmony⁵, as well as trying the effects of three dimensions: colour vibration, metal papers, and gloss foils (Broadhurst, as cited in *Signature Prints*, 2002b, p. 2). The designs that featured within the collection were

generally available in a broad selection of colourways, with the original colour palette linking to the subject of the design. As the colourways for the design expanded, they often contained muted hues, which reflected the trend of the time.

Broadhurst directed a team of designers (although in a Cinesound newsreel recorded for Channel Nine, she claimed that she did all the design work herself) and also employed young graduate designers from art schools in Sydney. How much of the designer's 'own' inspiration and interpretation was included in the design process? Certainly, as most designers oversee the finished art of their original concepts by hired staff, it appears that Broadhurst did not follow this principle of art-directed designing. When Peter Leis was employed for Broadhurst, he claims he saw her giving her artists large sample books of other people's designs and telling them to copy them. In some cases, claims O'Neill (2006), Broadhurst certainly did create copies. An extreme example, she says, is Florence Broadhurst's *William Morris*, "a beautiful, naturalistic, flowing stream of flowers, stems and leaves which is an obvious and direct imitation of the 1890 William Morris design *Pink and Rose*" (p. 111). Yet it is believed that Broadhurst would only direct her designers to copy a specific image if a client asked for it. "If someone else had a design that might fit, we would do it, we would copy it," says Australian designer Sally Fitzpatrick (as cited in O'Brien, 2004), who worked for Broadhurst before entering into the design field as an independent fashion designer, "But it was never exact" (p. 111).

One could well argue that the copied designs, even though directed by Broadhurst herself, were very much a reflection of her own personality - that of being loud, brassy, and confident. Even so, within the vast collection of Broadhurst designs, there are many different styles of handwriting, and the actual initials of the designer or artist who finished the work are often detected. The signature of John Lang for instance, Broadhurst's original artist who created her earliest designs, remains visible in at least one image. "Peer carefully between the delicate, whispery, curving fronds of *Small Fern*, advises O'Neill (2006), and you can find eight tiny letters that probably should not be there. They carefully, cheekily, spell out the name "John Lang" (p. 83).

In 1959, Broadhurst and Leonard Lloyd-Lewis launched L Lewis and Son, a truck yard and courier business in the northern Sydney suburb of St Leonards. At the rear of the premises were a number of sheds, which were rented to small businesses, and one of these was rented by textile and wrapping-paper designer, John Lang. Lang claims that Broadhurst's idea for printing wallpaper came from him. "She said that it was a commodity that could be marketed in a very social way" (O'Neill, 2006, p. 41). According to Helen O'Neill (2006), Florence Broadhurst intended to use John Lang's rent as part of her income, but Lang had difficulty in earning enough money to cover the rental payments. It was then that Broadhurst contacted Sydney-based designer and colourist, Phillis Shillito who lent Broadhurst several books on screen-printing and advised her to enter the wallpaper business as a way to make ends meet (pp. 72-73). Later that same year, Broadhurst launched Australian (Hand Printed) Wallpapers.

Because the designs were modified, with consideration given to the fact that they would feature on a wall, scale was often

manipulated with the addition of textural effects to add depth to the two-dimensional printed surface. Design repeat systems comprised a four-sided repeat, so the design could carry itself over an entire wall of any size (Lennie cited by Clifton-Cunningham and Karaminas, 2004a). Could all these agents have also played a role in changing the meaning of the design?

It is probably true to say that Florence Broadhurst was more so an art director, astute marketer, and businessperson than a traditional designer. Lennie likened her to the English novelist Enid Blyton. "Enid Blyton supposedly wrote a hell of a lot of books and had also a hell of a lot of shadow writers. Her job was to keep the level of excellence to a point" (Lennie, as cited in Clifton-Cunningham and Karaminas, 2004a).

The volume of design prints that Florence Broadhurst produced may have been influenced by the amount of commissioned work she claims she received on her travels overseas. These "successful selling visits," during which "subsequent orders poured in and I [then] realized that I had accidentally tapped a highly lucrative overseas market" included a commission to print a "special design for Qantas premises around the world," and a special design for Estée Lauder cosmetics (Broadhurst, as cited in Signature Prints, 2002b, p. 7).

David Lennie (as cited in Clifton-Cunningham and Karaminas, 2004a) comments, "A lot of the design work comes from the brief that you are asked to develop. Libraries evolve from what the marketplace wants, there is absolutely no way that she could [have drawn] every single design" (p.11). Many of the young designers who worked with Broadhurst claimed that she would always begin by examining the work of established designers, such as Gordon Andrews and Marion Hall Best, before commencing any design work. Many of the in-house designers could not recall how many designs they would work on daily; Australian designer Sally Fitzpatrick (as cited in O'Brien, 2004) recalls turning designs around extremely quickly. "Depending on what it was and how complicated, how many colour separations it had, you could get it done in a day" (p. 111).

There is no evidence that Florence Broadhurst herself drew any of the designs that appeared under the Broadhurst label. This does not necessarily suggest that she was fraudulent. There is certainly a well-established tradition in western design disciplines, which design critic Lyndon Anderson (as cited in O'Neill, 2006) confirms, of designers not actually putting pen to paper. "British pottery maestro Josiah Wedgwood managed to avoid it two centuries ago, and London designer Paul Smith shuns it to this day," he says. "If somebody is directing artists to produce innovative, aesthetic, repeatable images, they are a designer. The idea that a designer has to actually do the drawings for the wallpaper themselves is not the case. What matters is context and intention" (p. 214).

Meaning and Translation: Belonging 'Elsewhere'

Broadhurst's designs appear as a taxonomy worthy of Borges' 'Chinese Encyclopedia'. See (1) geometrics; (2) floral (small and large scaled); (3) stripes (45 and 90 degrees); (4) trellis

(bamboo and tortoiseshell); (5) tapestries; (6) textures; and (7) Orientals. The ‘gathering’ of motifs and symbols by Broadhurst and the assemblage of ‘Other worlds’ reflect wider cultural rules, mainly of taxonomy, gender, aesthetics, and power. This need to collect, to *have*, is transformed into the desire to possess, to select, order, and classify into hierarchies of ‘collections.’ The notion of collecting, at least in the West, where time is thought to be linear and irreversible, implies a rescue of phenomena from inevitable loss or historical decay.⁶ The collection contains what deserves to be ‘kept,’ remembered, and treasured. Artifacts and customs are saved ‘out of time’ (Clifford, 1993, p. 67).

The Broadhurst Collection can be considered a form of ethnography. Motifs are selected, gathered, detached from their original temporal occasions, and given enduring value in a new arrangement. In doing so, specific meanings are erased and cultural significance shifts and slides to the point that the appropriation of the motifs in the context of patterns are as significant as the colonial occupation of Central and Northern Asian art and design (Van de Ven, as cited in Clifton-Cunningham and Karaminas, 2004b). In this way, the sense that colonization is not a historical phase that has passed (the effects of which are known and finite) informs the arguments that Broadhurst was, in fact, implicit in the process of cultural appropriation. Attracted to the potential for her work in Central and Northern Asian cultural heritage, she appropriated designs into her work and emulated typified ‘Oriental’ styles. When Australian fashion designer Akira Isogawa first saw Broadhurst’s ‘Nagoya’ (Figure 1) and ‘Chelsea’ (Figure 2) designs, they reminded him of traditional Japanese kimono

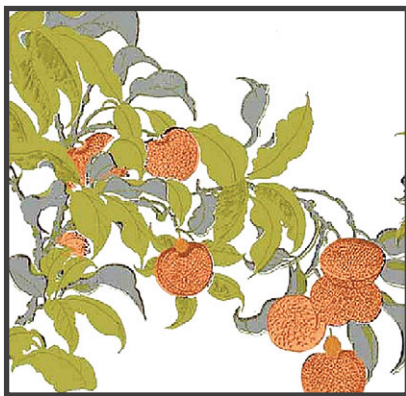


Figure 1. Nagoya. Courtesy Signature Prints: The Florence Broadhurst Collection.



Figure 2. Chelsea. Courtesy Signature Prints: The Florence Broadhurst Collection.

textiles. He said, “It gives me a feeling of being somewhere else [like] the Far East, or somewhere exotic in another time” (personal communication, February 21, 2004).

The motifs that appear in *The Broadhurst Collection* comprise *Nagoya* (Peaches) (Figure 1), *Chelsea* (Chinese Chrysanthemums) (Figure 2), *Japanese Fan* (Figure 3), and *Japanese Bamboo* (Figure 4) designs, as well as *Cranes* (Figure 5), *Exotic Birds* (Figure 6), *The Egrets* (Figure 7), and *Persian Birds* (Figure 8). The choice of themes goes back to Central and Northern Asian symbolism and religious iconography, and in this sense its taxonomic, aesthetic structure is valued as ‘different’ and ‘exotic’ as opposed to the “Australian taste of décor at the time which tended to be flat in colour and conservative” (Broadhurst, as cited in Signature Prints, 2002b, p. 1)⁷. Thus, the designs themselves become negatively marked as objects of inspiration whose various “levels of meaning applied through social and historical relations cease[d] and [went] beyond and out of context of their original cultural significance” (Van de Ven, as cited in Clifton-Cunningham and Karaminas, 2004b).



Figure 3. Japanese Fan. Courtesy Signature Prints: The Florence Broadhurst Collection.



Figure 4. Japanese bamboo. Courtesy Signature Prints: The Florence Broadhurst Collection.

It cannot be denied that Broadhurst’s designs were subjected to a repeat process of adaptation and manipulation, but it is equally undeniable that out of this procedure evolved an inspiration for Chinese and Japanese images that depicted a ‘traditional, refined and ethereal East.’ “The chrysanthemum that appears in the *Chelsea* (Figure 2) design,” states Australian designer Akira Isogawa (personal communication, February 21,

2004), “defines a particular ‘season.’ Whether the traditional meaning changes or alters depends on one’s attitude regardless of the object. For me, the meaning remains the same. Another design called *Japanese Fan* (Figure 3) is heavily Japanese influenced. I really feel in touch with this sensitivity” (Isogawa, as cited in O’Brien, 2004, p. 188). Akira imagines that Florence Broadhurst must have collected kimono textiles, as well as traditional fabrics that she found on her journey through China, India, and the Middle East. “She would have spent time in England and hand-picked a liberty print, or something like that,” he says (as cited in O’Neill, 2006). “Then mixed all of that influence [to] create this empire in Australia” (p. 188).

Cranes (Figure 5) and *Exotic Birds* (Figure 6), rather than the familiar chrysanthemum, were the emblems of the early Japanese sovereigns. The ancient court history describes their depiction on the banners of Emperor Mommu in the year 701, and as such they are the most explicit early examples of fixed designs used as a symbol of a person’s status in Japan. The *Scroll of the Mongol Invasion*, a thirteenth-century pictorial account of battles, includes one of the most intricate of Japanese heraldic

crests, a circle enclosing the traditionally auspicious symbols for longevity, the *crane*, the bamboo (depicted in Figure 4), and the plum blossom. The crane symbolizes a thousand years of life. The plum blossom is a traditional symbol of fortitude in all of Asia for it “braves the lingering chill of winter to bloom before all the other flowers” (Dower, 1995, p. 15). Together with the bamboo, the plum blossom is known as one of the ‘three companions of the cold.’ The bamboo, a symbol of resiliency, was also associated with longevity in Chinese legends, which held that the phoenix (peacock), bird of immortality, dined on bamboo. In a sense, the above motifs utilized by Broadhurst have become objectified - simulated, adapted, corrupted, and, ultimately, appropriated.

As a mode of cultural engagement, ‘appropriation’ is dependent on the ability to separate a given object or design from its cultural milieu for the purpose of its employment in a different form and is predicated on formalist assumptions as to the recognition and meaning of cultural heritage. For example, the inclusion of the peacock, or the crane, as part of a general Broadhurst design, betrays a reduction, isolation, and re-designation of a culturally-specific design.

On Longing for the Other

Susan Stewart’s study *On Longing* negotiates the gap that separates language from the experience it encodes by exploring certain recurrent strategies pursued by the West since the sixteenth century. Paralleling Marx’s account of the fetishistic objectification of commodities, Stewart (as cited in Clifford, 1993) argues that in “the modern museum [the collections] are an illusion of a relation between things [which] take the place of social relation” (p. 53). She shows how collections create the illusion of a representation of the world by removing objects, in this case motifs, out of specific contexts (whether cultural, social, historical, or political) and making them represent abstract wholes. *Japanese Fans* (Figure 3) or *Japanese Bamboo* (Figure 4) in this case, becomes an ethnographic metonym for Japanese culture. A system of classification is then put into place for the coding and marketing purposes of the design itself, which then overrides specific histories of the motif’s iconographic symbolism and its appropriation. The objective world is given, not produced, and thus historical relations of power are occluded. The making of meaning in *The Broadhurst Collection* is mystified and mythologized as ‘inspiration,’ eclipsing the act of “appropriation, or direct translation” (Van de Ven, as cited in Clifton-Cunningham and Karaminas, 2004b). The order and taxonomy of the collection overrides and deletes the multiple meanings of tradition and history that are attached to Japanese, Chinese, and Persian sacred symbols of time, place, belonging, and identity.

James Clifford’s seminal paper ‘On Collecting Art and Culture’ (1993) argues that the history of collections [in the West] (not limited to museums) is central to an understanding of how those social groups that invented anthropology and modern art [or modern design] have appropriated exotic things, facts, and meanings. It is important to analyze how Broadhurst’s designs made at a particular moment in the Australian contemporary social fabric circulate and make sense within the broader context of Australian identity and selfhood.



Figure 5. *Cranes*. Courtesy Signature Prints: The Florence Broadhurst Collection.



Figure 6. *Exotic Birds*. Courtesy Signature Prints: The Florence Broadhurst Collection.

What criterion validates ‘good’ and ‘bad’ design? What ethical and political criteria distinguish between different historical moments and at specific historical conditions? Does the appropriation, inspiration, and inevitable exoticization of certain aspects of design come from the designers themselves or “from the multiple meanings that the consumer puts on the pattern?” (Van de Ven, as cited in Clifton-Cunningham and Karaminas, 2004b).

According to ethnographer James Clifford (1993), the critical history of ‘collections’ “is concerned with what from the material world specific groups and individuals choose to preserve, value and exchange” (p. 62). Similarly, although this is a complex history of European imperialism, one that reaches back to at least the ‘Golden Age of Discovery’ [sic] in the history of European colonization, Baudrillard provides a framework for the consumption of artifacts in the recent capitalist West. In his account, all categories of meaningful objects function within a system of symbols and values.⁸

Take, for example, Broadhurst’s *Exotic Birds* (Figure 6) whose figurative pattern was also used in Persian art. Mostly allegorical, it has symbolic significance prevalent in Persian arts, such as book illustrations, mural decorations, pottery, and textiles. “Broadhurst loved birds,” recalls Fitzpatrick (as cited in O’Neill, 2006), “Asian designs, Japanese influenced materials, I am sure [this inspiration came] from her youth and time [spent] in China” (p. 121). The interior designer Barry Little, for whom *The Egrets* (Figure 7) was designed so as to secure his business, (and which is now a Broadhurst iconic design) had a penchant for subtle colours and elegant designs, but his passion lay in Asian art and philosophies. “I just love the Orient,” he says (as cited in O’Brien, 2004), “it was in my blood” (p. 121).



Figure 7. *The Egrets*. Courtesy Signature Prints: The Florence Broadhurst Collection.

Oriental Fascinations and the Cult of the East

Oscar Wilde (1992) once observed, “The whole of Japan is pure invention. There is no such country. There are no such people” (p. 684). Broadhurst’s designs can be seen as instruments of such inventions. Through them, an imaginary Japan is invented, along

with imaginary tastemakers and cultural selves to accompany them. The placement of the designs in a taxonomic order in the Collection is not arbitrary or consequential, but resides in the complex histories and ideological contexts of ‘Western’ traditions that include several elements, which include the history of representing the ‘Oriental Other’ itself. This complex relationship between the Occident and the Orient is a relationship of power, heavily weighted towards the former. Such power is connected intimately with the construction of knowledge about the Orient, which makes its management easy. “Knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control” (Said, 1978, p. 36). This knowledge of the Orient incorporates images into Western systems of representation and in a sense *creates* the Orient and the Oriental world. “The Oriental is depicted as something one judges (as in a court of law), something one studies and depicts (as in a curriculum), something one disciplines (as in a school or prison), something one illustrates (as in a zoological manual). The point is that in each case the Oriental is *contained* and *represented* by dominating frameworks” (Said, 1978, p. 40).

Another significant element is the specific history of Oriental art and design, its representation and the circumstances of its production. In both Britain and France, the craze for *Chinoiserie* and *Japonisme* reached its peak during the high noon of Imperialism (1860), when the popularity of Oriental themes were due to both the deployment of the fine and decorative arts in the imperial project and the opportunities in technique and content offered by the new sights and colours associated with the East (MacKenzie, 1995). Artists and travellers brought back images of deserts, odalisques and geishas, visions of forbidden exoticism that were to become the key tropes of Orientalist art, and decorative design.⁹ Other techniques, such as transfer printing, led to plates appearing with Oriental scenes, Chinese landscapes, Indian palaces, and so on. Such scenes also appeared on wallpapers, which became popular throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Stylized flowers and trees emerged in the pseudo-oriental wallpapers of William Morris’s Arts and Crafts movement, which Florence Broadhurst would later adopt.¹⁰

As with wallpaper prints, textiles¹¹ and ceramics patterns were also guided by European taste. Designs and motifs, such as the flowering tree, viewed as ‘Asian,’ was in fact a combination of Hindu, Islamic, Chinese, and European elements that conformed to Western tastes. From the earliest days of colonialism, European versions of Chinese and Japanese were being transmitted to India from the imperial centre to be copied. “Fantasy was built upon fantasy; imaginary Orients overlaid each other. Indian craftsmen adapted and modified the model patterns in light of their own existence; repeated copies ensured that they became unrecognizable in terms of the originals” (MacKenzie, 1995, p. 114). As Irwin and Brett (as cited in MacKenzie, 1995) put it,

English and Chinese flowers, distorted into something fanciful by Indian eyes to whom the plants were alien, were now welcomed in their new form as expressions of exotic fantasy ... English tastes were now returning in parodied form to feed the new appetite for exoticism. The Directors [of the East India Company] wanted more and more of such goods, and the more fanciful the better! (p. 114)

Broadhurst's designs have undergone similar modifications and adaptations, where iconic and cultural symbolic values are redolent with past meanings and associations that can never be totally disclaimed. Her successive 'Oriental fascinations' represent a curious blend of restraint and theatricality. This combination can certainly be found in *Persian Birds* (Figure 8). Her use of ill-defined flat backgrounds and her handling of space, compositional devices, perspective, and colour were profoundly influenced by Japanese art. Although she travelled broadly throughout Asia, from India across to East Asia, to China and possibly Japan from the late 1910s to the 1920s, "one could suggest [Broadhurst] picked up inspiration in those countries, or there is a word to consider 'plagiarism.' Inspiration, appropriation, plagiarism, where did Florence sit in terms of her designs?" (Van de Ven, as cited in Clifton-Cunningham and Karaminas, 2004b).

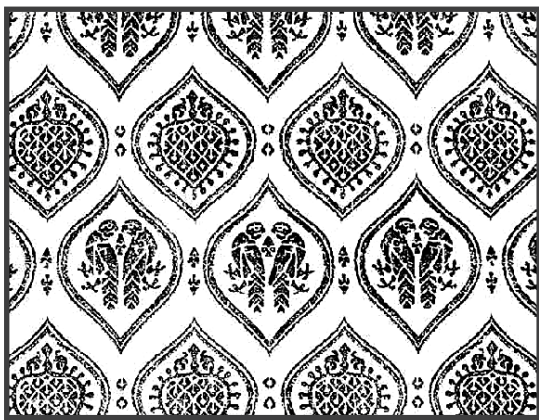


Figure 8. Persian Birds. Courtesy Signature Prints: The Florence Broadhurst Collection.

In general, the image of the peacock is a cross-cultural symbol, and in many cultures and traditions, it appears as a symbol of paradise, rebirth, immortality, and the incorruptibility of the soul. The bird is also a symbol for the story of the heavens and hence resurrection and everlasting life. In the East, it represents a symbol of rebirth in the mythology of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. In Hinduism, the image of the God of thunder, rains, and war—Indra—is depicted in the form of a peacock. In India, the peacock is also a symbol of love. The peacock is represented in numerous paintings that depict love scenes. In Chinese and Japanese art, the peacock is a symbol of beauty and dignity and the benefactor of humanity. In Chinese symbolic patterns, we see that parts of the body and tail of a symbolic bird, such as the phoenix, were depicted in the form of a peacock.

The image of a peacock was found on a late sixth-century or seventh-century Sassanian mural decoration at Ctesiphone. The popularity of this motif in mosques and as a sacred object was due to its symbolic significance, thereby the peacock became a symbol of beauty, paradise, and the soul of humanity, which wishes to return to its eternal home. According to one tradition, the prophet of Islam, in his Ascension to heaven, was carried on a Buraq, a being with the head of a man, the body of a horse, and the tail of a peacock; and this appears in many Islamic paintings. Similarly, the depiction of the peacock motif is used extensively on the walls of Persian religious buildings, such as the Shah's mosque, and can be explained in two ways: as a symbol for the beauty of the Divine

and as a motif referring to the soul of humanity, which wishes to return to its eternal home. Broadhurst's peacock motif (Figures 6 and 8) was utilized on her wallpaper designs and became a significant aspect of interior decoration in Australian middle-class homes in the sixties and seventies. Thus, one interpretation features the '*Persian Birds*' (Figure 8) as religious iconography and the other as commercial enterprise. The moral evaluation of the two acts is sharply opposed; but the motif, in this case, the peacock, is still meaningful and ethereal. Commercial, aesthetic, and religious worth in both cases presupposed a given value system.

The use of the traditional peacock motif by Broadhurst circulates within a system of values and meanings that finds beauty in the collection of objects from the East; Orientalist collectors endow Chinoiserie and Japonisme with a sense of depth and longing. This 'Cult of the East,' is so suffused with a yearning for transcultural inspiration that temporality is reified and salvaged as origin, beauty, and knowledge.

Conclusion

Broadhurst's designs embody a fundamental position in the ethics and morality of design and in its trafficking of meaning. *Nagoya* (Figure 1), *Chelsea* (Figure 2), *Japanese Fans* (Figure 3), *Japanese Bamboo* (Figure 4) and *Persian Birds* (Figure 8), to name a few, are all survivals, remnants, and appropriations of *Other* traditions. The motifs that appear in Broadhurst's designs are shreds of culture, captured commodities, vanishing into a two-dimensional fate.

The spectre of imperialism most certainly haunts Broadhurst's designs and raises deeper issues of cultural awareness and social responsibility in the ways in which designers address the politics and ideologies that inform their design processes and practices. Such issues are manifold and are made and 'un-made' in many sites and across many paths; in perspectives of self, engagements with place and relationships with culture and identity. This paper calls for additional ways of understanding the complexities of cultural identities, particularly those that contest and sometimes subvert the representations that claim to realistically depict and define them. This does not mean that as designers we should cease to gain 'inspiration' from the works of other cultures through cross-cultural collaborations or otherwise, but rather, we must pay attention to the implications posed by the realities of cultural appropriation. As Gayatri Spivak (1989) observes, when the "hegemonic discourse" repositions itself so that it can "occupy the position of the Other," it, too, becomes subject to a major transformation, to its own decolonization (p. 121).

Endnotes

¹ On October 15, 1977, Florence Broadhurst was killed by an intruder in her Paddington studio. The murder has never been solved.

² The Sydney Powerhouse Museum houses the Florence Broadhurst Library, which contains the original printing screens and personal photograph albums.

³ The 1842 Treaty of Nanjing between Britain and China saw the treaty port of Shanghai open for international trade, particularly opium. The British, along with the Americans and French, were allowed to live in certain territorial zones without being under the Chinese laws. European and American inhabitants were widely known as Shanghailanders and enjoyed a lifestyle of wealth until the Chinese Civil War in 1927, which forced many foreigners (including Florence Broadhurst) to leave Shanghai. The Chinese Civil War was a conflict between the Kuomintang (The Chinese Nationalist Party or KMT) and the Communist Party of China (CPC). It began in 1927 after the Northern Expedition, when the right-wing faction of the KMT, led by Chiang Kai-Shek, purged the Communists from a KMT–CPC alliance (see Dong, 2001).

⁴ See Raizman, D., *History of Modern Design* (2003) for a more detailed survey of the applied arts and industrial design from the eighteenth century to the present day.

⁵ In ‘Personalisation Pays off’ [notes for a speech by Florence Broadhurst, circa 1975], Broadhurst notes that on her arrival from Britain to Australia, she found it impossible to purchase any coordinated interior decorations, as the emphasis was on carpets rather than wallpapers, which were seldom used. When wallpapers were used, Broadhurst noted that they were generally in muted tones and nondescript patterns and colours. She attributed Australia’s blandness in colour to the lack of availability of wallpapers (both locally and abroad) that suited Australian aesthetic sensibilities (as cited in *Signature Prints*, 2002b, pp. 1-2). For a history of Australian Design, see also Fry (1988), Bogle (1998), and Jackson (2006).

⁶ In his review of the new installation of nineteenth-century art in the André Meyer Galleries in the Metropolitan Museum, Hilton Kramer attacked the inclusion of collections, in this case salon painting, as impotent, decayed, and dead (see Crimp, 1993, p. 43). See also Adorno’s essay, ‘Valéry Proust Museum,’ in which the experiences of Valéry and Proust at the Louvre are analyzed. Adorno insists that the museal [museum-like] mortality is a necessary effect of an institution caught in the contradictions of its culture and therefore extending to every object contained there.

⁷ In his study on *Designing Women: Gender, Modernism and Interior Decoration in Sydney, c. 1920–1940*, Peter McNeil (1993, p. 101) argues that the emphasis modern designers placed upon colour is crucial, as colour was categorized in post-Renaissance artistic discourse as base, sensual, and irrational. Australian artists, including Adrian Feint, Roy de Maistre, Thea Proctor, and Hera Roberts, were involved in popularizing the modern interior in inter-war Sydney as well as introducing a modern aesthetic where bold colour and form were primary.

⁸ In *The System of Objects*, Baudrillard (1996) offers a cultural critique of the commodity in consumer society. He classifies the everyday objects of the ‘new technical order’ as functional, nonfunctional, and metafunctional. He contrasts ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ functional objects, subjecting home furnishing and interior design to a celebrated semiological analysis. His treatment of nonfunctional or ‘marginal’ objects focuses

on antiques and the psychology of collecting, while the metafunctional category extends to the useless, the aberrant, and even the ‘schizofunctional’.

⁹ Note for example the work of French fine artists Ingres, 1840; Gérôme 1860, as well as Decamps (1813–1860, who were considered the most esteemed Orientalists of their day.

¹⁰ Pink and Rose, c. 1890.

¹¹ The Dutch East India Company controlled the textile-producing regions of Cambay and Surat in India, importing cottons, chintzes, muslins and silk embroideries, and silk from Bengal (see Impey, 1977; Jarry, 1974; Howard & Ayers 1978).

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