

Creative exploration.....exploring Creativity

with Armure Studios

Anyone with the basic skills of a process can create something of merit. Making that object into something which demands attention requires elaborate technical skills, dumb luck, or a combination of both. Creating objects which constantly stand out for their inherent characteristics demands much more than just basic technical skills – it takes a “vision” of how the viewer will view, react, and respond to the work.

Where do ideas come from? How do you create an original work?

How do you go beyond what you have already done? These are very good questions which get asked by people new to any field, and even many who are experienced workers. Interestingly enough, the answer is much the same no matter what field you are involved with. The following is a guideline to facilitate a greater flexibility for idea generation.

It is no accident that some people find it easier to generate original concepts where others find it very difficult. The first factor is that you must provide yourself the necessary skills and equipment, particularly intellectual skills and equipment. This sounds like a difficult thing to do but it is actually very easy. This paper discusses nineteen things you can do to prepare yourself for the creation of fresh and original works.

It is not necessary to use all of the ideas presented, but you should consider having at least half of them as part of your regular daily life. These are not things you do at special times, it is important that you develop the ability to include these activities into your regular routine. The ideas are presented in random order; they are all of equal importance. The ideas you select and how you work with them is what makes your work special and unique.

The division of ideas is a bit arbitrary. You may find that many of the concepts seem similar and overlap. The divisions of ideas to make specific points. Mix and match to your own needs.

1) Notation

Every technique and skill has its own documented language or notation. Some document ideas in a verbal or coded manner while others document through diagrams or drawings. Being able to read, understand and write in the specific notation is vital for good communication of ideas. For weavers they have the draft, beaders work from diagrams and charts. Musicians use scores and architects employ blueprints. Notation permits the transfer of information without the creation of an actual work. It also permits experimentation without having to use valuable materials.

Spinners have a technical language which describes the direction and degree of twist at each stage of yarn construction, the diameter of each of the singles and the combined yarns, etc. They understand the materials with which they are working and that all wools are not created equal. The difference between a fleece from a Lincoln sheep is significantly different from that of a Merino. Flax, silk, cotton in each of their forms conveys information about the yarn design. Tow flax will yield a different yarn than line. Like most fields, description of colours is not consistent – unless one were to resort to hexadecimal codes. There are terms to describe novelty and art yarns, but these are subject to local variations.

2) Known Concepts

Weaving:

Expand your knowledge of weave structures. As you become familiar with these structures and you allow your mind to wonder you will find yourself asking the question “I wonder what would happen if I were to.....?” This will lead to new and variations of familiar structures. This is often a good exercise to play with a study group. Don’t forget to work with the concepts of colour, texture and density changes with all know weave structures.

Garments:

By studying construction techniques used in the garments in your wardrobe and in stores, expand your knowledge of the wide variety of techniques for the construction of a garment. Note especially the major features of the style. Consider how the use of darts, sleeve attachment, construction details and hem length work together to affect the overall look and hang of a garment. Check the technical drawings of garments in the pattern catalogues – especially the out of print and historic designs.

Beading:

There are many familiar concepts on how beads can be joined together and used. The number of creators who manipulate these concepts provide numerous concepts for you to work with. The more of these concepts that you can work with the easier it is to develop original ideas. Spend time looking at how beads have been used in an object. Observe not only the totality of an object, but how its components work together to make it work.

Spinning:

Known concepts for spinning include understanding the physical properties of the fibres with which you are working. This helps the spinner to create the best yarn for the end purpose. Blending fibres just because you can does not always make sense.

3) Technique as stimuli

In any endeavour, there are traditional ways of working. The way the teacher told you do it. We are now accepting that people approach tasks from different views. When you take the aspects of one technique and apply them to a different technique you may find something that you would never have thought of. Especially when things are just not working out the way you hoped, what happens when you turn it upside down?

Weaving:

There are many interesting techniques, which can be applied to any weave structure. Some examples would include, Italian treadling, Honeycomb, Swivel weave, etc. Although these techniques are frequently associated with specific weave structures, exploring the possibilities on unlikely structures can produce exciting results.

Garment:

Garment construction techniques may be the stepping off point to the design of a garment. An understanding of the design principles involved in the construction is necessary for the successful use of these techniques. Garment concepts such as pleats, cowls, yokes, pockets, and

waistline features are examples. Understanding the simple principles of Garment Pattern Making allow you to take a garment pattern and change it into what you really want.

Spinning:

Once the spinner understands the variety of yarn constructions, the combinations appear endless. Yarns may be simple 1-ply, 2-ply or multiple ply, or they may draw on industrial constructions such as marl, slub, loop, gimp, or inlay. Matching or mismatching diameters, degrees of twist, directions of twist, and exploring different materials help to expand the spinner's repertoire. Again, keep in mind how the final yarn will be used. A lovely, lofty yarn may not be suitable for sweater cuffs or other garment pieces that receive lots of abrasion.

4) Materials as Stimulus

Weaving:

Frequently, when we are at our suppliers we find a material that is too interesting for words. These are most commonly novelty or luxury yarns. Allowing these materials to suggest what should be done with them is a valid method of designing. When working from materials don't forget to look in other sources than weaving suppliers. I have found wonderful materials in electrical and hardware stores.

Garment:

A trip to a good fabric supplier may be the inspiration of a multitude of garments. The 'design' of a fabric may speak of particular garment. Animal prints immediately speak of form fitting jumpsuits; delicate floral prints suggest gently flowing garments with lace or piping accents. Strong geometric patterns become distorted by stitching lines that would limit their success in extreme tailored garments. It is not necessary to follow the "language" of the cloth, but you should be aware of the interaction of the cloth and construction techniques. Colour may also limit or heighten the drama of a particular garment.

The "texture or hand" of the cloth may also suggest the silhouette or style of the garment. A sturdy tabby weave in a heavy wool will not function well in a free flowing evening or cocktail dress, but will create the ultimately sophisticated tailored coat, jacket or skirt. Light draping materials work well in loosely structured garments. They may also be used in more constructed garments through the use of interfacings or under-linings. Be aware of how a fabric is going to react in stress areas and techniques that will compensate for the stability of the garment.

SAMPLE before beginning all but preliminary designing.

Beading:

Every time a beader finds a new source they know they are in trouble. Every new bead opens up new possibilities. It is important to listen to your materials to find out what they are best suited for. Don't limit yourself to the immediate suggestion but use that as a point of departure. For don't forget that anything with a hole is a potential bead. Keep your eyes open and you will discover that the world is full of wonderful beads that are not in a bead store.

Spinning:

Go to the yarn store! Industry spends lots of money developing new yarn structures, and while not all of them readily adapt to handspinning, analysing commercial yarns can open new possibilities.

5. Equipment

It is important to have the provide yourself with the best equipment. If you can't afford a particularly expensive piece of equipment work with your guild to get it. The quality of the your equipment directly effects what you produce. The limits, due to the design, of a particular piece of equipment will change how you think about the design of your work. Changing your equipment or working with a colleague's equipment can change your thinking. By the way, beautiful handmade equipment is a joy to touch and work with. That joy is transferred into the work produced.

Weaving:

The availability of specific equipment can frequently cause you to think of your design in a specific way. If you have a four-shaft counterbalance loom as opposed to a sixteen-shaft dobby loom you will naturally think differently about the design of the work you are producing. Your equipment sets limits, but push those limits as far as you can. Most important – don't forget you can replace equipment if it will not accomplish what you want.

Garment:

You will think differently about the garments you make if you have a serger or embroidery machine. Having Knitting loom knitting will allow you to create panels or trims, ultimately affecting the overall design of your garments.

Beading:

Beading boards, pin boards, needles and beading wire, are but a few pieces of equipment, which will have an effect on what, you produce. Blunt needles are sometimes good, but when you need a sharp be sure that you have one. Working with the wrong equipment is very frustrating. When it comes to bead looms, I have many. Each is good for different purposes. For some types of bead weaving, I will make myself a new loom for each project.

Spinning:

Understanding how your spinning wheel works is critical, and keeping it in good working order (oiled, proper driveband, etc.) is essential. All wheels do not perform all tasks equally well, so learn your wheel's strengths and limitations. Learn to use the spindle in its various sizes for different purposes.

6) From Drawings

One of the best methods for developing strong ideas is by drawing and painting natural things which excite you. Flowers, birds, fish, landscapes, etc. all make for excellent sources of information. Nature has fabulous colours and patterns for us to work with. By imposing your technical knowledge on these images you will have an unlimited source of projects. Keep in mind that you are not drawing and painting to hang on the wall. You are drawing to exercise

your powers of observation, so that you can apply the rhythms, colours, patterns, structures and textures to your work.

But you can't draw you say. Do something about that. Also think about the fact that not all drawing is figurative. The simplest scribble can be the beginning of something incredible. An entire picture does not have to be used in a composition. Look at images with a viewfinder to find new variations of your design. Books like *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* can help you develop *image creation tools* as opposed to pure drafting skills.

Cameras are another good way to develop your appreciation of nature's delights. Shape, pattern, colour and form are the stepping off points for a great deal of designing. The camera, although a wonderful tool, is still second to actual drawing.

Spinning:

Use sketches or photographs to inspire your use of colour and texture.

Garments:

Schiaparelli was inspired by a multitude of things around her. A shoe for a hat, the circus for embroideries and buttons on her suits. It has been said that Christian Dior based his New Look Fashions of 1947 on his cutting sheers, and the sloping shoulders, sleeves "cut in one" with the bodice, flaring skirt and nipped-in waist have always reminded me of those open scissors standing open on their points.

7) Experimental Sampling

Weaving:

This is one of the simplest and yet most complex methods of developing new fabrics. In the hand-woven industry a common method of experimenting is by using a plain warp of a fashion trend colour or texture, and working with a variety of materials in striped and patterned wefts. The successful designs are then 'turned' for production purposes. Playing with a leftover warp or giving yourself a warp to 'play with' can lead to exciting variations. A basic rule in weaving is to sample, sample, sample. The more you play the higher the probability you will develop something wonderful.

Garment:

Quarter and half scale garments are a quick and inexpensive method of exploration in fashion design. Full size muslins should be done for all garments before beginning final construction. "Draping" techniques may also be used to create specific styles. Often a 'fitted' sheath, inner garment is first constructed to fit and then fabric (or initially paper) pieces may be pinned or basted into place. Folds, cowls, sashes, etc. may be added and stitching lines cut and marked. These pieces are then taken off, opened and traced to paper, seam allowances and construction marks of balance points are added to create pattern pieces for final construction.

Beading:

Play with your beads. Allow colours, shapes and sizes to tell you how they should be used, but then see what happens when you start to put them together. If it doesn't work, you can always take it apart and try again. BUT if you don't try it, you will never know.

Spinning:

Sample your yarn and then work into a sample large enough that it will tell you something about the properties (hand, drape, resilience, etc.) of the fabric. Skimpy samples may mislead you. Be sure the sample using the technique you plan to employ in your project.

Participate in guild challenges. Set some challenges for yourself whether it be to work from some supplies that have been too long in the cupboard or work with colours you prefer to avoid or fibres you dislike

8) Colour studies:

Playing with colour is an adventurous way to develop new designs. A great method is to use leftovers to develop your appreciation of colour. This can be done by exploring your source of colour whether it be the dye pot, the spinning wheel, the interlacement of fibres or even scrapes left over from previous projects or simply having fun with materials at hand. It might be good to have some children to help you; they don't have your hang-ups. Colour is a design element, it just a GIANT element. Whatever your media it is important to discover how colour works in your chosen field. The study of colour theory is helpful as there is much about colour that has been codified by many of the great theorists of the past. But bottom line, it is experience which will ultimately help you. The concepts listed here are just the beginning of the possibilities.

Weaving:

Most weavers are familiar with the creation of (warp) reelings. They are simply the wrapping of different colours and textures of yarn around a piece of card to mimic the effects of some visual stimuli. Very few weavers use these reelings to full potential. (Warp) reelings can be developed from any natural source; flowers, plants, rocks, or landscapes. You can work from nature or photographs, to different results. Other good subjects are favoured art works, music, personalities, flavour of foods or anything, which can be described with words. The verbal description of your subject becomes the visual description of the cloth you are designing. By increasing your weave theory knowledge you will have greater versatility in the interpretation of these reelings. Not everything, which is in the reeling need by in the warp. Save some of the elements for use in the weft.

Garment:

Colour relationships become very important in garments. The success of failure of a piece relates not only to the structure but the colour story.

The proportion and relationship of colour will either create a harmonious feeling or dramatic contrast. Particular fashion designers have been recognized for their use of colour, Perry Ellis and Chanel are but two. It is important to have a good understanding of colour theory and to use it effectively. Create a total image. Keeping it simple at first is particularly important. As you gain a better understanding of the use of colour be experimentation you will naturally use it more effectively in your work. "Good Old Mom Nature" provides many excellent examples of colour and textural interaction.

Play with quantity and quality of colour, intensity, and value to create a colour story. The effects of piping, facings, top stitching, welts, etc. can and often do, make or break the outcome of a garment.

“Piecing Studies” are an easy way to test colour combinations. Samplers allow for longer-term study of the colour experiment. Saving these allows you to return to a successful colour story at a later date.

Beading:

Beaders have some unique issues to deal with when it comes to colour. Beads come in a wide range of colour, size and texture, as well as opaque, transparent, opalescent, metallic, iridescent, etc. Each type of bead provides new challenges when it comes to colour. Many of the transparent beads seem to disappear when put side by side. Opaque beads can seem to jump out from a bed of translucent beads. It is vital that small projects be undertaken to test the behaviour of each type of bead before you use them in a major project. We are back to sample, sample, sample.

Spinning:

Spinners have the advantage of playing with colour from the very beginning of a project. They can control quality of the colour by using a clear colour; changing the yarn to heather tones, or adding noils or streaks of various sizes and colours. Another seemingly infinite range of choices!

9) Outside Source as stimulus

The challenge of commission work often leads you in new directions. Working with clients has many inherent challenges. There are a series of given expectations, expressed by the client. You have to analyze the client’s needs and develop a design, which satisfies both you and the client. Many of the methods discussed here can be employed in the development of the design but they differ in as much as the basic source of information comes from outside you. Clients notoriously want something of you that you have never thought of before, but that it the fun.

10) Collaboration

Wonderful situations arise when you are working with another designer on a collaborative project. Although this is similar to commission work, it differs in as much as there is no design idea at the beginning. Collectively, through discussion and compromise a design concept emerges. In a good collaboration, it is impossible to identify exactly what each has done on the project. By the sharing of ideas and enthusiasms the project evolves.

Spinning:

Working with a weaver, knitter, basket maker or other designer can help open new possibilities and increase understanding of yarn attributes for different purposes.

Garment:

Having the skills to spin, dye, weave, design and construct a final garment limits the success of the project to the weakest of your skills. Why try?

Again Schiaparelli didn't do it all. Her embroiderers presented rough outlines and samples but then had free range to create. The same with textiles designers. She used painters to design many of her more elaborate costumes. Each person in the collaboration will need to be "paid" for what they do, but it does not have to be in dollars, if you are creative in your collaborations.

11) Based on Existing Goods

Keep your eyes open for interesting work. By analysis and adapting to your area of endeavour you can often create exciting new designs. There is no need to re-invent the wheel, it is only important that you make it better.

The work of Other Designers:

The use of other designers as a source of stimulus can be an exciting method of working. This is not to be confused with copying. The designer you are looking at does not have to be in your field at all. Architecture, automobiles, printed textiles or glassware may all provide the needed spark to get you going. The inspiration of another's may cause you to create your own "reaction" to their work. If you are lucky enough to know the designer who has stimulated you it is fun to show them what you did with the idea and challenge them to go a further step with the concept.

Historical Stimulus:

The study of design history, whether your specific field or in general, can provide a great wealth of ideas for designers. Historic design in all its forms, from buildings through ceramic vessels, will provide even more ideas. There is very little that is really new. Adaptations to either "traditional" or "specific eras" are a strong starting point for the designer. There is good reason why we keep seeing work, which is described as "retro". You could say, "Everything old is new again".

Spinners:

Be inspired by the work of other cultures. What the Egyptians accomplished with a spindle and some cotton was magnificent!

Garment:

There have been a number of exhibitions and publications recently that explore embellishment and design elements in costume. These are a great stimuli for your own work. Details are what sets the fabulous apart from the fad.

12) Books and Magazines

Keeping current with the developments in design, both in your field and publications on design specific or general will provide a wealth of visual stimulus. "Picture books" on gardening, architecture, theatre, etc. all ripe for selecting ideas to work with.

13) From Original Concepts

Working from a concept is when you have an idea of a look or theme that you want to base your design upon. This idea can be concrete or abstract. It frequently comes from an issue or concern,

which you have, and you want to express your thoughts. The challenge is to hold onto the basic concept as you apply specific designing techniques to accomplish your final design.

Spinners:

Use colours from images to fuel your designs. Yarns can also reflect a feeling or attitude.

Garment:

Many of the garments classed as “wearable art” derive from a concept or expression of feeling. Though in the case of designer fashion shows they are intended to create interest and publicity for the design house and may appear in retail lines in modified forms more acceptable to the general public.

14) Image/Style

Image or style is when you are trying to develop something with a specific feeling. You may wish to make a particular statement. Style speaks of a series of elements that together create something in the viewer's mind. Think of art nouveau, art deco, modernism, surrealism, Memphis, etc. It is rare that we want to repeat these styles but we may be interested in giving a new twist or variation. Once more the more awareness you have the stronger you are as a designer.

Good design is always fashionable. Classic elements of design appear over and over again through history. We are seeing strong influences in domestic architecture for Arts & Crafts elements, but elements of Elizabethan buildings often find themselves on homes that are not always visually successful, especially when a large number of houses all cluster with the same boring elements repeated one after another.

Thankfully fads tend to last for very short periods of time. Classic styles are never really out of fashion. A classic Chanel Suit from the mid 1920's or the 1950's would still illustrate the well dressed woman today.

15) Live Life

Live life, don't spend all your time observing. If you must observe – PAY ATTENTION. Experience as much as you can. Travel, go to the theatre, the movies, the museum, and galleries. Go window-shopping at the best of stores. Don't miss the parade. Do some charity work. Bottom line; get involved. The greater your life experiences the better designer you will be.

16) Design Tools and Toys

There are many tools and toys you can use to exercise your design mind. For example, I collect Kaleidoscopes, which stimulates my interest in repeat design. I even have one that is an attachment for my camera. I have also collected other types of optical devices which break-up the visual world in new and exciting ways. Keep your eyes open for devices which can help you with your vision.

17) Inspiration

This is the ultimate catchall. As you start to work with the techniques outlined here, you will start to find that ideas are conjured in your head for no apparent reason. The idea seems to have no

reason for existing other than your own imagination. Don't complain, if you like the results, keep it up.

This type of thing starts after you have been busy with the thoughts 1 –15. You have been feeding your subconscious and it is finally working for you. Some people like to call this intuitive or spontaneous, when in reality it is just from your subconscious mind. If you keep feeding your mind then it will do wonderful work for you.

18) Workshops, Seminars, etc.

You can never know too much, learning new thoughts and ways of doing things is always a good thing. When you go to a session, if you come away with one new thought or idea then it was worthwhile. Be sure to go to other media presentations not just the one you are involved with. I have learned so much for other disciplines. What is a mystery in one area is known ideas in a different area, take in all you can.

19) Guilds and other social groups

Your colleagues are an endless source of information, on the assumption that they are at the guild for the same reason you are there. A guild is a place to share thoughts, ideas, problems. You learn from your involvement with others. It is important that you participate with your guild not just go to meetings. In a period of three years you need to take on some responsibility with the guild, in is vital that you don't just take from the group, you must give. My favourite line from the 'King and I', "When you become a teacher, from your pupils you will be taught". This is one of my guiding concepts, please make it yours.