A close-up photograph of a book cover. The cover features a mix of materials: a dark red leather-like material at the top, a tan leather-like material in the middle, and a dark metal clasp on the left. The background is a light-colored, textured material, possibly paper or fabric, with some red and black markings. The text "LEO PALMER EXAM REPORT" is overlaid in the center.

**LEO
PALMER
EXAM
REPORT**

MA2

Xylographic Furniture:

A reintroduction of meaning through ornament.

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Abstract

The objects we cherish most are the ones that tell a story. This project is an investigation into methods of achieving this quality. I have chosen to approach this by examining the role of ornament in furniture design.

In the past, ornament was used to convey collective narratives. In today's design landscape the idea of ornamentation is relegated to kitsch. By combining the practice of Xylography (woodcut printing) and furniture design I have modernised the idea of ornament and imbued my work with tactile narrative qualities, which I feel are often lacking from design today.

The process of ornamentation developed during this project, is intended to be applied holistically. The pieces shown here are examples of this application and its development. If successful, the process should deliver a piece of furniture which reflects the theme of the print.

The print itself relates to the context or function of the object, this further enhances the narrative qualities. The result is a unique piece that visually communicates

a place or memory. This then elicits an emotional attachment to the furniture.

This project results in a piece that expresses these qualities. I chose myself as the client and therefore the furniture is a response to my memories. The piece in question is the kredenc¹, which relates to food preparation. I therefore started by creating a set of prints based around my own fond food memories.

Once the printing process is complete, the woodblocks take on a new role - as ornaments on the kredenc. As I cook the fragmented images subtly remind me of all the good food and associated memories I've had in the past.

At the core of this project is the need to make objects that spark joy and curiosity. Objects such as the kredenc, that through their ability to make an impression accompany us throughout our lives, their story evolving along with our own.

1 Kredenc - Czech word for Credenza. A traditional piece of furniture with an upper and lower cupboard divided by a work surface. Usually found in the kitchen. (Definition by author)

Key Words

Furniture, design, printing, woodcut, narrative, ornament, Modernism, graphic print, sustainability, material, texture, carving, wood.

Introduction

When considering the furniture industry today, one can be forgiven in thinking that there has never been more choice available to the consumer. It is true, the sheer quantity of brands, types and functions of furniture is extensive. However, more often than not, the variety of aesthetic styles is now largely reduced to one: Modernism, or derivatives thereof.

This is not particularly surprising given the effect of Modernism on our culture. In fact we still live in a Modernist society of one sort or another. As Deyan Sudjic, director of the Design Museum in London (from 2006-2020), states "Modernism has defined our tastes to a remarkable degree. Without it, there would be no built-in kitchens, and no loft living. [...] Without modernism, Britain's contemporary domestic landscape would be an entirely different place" (Sudjic, 2006, para. 21)

My initial reaction to this lack of stylistic variety was one not too dissimilar to that of the Postmodernists. A rallying of form over function, a need to bring heart

back into design “postmodernism meant design with the wit, the emotions and the history that modernism had rejected put back into the mix.” (Sudjic, 2006, para. 4) This Postmodernist approach, although useful in organising my thoughts, perhaps lacked originality. I found myself retreading ideas that had been discussed, and in a sense resolved in the 1980s. This then didn’t seem like the best way forward.

Instead, I turned to the question: why does furniture look the way it does today, and what could changing this entrenched aesthetic mean? I started to consider this not only from the stylistic perspective, but also in relation to manufacturing and our current consumer society. For example, looking at how certain capitalistic demands can affect how furniture looks, i.e. the need to meet certain mass production quotas, or what impact environmentally conscious thinking might have on design, material, or behavioural choices.

Throughout this report I aim to expand upon and guide you through the points highlighted above. I hope that you as the reader will be able to see how my design decisions relate to these topics and why I have chosen to address them in this manner.

Background

Before continuing with the analysis of the furniture industry and my subsequent design decisions I would like to outline how I came to the idea of using ornament in furniture, and why xylography¹ became the medium for this expression:

Prague, summer of 2021. Having just finished the first year of my Masters I began to ponder my next project. For inspiration I visited one of Adolf Loos’s² houses. While I admired the clever spatial design (Raumplan³), use of materials and attention to detail, I was struck by the richness of this particular type of Modernism. When considering Loos’s work, as I was in that moment, it was difficult not to be reminded of his infamous essay regarding ornament

The essay in question, “Ornament is crime” (Loos, 1931)

-
- 1 Xylography - The art of engraving on wood or of printing from woodblocks
 - 2 Adolf Loos - Czech/Austrian Modernist architect and theorist. (1870 - 1933)
 - 3 Raumplan - A method of ordering rooms in a 3D space to create a flowing interconnected plan, devised and used by Loos.

is an acerbic critique of the overly ornamented Viennese aesthetic favoured by the bourgeoisie of his time. In this essay Loos decries the use of ornament as a means of communication, claiming that "Since ornament is no longer organically linked with our culture, it is also no longer the expression of our culture." (Loos, 1931, p.22). To Loos, ornament as a visual language had no place in the fast approaching Modern era.

As a result, when people think of Modernism they often think of austere, unadorned and rational spaces that shun the frivolities of ornament. Where architecture leads, furniture design often follows. Of course it would be facetious of me to lay all the blame for this shift at the feet of Loos. Nevertheless his name is often cited in any debate on the subject of ornament within architecture.

As alluded to above, the interiors designed by Loos himself and many other notable Modernists, Mies van de Rohe, Charlotte Perriand or Eileen Gray, to name but a few, are not austere at all. They used material, form, light and space to bring a new level of meaning⁴ to the spaces and furnishings. The Modernism

4 Meaning in design to me is a feeling that speaks to us as people, a connection that goes beyond practical attributes of

of the 1920's however is not the same as what we would recognise as Modernism today.

It is this contemporary Modernism that I wish to address. It is a Modernism of homogeneity, and familiarity. A Modernism of waste and consumerism. It is perhaps not accurate to describe it as Modernism at all, yet the aesthetic roots are there, even if the spirit is not.

~

Back to Prague. Later that week, with Loos and his comments regarding ornaments still on my mind, I visited the Museum of Modern Art. Specifically to see the exhibition on Woodcuts (Woodcut/DrevoRez. Prague, 2021). I have always enjoyed this medium of graphic print, being drawn to the bold colour, simple observed subjects and pleasingly expressive material qualities of the prints themselves. This time however, I noticed the woodblock.

the object. I try to achieve this by linking the object to something exterior to itself, be it tradition, location of just a specific moment. "The pleasure of the purely useful is comparatively commonplace and crude, the pleasure of the beautiful is rare and refined" (Moritz, 1750, p. 20-34).

There were a number of used woodblocks on display, carved by Gaugin, P. (1848 - 1903), Munch, E. (1863 - 1944) and others. These objects instantly caught my attention. They had a subtle worked quality that spoke to me. I saw the woodblock not only as part of a process but as a material object in and of itself. A woodblock's primary function is to be a vehicle for ink, its unique materiality is secondary. I realised that I could utilise both of these qualities if I applied them to furniture. I could use carved woodblocks as raw material and in this way transpose ornament, and by extension meaning into my furniture.

~

The fact that these objects were made from wood is important to me. I work with wood for a number of reasons. It is an inclusive material, one which we recognise but which can also surprise us. We know its source, we can imagine its touch and its smell. It is in this way a comforting and trusted material. Nostalgic yet innovative. It is potentially sustainable and endlessly practical. From new manufactured timber products to sustainable building techniques, wood is the perfect material for the 21st century. This idea is not a new one, but bears repeating, and is more accepted year by year.

There are many scholarly papers on the subject. To cite a recent example, the work of Fabio Bianconi, and Marco Filippucci, authors of Digital Wood Design, "Although wood is one of the oldest construction materials, in recent years many innovations have affected the production techniques and the design tools, and they have paved the way for new formal, aesthetic, and structural solutions, which can fill the application fields of this material" (Bianconi & Filippucci, 2019, p.xi)

~

During that serendipitous week in Prague I managed to synthesise the idea of carved woodblocks with furniture. I realised the connection had potential both from a material and conceptual level. I wouldn't have the chance to develop it until later, nevertheless the seeds were sown and had started to take root.

Purpose

I want to encourage a new perspective on furniture production and consumption through the use of a craft oriented aesthetics i.e. Ornament.

Capitalist driven design tends to produce homogeneous results, which in turn leave us cold beyond the current trends. This, along with other factors, encourages a consumerist culture of planned obsolescence¹ within furniture.

I believe introducing ornament to my design could imbue my furniture with meaning. Which would, by visually communicating a narrative, create a healthier and longer relationship between the object and its user. Should this aesthetic become popular this could then encourage smaller, local and slower production systems to become more prevalent as these factors are intrinsic to such objects.

¹ Planned Obsolescence: a policy of producing consumer goods that rapidly become obsolete and so require replacing, achieved by frequent changes in design, termination of the supply of spare parts, and the use of non-durable materials. (Oxford languages, 2022)

Goal/Objectives

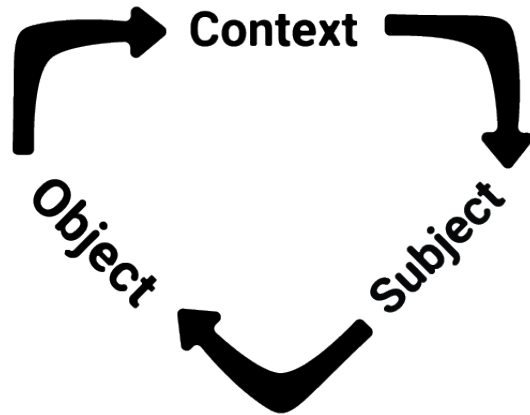
The goal for this thesis project is to take what I have learned so far during my exploration of xylography and produce a piece of furniture that successfully deploys the ornamental language I have developed.

Questions Formulation

Why does furniture look the way it does today, and what could changing this entrenched aesthetic mean?

How does the incorporation of woodcut printing into furniture design affect its production, and how can this change be used positively?

How can I use this process to make viable, desirable products?



Approach

Xylographic Design Method

In this semester I have focused on the design of the furniture, and then incorporated the xylographic ornamentation. I have simplified this process down to three specific elements: Context, Image Subject and Object. Development can start from any of these three, and this choice is dependent on the brief/desired end result - in this project I began with the Context. Up until now I tended to begin with the Image Subject as this was my primary focus (printmaking). It is worth mentioning that these are guidelines, not rigid rules. I use them to structure my approach but readily give way to experimentation and inspiration.

Three elements:

Context - what is the environment in which the object will be used, and by whom? This inspires the subject of the image.

Image subject - dictates the design of the printed work and by extension the woodblock. The furniture is then made from the woodblock.

Object - The piece of furniture made from the woodblock, whose function relates to the context.

Figure 1: Three elements diagram



Approach

The function of ornament

Ornament is normally defined as “an object that is beautiful rather than useful” (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary & Thesaurus, 2021)

To me this definition undervalues the importance of aesthetics in how we perceive an object. I would suggest that if an object, through aesthetics alone, can create a positive emotional response, then it is of use. I would also go further and say that the aesthetics of an object can have an effect not only on our mood but also on our behaviour. In this project my desired result is to deepen the connection between the user and the object - which in today’s disposable culture has real value if this connection results in less waste.

So how am I using ornament to achieve this connection? As mentioned in the Background section on pg 6, Loos said that ornament no longer spoke to us as a society. This implies that it can do so if the right (visual) language is used. In the past this could be done collectively and therefore a general set of patterns could be used. I don’t think this holistic approach is applicable

today. Instead I want to create pattern or ornaments that speak to the individual or at most a community.

This is where my three element design method comes in. By starting with a context I can quickly come up with a relatable theme from which I can generate prints.

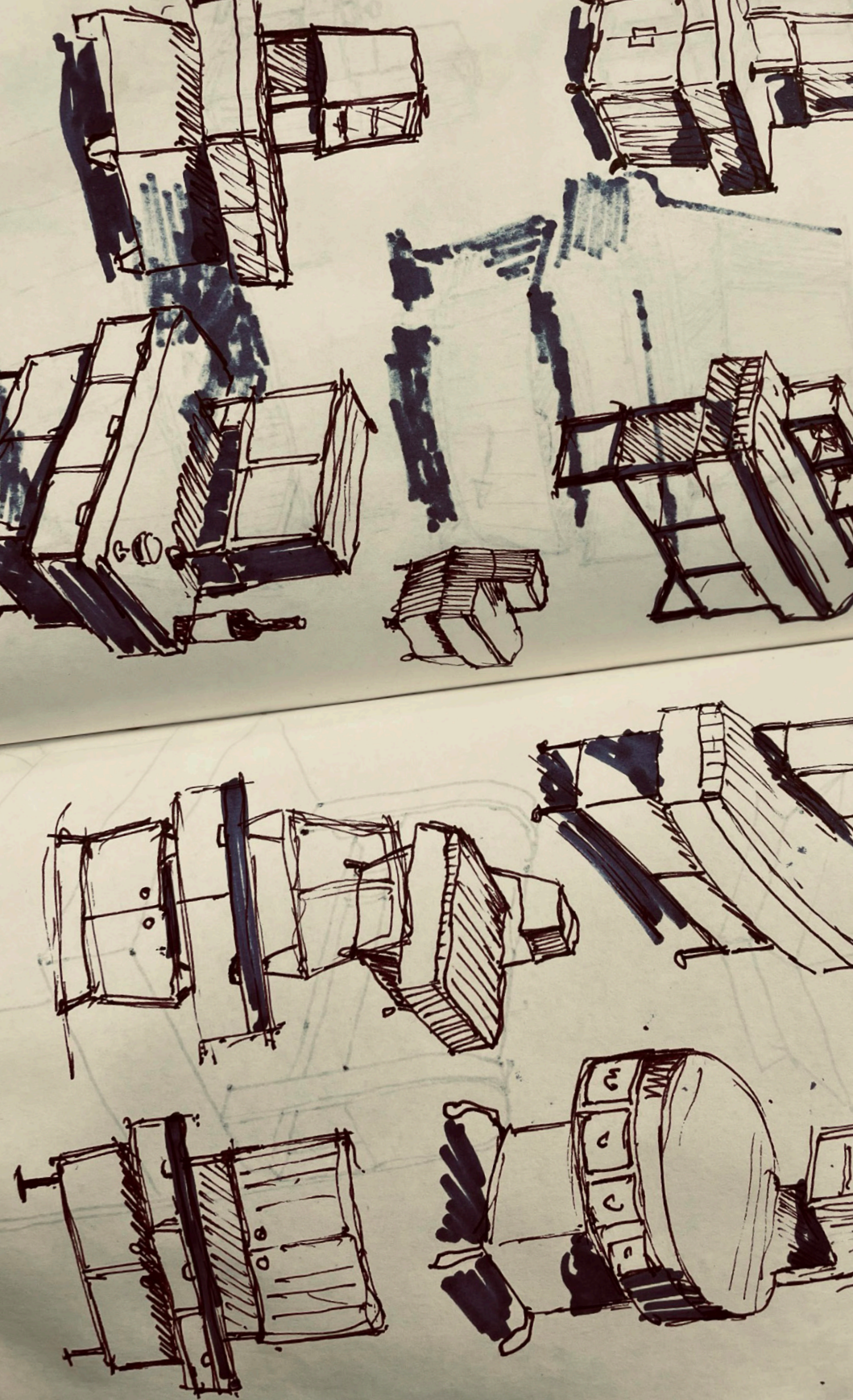
This image creation process forces me to think about a space, or a person in a pictorial and narrative way, increasing the chance that the resulting image will have some resonance with that context or client.

This being done I am left with a set of woodblocks that bare the physical marks of this narrative process (carvings). I could at this point simply use these to clad the furniture, but this would not sufficiently blur the function of the object with the ornamental form. For this reason I choose to abstract them.

This is done by treating them as a raw material. I cut and combine the carved wood as required, purposefully fragmenting the images I created to make the prints. The desired effect is a new aesthetic, which, when closely observed, reminds us of the printed images. Crucially however this aesthetic can stand on its own, and recede into the background.

If the entire woodblocks were retained and used as cladding, their pictorial qualities unchanged, this ability to let the ornament recede, to - not see the image - would be gone. Without fragmentation each time we would glance at the furniture our brain would not be able to resist seeing the whole image, and thus prevent us from freely associating with the memories hidden within.

The prints give us a conscious pictorial representation of the subject. While the furniture, which has functions beyond just the aesthetic, acts on us subconsciously. Allowing us to use the piece in a more practical way when necessary.



Approach

Furniture proposal

The main piece of work associated with this report is my Sideboard. In Czech, this piece is known as a Kredenc, which derives from the Italian word Credenza.

Graham Blackburn (2005) writing for Fine Woodworking magazine gives this brief history of the sideboard "The origin of the English term is interesting, if no longer pertinent to its contemporary use: As a side table on which food was placed to be tested for poison before being served (to pope, lord, king, or other important person) it provided the truth or credence of what was being served." (Blackburn, 2005, para. 5)

I have found that the term Credenza and the Czech term Kredenc often relate to slightly different pieces of furniture. The English understanding of the word relates to "a form of flat-topped, longish, table-height cupboard or cabinet, used as a bookcase or display cabinet." (Blackburn, 2005, para. 6) The Czech Kredenc, of the two, the object with which I am more familiar, is more akin to a cupboard for storing fine cutlery, crockery and other dining paraphernalia. There are

Figure 3: Kredenc development sketches. Photo by author 2022.



a number of reasons why I have chosen to make this particular type of furniture. The simplest being an emotional one.

In the kitchen of my family cottage in the Czech Republic, there stands one such Kredenc (See Figure 4). It has been there for almost as long as I have and it is a ubiquitous part of the room. I have many memories of cooking with my Grandma and to this day it is probably one of the most used pieces in the house.

This Kredenc isn't like the more sophisticated pieces I have seen in more affluent houses of friends in England. No, it has a rustic charm, but nevertheless its styling boasts shades of Baroque and its form a feeling of grandeur.

This takes me to my next reason. Throughout history the Kredenc was a signifier of wealth. This grand association no doubt an echo of the original royal application. As such it was often the only piece in the household that had any decoration. What's more the decoration or style of the Kredenc often depicted the fashion of the time, be it Gothic, Baroque or Art Nouveau. Interestingly, because of their status, these objects are often found to be well looked after. Many are exquisite examples that

Figure 4: Traditional Czech Kredenc. Photo by author 2022.

showcase the style of the era.

Given the decorative history of this particular type of furniture, it felt like an appropriate canvas on which I could showcase my own style of ornamentation.

Although, rather than reflect the current style, something which changes a lot faster than it used to, the source of inspiration will be local or personal.

One final reason for choosing to make this particular culinary piece is the Modern kitchen unit. A few years ago I worked as an apprentice to a Carpenter in the Czech Republic. Who has been providing his services to his small corner of the north east mountains for over 40 years. When I first started to work for him I proposed I make a table from solid Larch¹ as a learning exercise. He laughed and sadly commented that he hasn't made proper furniture for decades, "All I do now is fit and then repair chipboard kitchens units" he quipped

This Modernist invention perhaps more than any other piece of furniture design has become a symbol of the Modernist influence on our daily lives. Eminently

1 I did make the table in the end, and learned a lot in the process. Lucky for me he had plenty of experience with solid wood before the popularisation of manufactured boards. For photographs see Appendix 1.0)

practical, yes, but lacking in feeling and personality.

I am doubtful that such a kitchen unit could elicit the same fond memories to its users, as my folk-baroque Kredenc does to me. I propose then, that there is room for this particular incarnation of the Kredenc in our modern lives, a piece which says something about us, and over time holds more than just pots and pans, but also memories.

Result

Conceptual context

Conceptually, as briefly outlined in the introduction (pg4), I wanted my work to relate to the furniture industry. Specifically, how the manufacturing of objects affects the way they look, and how this then affects us as consumers.

Clearly, the designed objects with which we choose to surround ourselves have an impact on who we are and our lived experience. "William Morris understood that the spirit in which art was produced and consumed went to the heart of the society it both expressed and helped to make up" (Frankel, 2021, p. 24) It therefore follows that we should hold them to a high standard.

I want to stress that this report refers to the broader furniture industry, the one that most normal consumers engage in on a daily basis. There are of course many innovative furniture producers and designers out there.

In the industry as a whole however, the main forms of innovation are generally born from within a capitalist world view. Reduction of waste, streamlining of

processes, sustainable materials and designs etc. These innovations are very important and should not be discouraged. Not many, however, propose any change in the way we socially relate to our objects. This is because the furniture industry has a vested interest in the way we currently relate to objects. And of course, changing social perception, even with the best intentions in mind, is very difficult.

Having said that, there is a reason why our industry is the way it is: supply and demand. This is a circular system (not the good kind). Global demand is huge, so products are made at high speed for low cost, this affects quality. Low quality means shorter product life spans and increased product turnover, i.e. demand. It is clear to see that from a capitalist perspective this system is very profitable. This is often presented in a Neoliberal manner, as the only possible system, but it is a choice.

How does this affect design? The furniture produced by the need to fulfil this huge demand is streamlined, simple in form and material. More complex designs that require costly manufacturing techniques are often left on the cutting room floor. It also means that the designers are expected to appeal to a wide range of

customers and therefore are not incentivised to produce meaningful objects for fear of reducing their target market.

An undeniably successful example of this is IKEA. "for IKEA, design always represents a culture even if removing cultural cues is the new culture. Postmodernist views have long advocated multiple perspectives, diversity and multiculturalism; promoting mid-century modernist, minimalist, Scandinavian, and IKEA stylistic values, seems controversial and conflicted, since these (IKEA values) dictate a cold-blooded, uniform, monotone, dull, and dry style, and kill regional cultures and unique personalities" (Basak, 2021, p. 174)

However, although the dominant market seems to be one of global consumerism there always remains a certain need for the opposite. In the post industrial landscape there has always been an argument against the industrialisation of design. The Arts and Craft Movement is one such example, Postmodernism, is another. Today the independent, the craft, the niche still survive, and perhaps, given the dawning of our collective acceptance of climate change, they will begin to thrive. Consumers are beginning to see that low cost equates to compromises, be it in terms of quality, ethics

or ecology.

The Modernist aesthetic which came about because of the industrial era and is therefore suited to these processes, has become the natural default. This is no accident, one created the other. But Modernist design is perhaps facing the same fate as ornament did at the turn of the 20th century.

The industrial revolution saw the pre-industrial value of an object: painstaking detail, hours of labour and carefully considered pattern, become superfluous. Those qualities could now be reproduced mechanically, and in great numbers. What was once a sign of wealth became associated with cheap knock off tat. The perception of value shifted.

Perhaps now could be a good time to take the best qualities from both pre-industrial and post-industrial design ideologies. Something akin to this approach is offered by the architect Louis Sullivan (1856-1924), often referred to as the Father of Modernism. "It would be greatly for our aesthetic good if we should refrain entirely from use of ornament for a period of years, in order that our thought might concentrate acutely upon the production of buildings well formed and comely in

the nude.[...] This step taken, we might safely inquire to what extent a decorative application of ornament would enhance the beauty of our structures-what new charm it would give them." (Sullivan,1947, p. 284-287)

This "new charm" (Sullivan,1947, p. 284-287), this reassessment of ornament and its reintroduction into Modern design appeals to me. In this project I have chosen to focus on altering the way we interact and relate to objects. Xylographic ornament is my agent of change in this endeavour. Could the new environmental aesthetic be one of bold and optimistic ornament?

In his essay Junkspace, Rem Koolhaas (2000) points to a lack of fixity in our built environments "Junkspace¹ sheds architectures like a reptile sheds skins. It reinvents itself every Monday morning. In classical space materiality was based on a final state that could only be modified at the expense of at least partial destruction" (Koolhaas, 2000, para. 6). Koolhaas refers to architecture, but the same can be said of furniture, mass produced, modular, granular, nothing lasts, nothing holds meaning. It's not meant to. By design it remains anonymous, or perhaps,

1 "Junkspace is what remains after modernization has run its course, or more precisely, what coagulates while modernization is taking place - it's fallout" (Koolhaas, 2000, para. 1)

universal.

I have already explained my craft based, ornamental approach (pg19-21), I will try to imagine what effects it could have on the industry.

From a practical standpoint, the handcrafted nature of the objects puts certain limitations on production speed. But this is also the factor that brings the most value. If this slowing down is to be viable there would need to be many such producers operating to satisfy demand on a larger scale.

To me this sounds positive, unlike IKEA which seeks to “remove cultural cues” (Basak, 2021, p. 174) we would now have smaller localised designers and makers producing objects that reflect who they are, and where they come from. Suddenly the customer can choose from a variety of objects, each with their own *genus loci*. In combination with modern logistic capabilities, manufacturing tools and sustainable practices, the cost of these objects could remain accessible if the new value of these changes is socially accepted.

I am talking from an European perspective, although I don't see why this wouldn't be applicable beyond the EU, and perhaps it already is. There are currently many

initiatives funded by the EU that encourage the sharing of cultural knowledge.

Zanat, A Bosnian furniture brand is a good example of this very model. Traditionally they focused on hand carved furniture. Now they successfully operate in the current market but have managed to retain their carved aesthetic by making it their signature look “though everything has changed production wise, the carving tools and techniques have remained the same and that work takes the same amount of time it always did” (Dunmall, 2021, p. 169)

Zanat produces some elements in a batch production system and executes some by hand. I think this hybrid approach is the most effective.

This also goes some way in alleviating the classic problem of cost. Unfortunately it does not do away with it entirely. In an ideal world I would like my pieces to be available to as many people as possible. However given the time associated with hand made products, this is often difficult to achieve. This conundrum remains an issue I have yet to satisfactorily resolve.



Result of Process

Process evolution

The final iteration of this project comes at the end of a series of test pieces which were instrumental in the development of my xylographic approach. Therefore I will briefly outline my journey up to this point to provide a little context for my subsequent decisions.

As I mention in the background section (pg7), my relationship to woodblock printing/xylography was mainly through the viewing of prints in galleries. I have done a little carving, and some linocut prints but nothing extensive.

As such, the first challenge became acquiring a new skill to a satisfactory level. This of course doesn't mean mastering the art of woodcut printing but rather getting to a stage where I could produce woodblocks of sufficient scale and complexity that would produce the desired ornamental effect. Practically this meant progressing from single-block prints and working my way up to large multi-block prints.

For these exercise prints I didn't really know what

Figure 5: Work bench, photo by author 2021.

subject to use. I settled on using some photos I had taken and then breaking them down into their basic elements. This made them more suitable for my level of carving ability. I continued in this fashion, slowly increasing the complexity and quantity of layers.

It turned out even this decision would end up being quite transformative. This process taught me how to break down complex photos into printable designs, and gave me an idea of which images are more suitable for this application. It also inspired me to link the subject depicted in the printed image to the object, the surface of which, it would eventually adorn.

Needless to say I quickly realised that yes, there was potential here, and I embarked on my first furniture test.

~

This is the initial process I used to combine xylography and furniture:

1. Design a straightforward chair made from plywood. I made sure the design had plenty of surfaces which could accommodate the carving required to make the print.

2. Break down the design into elements. These would then be cut out of plywood sheets. Plywood being a sheet material made this quite easy. Although I later found birch ply to be quite unpleasant to carve.

3. Choose an image and break it down into colour layers.

4. Trace the colour layers on to individual parts of the chair. (See Fig 5)

5. Carve away areas not meant for inking.

6. Print. I apply colour with an ink roller to the raised un-carved surfaces. These are then pressed onto paper in the correct sequence to create a layered image.

7. Assemble the chair from the various elements (now carved and covered in dry ink), glue and varnish.

This process is quite extensive, and in a way unusual due to the order of the various stages. For example finishing the piece (sanding, cleaning up edges etc.) at the end is quite difficult because I want to retain the carved and inked surfaces as much as possible. This

means any marks made on the wood during the early stages are hard to remove, and the final object very honestly conveys the creative process. Another difficulty with this approach was the inconsistent shape of the woodblocks/chair parts. When printing, each layer has to align with the rest to create the desired image. This is more difficult if each woodblock is a different shape. Printing from say, a backrest, and then a chair leg, meant lots of aligning was required on the fly. Making the normally repeatable printing process quite time consuming and unreliable.

As I mentioned, plywood was not very pleasant to work with. My carving exercises were done using Linden wood, which, by contrast, is soft and beautiful to work with. I chose ply for my first chair project mainly due to its large flat, manufactured form. However in every subsequent experiment I decided to use Linden wood. This greatly improved my carving experience, but added an extra level of complexity. In practice this shift to using solid wood meant adding a few steps to the process just listed, these are:

2b. Consider the design in terms of timber planks, and break it down into these elements.

3b. Cut and glue planks into suitable blocks for carving

(See Fig 14&15).

7b. Cut up wood blocks back into the designed furniture components prior to assembly.

These extra stages definitely further complicated the process, however, they also uncovered an exciting new aesthetic. Now I had to consider the woodblock and the chair separately and then cut up the former to make the latter. This meant the semi-coherent carvings were even more jumbled and produced a far more interesting composition when assembled as furniture.

I also tried producing secondary prints from the jumbled but not yet assembled carved pieces, this again produced a very interesting result (See Fig 13). A sort of halfway print between the initial image and the final object. It was in these moments, when I was experimenting, taking risks and just letting the process guide me, that I think the project really began to come into its own. In every iteration of this process I added a new idea, or identified what worked and what didn't. The final piece of furniture, which I will discuss shortly, may not necessarily be the best but it will hopefully showcase these lessons and again teach me something new about the potential of this approach.



Result of Process

Design Development

In the previous section I outline my approach in a sequential manner. Here I will present the objects I have made in the development stages throughout the last two semesters.

1. Test Prints

These exercises in xylography were initially just personal litmus tests. I needed to know if I actually could do the practical aspects of woodblock printing and more importantly if I enjoyed the process.



Figure 6 & 7: First exercise carvings using Linden wood (top). Black and white Bull print, the image was derived from a photo by the author. 2021. For Original see appendix 2.0



2. Swedish Chair - Plywood

The production of this chair is described in the previous section (pg 38-39). The subject of the print was quite simply the view from my window. At this stage the meaning behind the image was not my main focus. I was still establishing the practicalities of the process.

Reflection:

The plywood chair was a good starting point, however it combined the woodblocks with the design in too simple a manner. The result wasn't greater than the sum of its parts, the carved surfaces were too isolated in relation to the geometry of the chair. But as a stepping stone it proved very useful.

Figure 5 nicely illustrates the different colour layers used in the print. The back is the blue layer for the sky, the yellow on the leg is the facade of a building and so on.

Figure 8: Photo of the Swedish Chair, Birch plywood. Photo by author. 2021.



3. Mountain Stool - Linden wood

For this experiment I decided to go back to using wood, as I had done in my first printing tests. It is a much more pleasant material to work with in comparison to plywood.

I also decided to carve on both sides and basically edge to edge. The result was that the stool I made from this block was entirely covered in carvings and ink. This was much more successful and showed the beginnings of an interesting aesthetic.

Reflection:

This was a big step in terms of proving that this process can produce original and to a degree functional results. The main take away was that the final object is more striking when the carving covers the majority of the surface and is deliberately shuffled around. Furthermore, the abstract nature of the print also works better as ornament. The next test will be to repeat the process with a more ambitious/complex piece of furniture and print.

Figure 9: Photo of the Mountain Stool, Linden wood, with corresponding landscape print in the background. Photo by author. 2021.



4. Apuan Chair - Linden wood

The main development here was the considered use of colour. This added a whole new aesthetic, and gave the final object more depth. It also highlighted the layered nature of the printing process when seen in conjunction with the print.

The abstract nature of the printed image was chosen to further fragment the resulting ornamental aesthetic when applied to the chair. This was a decision made after reflecting on the successful nature of the semi abstract print used in the production of the Mountain Stool.

Another innovation here was the idea to cut out some areas (post print) to create negative space within the design.

Reflection:

I have learned which elements I think work well, such as: The use of negative space, a more planar design with regards to the form of the furniture and a certain level of abstraction when relating to the print. There is an interesting juxtaposition between a reclaimed material

Figure 10: Photo of the Apuan chair and print.
Photo by author. 2021.



feeling and a very prescribed graphical aesthetic. The former is apparent at a glance and encourages closer inspection, upon which the latter more considered elements of the ornamentation become apparent. This is further heightened if viewed in conjunction with the print. The viewer is encouraged to work through the process and is taken on a journey from two, to three dimensions and back again.

Figure 11: Photo of the Apuan Chair, Linden wood, Texture and negative space detail. Photo by author. 2021.



5. Pub bench - Linden wood

For this last experiment I have chosen to produce a bench. This felt like a natural evolution in scale and complexity from my previous pieces. A bench is also a communal object which relates to the chosen context.

The print is my interpretation of the contemporary, Czech, rural drinking culture.

Reflection:

The main focus for this piece was to unify the subject of the print with the function and context of the furniture. This resulted in spending far too long on the design of the image and not as much time on the bench itself.

An area which needs improving is the furniture-ness of the final object. This is achieved by attention to detail, ergonomics and form. I hope to consider these more thoroughly in my final piece.

I am pleased that I managed to complete this ambitiously large piece and that I overcame the printing challenges that arose.

Figure 12: Photo of the Pub Bench, Linden wood, with corresponding landscape print in the background. Photo by author. 2021.



What I think worked particularly well were the abstract prints. These were produced halfway through the process. After I cut up the blocks into their components, but before the assembly. They have a unique unprescribed abstract nature. One which I would not be able to manufacture deliberately. They straddle the space between the more literal image and the final piece of furniture. I like the main print as well but that result was more or less in line with my expectations.

Again the joy of this process has been discovering new exciting results through experimentation.

Figure 13: Photo of the Pub Bench, Linden wood, with corresponding abstract print in the background. Photo by author. 2021.

Result of Process

The Kredenc

I have explained my conceptual research, and shown the journey of the ideas and themes inherent to this final piece from conception to implementation.

The development process for this final piece was similar to the one describe earlier (pg 38-41), this time, more than ever, I tried to implement my “three elements” method: Context inspires the subject of the print, which adorns the furniture, which itself is designed to fit in the context.

In addition to this I also deliberately focused on producing more furniture related details. For example, choosing to panel the doors, and have a working drawer. This was a contrast to my previous prototypes, as these were much simpler in their construction.

This was meant to pull my design more towards furniture and further away from art. I am still trying to find this balance but it is interesting to investigate how this affects the perception of the object. More on this in my Discussion and Reflection section (pg 68).

Figure 14 & 14: Process photo of carved Alder woodblocks, before printing. Woodblocks post print. Photos by author, 2022.





Another shift towards furniture is the more prominent non-carved components. Again, in past prototypes there was little to no extra material being used to make the furniture. I decided to bring this element to the fore for both aesthetic and conceptual reasons. First the black ebonised oak acts as a sort of framing device, allowing the complex ornaments to become more defined by contrast. Second, as I mentioned previously (pg 35) I am interested in making hybrid furniture, where some aspects can be made using manufacturing processes, while others are hand carved.

The inspiration for this type of furniture comes from a specific Kredenc, which I have discussed in the Approach: Furniture Proposal Section (pg 23). From a practical perspective it is therefore quite similar, and comprises of 4 main elements:

1. At the base there is a deep cupboard for storing pots and pans, accessible via double hinged doors.
2. Above there is a large drawer for cutlery and other cooking utensils.
3. Then follows the solid oak work surface.
4. And lastly a thinner top cupboard, again with twin doors, which sits atop a raised oak shelf (See Fig 19).

Figure 16: Process photo of oak frame for the Kredenc, prior to ebonising, a process where oak is naturally dyed black. Photo by author, 2022.



Once I decided upon the Kitchen as the context I began to consider what images I wanted to carve. Naturally food was at the forefront of my mind. But similarly to my story about baking with my Grandma I wanted to evoke food and the experiences that food enables us to have.

This led me to produce my Proustian Print Series which takes 5 strong memories relating to food, or food adjacent experiences and converts them into graphic images. (See Appendix 3.0-3.3)

The idea was that as fragments of these prints catch my eye, while I use the kredenc, fond memories are conjured in my mind. This raises my appetite and hopefully creates a pleasant, positive and inspired cooking experience. These memories are also personal and therefore generate a connection between me and the piece of furniture. The development of this was covered in the Approach: The function of ornament section (pg19).

I will present one example of Proustian print which I refer to as "Buchty". When making these prints I didn't write down my memory and then produce a print instead I let the images in my mind's eye dictate that

Figure 17: Final photo of the Kredenc, detail.
Photo by author, 2022.



process. However to illustrate the kind of narratives that could be turned into images I have written out this memory to be seen alongside the print:

The story behind this print is the most relevant to the Kredenc. It comes from the same kitchen, in the same cottage. It relates to the baking I used to do with my Grandma. This particular treat "Buchty", a classic Czech recipe, was my favourite. Even today when I whip up a batch the smell of slightly sour dough, lemon zest and sweet curd reminds me of my Grandma, and all the important lessons she passed on, baking being one of them.

The remaining 4 prints can be found in the Appendix 3.0-3.3, each with its own corresponding memory.

Figure 18: Woodcut print by Author, Buchty, from the Proustian Memories series, Sweden, 2022.



Discussion and Reflection

I will start my reflection by considering the questions I posed during this project. The first question I answered is "How does the incorporation of woodcut printing into furniture design affect its production, and how can this change be used positively?" I think I have been successful in terms of finding a unique way to include craft into my design. The xylographic process brings traditional carved elements into dialogue with a contemporary piece of furniture, especially present in this last piece.

Judging by the discussion following my exam presentation, and in subsequent conversations, there seems to be an overall interest both in this aesthetic and its future applications. This to me is positive, it indicates a certain level of palatability and scope. The effect of this craft based approach in the industry is a little more difficult to assess without actually producing something in that context. But again no major issues were raised that would indicate that it wasn't possible.

The main comments I received were related to the

Figure 19: Final photo of the Kredenc. Photo by author, 2022.

practical nature of the design, for example, how difficult would the carved surface be to clean, rather than the aesthetic. As I discussed in the Approach; Xylographic Design Method section (pg17), these sorts of practical aspects did not receive as much attention in the development process, the priority was the implementation of xylography. Given that, I understand why these issues were raised, but it would have been nice to discuss the aesthetics more as this to me is the more radical proposition within this project.

I do acknowledge however that the shifting of focus to more practical considerations regarding my furniture is definitely the next step. I briefly discussed this with my opponent during the presentation. He seemed very keen for me to pursue this direction, stating that this is the next logical step in terms of transferring this idea from an artistic perspective into a design one.

By doing so he answered my question, "How can I use this process to make viable, desirable products". I now see that the balance of the craft and the design elements will play a key role in how viable a product is. It will be an interesting challenge to try and retain the values outlined in this report while being competitive in the field of furniture design.

Desirability is a hard metric to assess, however shortly after my exam presentation I attended Southern Sweden Design Days Fair in Malmö. The result of which was an offer to buy one of my Xylographic pieces. This shows a certain level of real world interest in this type of furniture.

Returning to the matter of production. I have considered ways to manufacture the carving process in a more automated way. The idea of scanning and milling out the carved elements was a method I discussed during my design process and in the presentation. It seems to be the only way of transferring this particular texture into a production friendly process. This however doesn't appeal to me creatively, and undermines some of the concepts set out in this report, but I think it would be interesting to find out whether this is possible. If so it could lead to increased production possibilities and perhaps whole new aesthetic horizons.

I am also open to discussing my process with other furniture companies should they see potential in my project that I may have missed.

This brings me to the last question I posed, "Why does furniture look the way it does today, and what

could changing this entrenched aesthetic mean?" I think my observations regarding the production line, obsolescence, consumer culture etc. Address this question sufficiently. Subsequently, during discussions and in my presentation these assertions have not been questioned to any real degree. On the contrary I have found a general level of agreement among students and tutors alike. This leads me to believe that they are broadly correct, and at the very least resonate with people.

A further question that I received from a member of the audience, during my presentation, and wish to address, challenged my project in an interesting way. The question was "what would Adolf Loos think of my furniture?"

He decried the more extreme trends within furniture of his time, just as I have done of mine. Specifically referring to the meaning represented by the aesthetics of ornament, "Since ornament is no longer organically linked with our culture, it is also no longer the expression of our culture." (Loos, 1931). As is perhaps obvious this quote has been a statement to which I find myself coming back to again and again. So how would he perceive my version of ornament?

I hope that he would see my pieces as extensions of his own ideas about aesthetics. I don't think that the design of objects today is linked to our culture, because so often the design is intended to be a-cultural. Just as he saw the decadent overly flowery aesthetics of his time as a hangover from a pre industrial age. He, like myself, may have seen the current homogeneity of design as a sign to make a departure and try something new.



Conclusion and Result

Finally I would like to reflect on the exhibitions at Steneby Konsthall and in Gothenburg and then on my final piece.

The Steneby exhibition design was a simple one, which I had planned for a while. As can perhaps be perceived from this report my progress through this project has been quite linear. As such I presented these pieces in chronological order, with their corresponding prints displayed above. This not only guided the viewer through my journey but also allowed me to clearly highlight how each iteration feeds into the next.

If I was missing something it was a sense of context. My final piece especially is closely linked with its context, the kitchen, so perhaps trying to present it in this manner would have also been interesting. At the very least I will try and take some photos of it in such a context when the opportunity arises. I think the neutral gallery setting offered by the konsthall further exacerbated the idea that these were more artworks than functional pieces of furniture. Perhaps if there

was more of an effort to present them in an everyday context, maybe just through the way they were lit and with some props, this could have been mitigated.

Overall I was happy with this exhibition layout. And seeing all the prints, and furniture pieces together had a pleasing effect. The colourful aesthetic really stood out in the neutral space and the overall result was one of unity yet complexity.

The Gothenburg exhibition space was more challenging. The location was a greenhouse. This resulted in lots of light but a very busy backdrop. (See Fig 20) By designing a number of free standing walls I was able to give my prints some room to breathe. The furniture however would have to fend for itself. Surprisingly It did just that, the vaguely industrial structure of the greenhouse contrasted with the bright and organic designs. In my opinion the kredenc had sufficient aesthetic power and was not overwhelmed by the difficult context.

To look at the Kredenc more closely, now that I have spent some time with it, I believe it has turned out very well. Given the number of woodblocks I had to make, carve, print and then fashion into furniture I think

the result is surprisingly well finished. There are a few tweaks I wanted to address, adding handles and perhaps a finial detail along the top rim. The latter I managed to add for the Gothenburg exhibition and I think it is a subtle but important improvement. Prior to this the top cupboard just sort of ended on an undefined edge and felt slightly weaker than the rest of the elements. The addition of this top trim strengthened the silhouette and reset the hierarchy of the forms.

With regards to construction, quite early on I made the decision to make the whole piece dis-mountable. It was the correct decision for this particular prototype although to fully represent my ideas of longevity in furniture this would not be the case were it a final piece.

In this decision there was still plenty of design to be considered in order to make it effective. The method of removing the panels is quick and easy and the overall frame can be taken apart relatively quickly. I have now packed and unpacked it a number of times. I can safely say that had I chosen to make it a solid piece the logistics of moving it from one place to another would have been significantly more complex.

Overall I am left with a feeling that my Masters program

has ended with a project that fulfils my reason for taking the course. Which was to develop my own unique approach to furniture. An approach built on solid design ideas, ethics and crucially, an approach with room to grow.

I am excited to take it further and apply all the feedback I have received so far, both from professionals in the industry and from the general public. I am heartened that taking bold aesthetic choices in the field of furniture design has been met with such enthusiasm, and I am eager to continue applying xylographic design ideas to my work.

Thank you,

LP.

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Appendix

Appendix 1.0

Referred to on page 27 in footnote.

Photo by Author, Larch table, Czech Republic, 2018.



Appendix 2.0

Referred to on page 26 & 53, in the main body of text.
Photo by Author, Traditional Czech Kredenc, Czech Republic, 2022.



Appendix 3.0

Referred to on page 65, in the main body of text.
Woodcut print by Author, Roadside dumplings, Sweden, 2022.

This print relates to a time when I was a little hungover in a traffic jam in Beijing. While we sat still among the idling cars, our stomachs rumbling, I noticed lots of drivers just abandoning their vehicles and making their way somewhere between the cars. It was then I noticed a big hole in the wall, on the side of the road, billowing out steam.

This was their destination. In a moment of hunger fueled decisiveness I went to investigate. When I peered through I saw a giant reed basket stuffed with steamed dumplings. In seconds I had a plastic tray of 10 or so thrust in my hands, I paid and before my friends even had time to notice I was back. The best dumplings I have had, and possibly the most unexpected place to find them.



Appendix 3.1

Referred to on page 65, in the main body of text.
Woodcut print by Author, Fresh Fig Feast, Sweden, 2022.

This print relates to a simple yet great meal. I'm lucky enough to have a friend whose family has a house in Italy. Every year a group of us go and hang out there during the summer. Most years the fig season eludes us, but this one time it was perfect.

Balancing on the edge of the pool we were able to pick figs straight from the tree using a long stick with a special hook. We then proceeded to devour them with Gorgonzola, Prosciutto and golden slabs of focaccia soaked in olive oil. All while having great conversations, feeling relaxed and drinking copious amounts of the local red. It doesn't get much better than that.

Tip, you can tell a ripe fig if the bottom is just starting to split open, like thin gold threads stitched into green velvet.



Appendix 3.2

Referred to on page 65, in the main body of text.
Woodcut print by Author, Cheese and toasted roll,
Sweden, 2022.

This print relates to a childhood memory. As kids we used to cycle a lot around our cottage. A particular favourite was a challenging route to a nearby secluded lake. Getting there was always tough. Bumpy forest paths, a few fords, or worse if the rivers broke their banks, and at the end a steep hill. But the promise of what awaited kept us going. Lying beneath a beautiful old farm house there was a lake sheltered by tall trees. One where we could swim, have a fire and play cards (and in my case recover. I was not a natural cyclist back then).

The journey is an important prelude, because the actual food is very basic. A pack of processed soft cheese eaten straight from the foil in one hand, and a toasted (charred for the easily distracted) "rohlik", a classic Czech roll in the other. One bite from the left, one from the right. The sunshine, hunger and sense of adventure makes this humble fireside snack a Proustian moment to which I return to fondly. It's also just bloody nice, if you're in the Czech Rep. I encourage you to replicate it.



Appendix 3.3

Referred to on page 65, in the main body of text.
Woodcut print by Author, Oyster bay oysters, Sweden,
2022.

This print relates to my first, and so far only trip to America. Me and my younger brother were visiting our older brother in San Francisco. Part of our stay was a road trip along the West coast, up North to Lassen Volcanic National Park. On the first day with a good few hours driving behind us we made, to us, an unexpected stop. Lunch, we were told, was over that dune.

As we mounted a low dune a deep blue estuary came into view. A few huts packed with boxes full of ice sat almost in the water, beyond them, nets and nets of oysters sparkled under the beating sun. This was my first experience of this briny dish and I can't imagine a better introduction. I forgot to mention, my brother had a bottle of chilled Champagne stashed in the boot of the Mustang, the vehicle of choice for our American road trip. Good times.