

# Art teaching and development of visual reading: use of textile printing in high school<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract<sup>3</sup>

The present study is based on the importance of the process of reading and analyzing artistic and textile visual works for the comprehensive development of students. Our procedures were firstly based on the conceptual framework proposed by Abigail Housen, which states that the process of reading visual languages involve basic development stages, namely narrative, constructive, classifying, interpretative, and re-creative – where the latter indicates the student has acquired and consolidated skills of conscious reading. This framework was combined with the triangular approach developed by Ana M. Barbosa in terms of the need to contextualize, make, and appraise art works. To make a deeper observation of the aesthetic-artistic process, we analyzed visual readings of artistic and textile prints by students and teachers of art and fashion collected in a school environment from 2014 to 2015 and guided by the basic question: “What do you see in this print?”. Thus, we observed the coherence of Housen’s stages of aesthetic development and the need for Barbosa’s triangulation, but we highlight the need and the didactic-pedagogical importance of developing image reading in the context of visual literacy as a way to promote collective expression, discussion and reflection and as an essential process for the development of aesthetic and artistic learning, which we believe leads students’ awareness of themselves, of others, and of the world - the basis for thinking autonomously. Thus it promotes the student’s development as a critical subject and citizen, as indicated by new literature findings.

## Keywords

*Art teaching – Image reading – Aesthetic appraisal – Textile printing – Abigail Housen.*

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## Introduction

This paper was based on the master's dissertation entitled "Printing in Art-Education" (2016) presented to and approved by the Graduate Program in Textiles and Fashion, School of Arts and Human Sciences, Universidade de São Paulo Leste ( Programa de Pós-Graduação Têxtil e Moda, Escola de Artes e Ciências Humanas [PPGTM-EACH], USP-Leste). This dissertation described a case study conducted from 2013 to 2015 to investigate and analyze the process of learning about prints in high school art classes at a public state technical school in São Paulo (Escola Técnica Estadual, Etec). One of the focus of this graduate program is image reading, i.e., decoding and visual criticism of textile prints. In order to analyze the particularities of this way of aesthetic understanding, a preliminary investigation was conducted with 48 subjects<sup>4</sup> (high school and college students, artists, teachers, and professionals, all involved in the field of arts and fashion), who analyzed and interpreted five different textile prints. These interpretations were studied and classified into the five stages of aesthetic understanding proposed by Abigail Housen (2011), an American psychiatrist who works at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).

The leading questions of this research were: is it possible to use a theory of image reading and classification of viewers of works of art to analyze the aesthetic interpretation of textile prints? How can we develop a methodological process of image reading for patterned art? What are the differences between the appraisal of patterned art and that of conventional art images?

The reasoning for studying this topic lies on the need to understand the learning processes in textile and fashion, reinforced by the scarcity of specialized literature, resulting from the fact that it is an emerging field of research. Thus, this study aimed to analyze how viewers interpret print fabric using the five-stage classification of aesthetic understanding proposed by Housen. For this purpose, we intended to apply and adapt conceptual categories of this classification to categorize viewers into the learning stages as defined by the above author. We avoided considering these stages as overly rigid classifications and sought to understand the characteristics and trends of visual readings, thus providing grounds for analyses that contribute to the development of teaching and learning on this topic.

We referred to pedagogy fundamentals of the triangular approach as proposed by Ana Mae Barbosa and improved our analysis by expanding our literature base to pedagogical and psychopedagogical works that provided the theoretical framework for the present study, such as those by Freire (1997), Dewey (2010), Piaget (2012), Freinet (KANAMARU, 2014). Art teaching framework was based on works by Perkins (1994), Eisner (2008), Hernández (2011), Agirre Arriaga (2013), Perkins (1994), Eisner (2008). A literature review of these works pointed concepts that supported out analysis and theoretical considerations.

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**4-** Interviews with research subjects followed ethical principles, meaning that participants' consent was obtained and their anonymity was guaranteed.

## Triangular Approach

This investigation results from an effort to combine theories on art and aesthetics with image reading, which is still an emerging field in Brazil, at least concerning its conceptual and theoretical reflection.

One of these theories is the *triangular approach*. Since the 1990s, this pedagogical theory has been used in art teaching in Brazilian schools. Its conception consists of constructing art knowledge based on image reading (analysis, evaluation, and visual decoding), artistic practice (work creation and production), and contextualization (art information and history). Since the triangular approach has a broad nature, Brazilian art educators use this approach in the teaching of different contents (even music and theater), because it is possible to explore, interpret, and operate any visual and aesthetic content through triangular approach, including print textile art (ARAÚJO; OLIVEIRA, 2015).

This approach is also known triangular methodology and triangular proposal, although Barbosa prefers the term triangular approach. She considered the other terms to be inadequate, because a methodology is made by the teacher and the term fell into disuse due to its overuse in school curricula vertically imposed to educators.

The triangular methodology was first mentioned in the book *A Imagem no Ensino da Arte*, published in 1991 (BARBOSA, 2005). However, the update to the term *triangular approach* occurred only in the 7th edition of the work. This update was motivated by criticisms relating the term to elitism, which are unjustified in Barbosa's opinion.

In addition to epistemological triangulation, the triangular approach was mostly influenced by *Escuelas Al Aire Libre* in Mexico, *Critical Studies* in England and particularly by *Discipline-Based Arts Education* (DBAE) in the United States (ARAÚJO; OLIVEIRA, 2015).

Barbosa also combined European and American artistic concepts – previously hegemonic in the Museum of Contemporary Art, Universidade de São Paulo (MAC-USP) – with Brazilian popular culture, broadening the concept of museum art. Convinced to work with education by the educator Paulo Freire, Barbosa obtained a bachelor's degree in law at his insistence, because he believed that the hermeneutical skills acquired in law school would help her in other areas. Changing her field of study to art and education in her master's and PhD degrees, she met Paulo Freire again in the defense of her qualifying thesis for a position as a tenured professor (*livre-docência*) at USP. In this occasion, he restated the importance of hermeneutical skills that Barbosa brought from art to art teaching. Her qualifying thesis analyzing the triangular approach was later published under the title *A Imagem no Ensino da Arte* (Image in Art Teaching) (BARBOSA, 2005).

Considering this triangular approach, the present research aims to make a reflection about print learning based on the three aspects involved in this approach: interpretation, artistic practice, and contextualization.

It is worth emphasizing that the triangular approach deals with the entire visual culture and not only with art, covering design and thus surface design and textile printing. With the development of Movement of Little School of Arts and Little Art School of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro in the 1940s and 1950s (which was extended to São Paulo and several cities), students were already familiar with design, especially in the 1960s. They went to

Rua Augusta, a high fashion at that time, to analyze material, cutting, practicality, and price and redesigned garments according to their tastes and needs. Students analyzed visual street culture and made their own graphic interpretations based on this visual understanding (BARBOSA; CUNHA, 2010).

Currently, there are widely disseminated methodologies for teaching art, but not for teaching surface design and textile printing. In this field, methods vary depending on educators, with no predominant educational line disseminated among great groups of educators.

This fact does not undervalue teaching of prints, but places a major responsibility on training and knowledge of the teaching staff. In order to systematize this process slightly more to improve consistency and uniformity of teaching, the present research proposes to exchange methodologies from visual arts and textile printing.

The use of methodologies does not mean imposing an inflexible learning process. Contrarily, contemporary art education is centered on how students learn, with the purpose of understanding the best way to address school curricular contents and museum education. Conceptual, methodological and attitudinal contents in the art field are apprehended by means of educational actions based on practice, appraisal, and reflection.

Art educators' actions rely on these three factors and on a varied curriculum, because narrative lessons are not always enough to teach a concept, procedure, or attitude. In Brazil, the art educator Ana Mae Barbosa disseminated this methodology for teaching art, derived from the curricular balance advocated, in England, by the Basic Design Movement in the 1950s, and in the USA, by the Discipline-Based Art Education of the Getty Center of Education in the Arts in the 1960s. In the MAC/USP, Barbosa developed the triangular methodology (currently known as triangular approach in art teaching), also grounded on practice, reading, and contextualization.

The teaching of printing puts a great emphasis on *practice* rather than on reading and contextualization. The reflection and appraisal of prints usually occur through expository lessons on fashion and art history. Due to the fact that tools for teaching/learning art promote reflections upon images and not specifically upon paintings or paintings, these tools can be used to teach/learn about textile printing, because visual arts and prints have a common base: the design.

## **Image Reading**

Educational and cultural actions are open to different interpretations. However, some reductionist significations, such as those contained in the National Curricular Parameters (Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais, PCN) on art, changed the concept of image reading, adopted in the fundamentals of the triangular approach, to focus exclusively on appraisal, which has an even greater elitist bias that predominated in the 19th century, when it sought to impose appraisal criteria adopted by the elite for the population to enjoy art (BARBOSA; CUNHA, 2010).

Interpretation, image reading, and aesthetic contemplation are addressed in the present study by analyzing prints. Pedagogical theories on image reading, aesthetics,

and art education already used in schools and museums may serve as a complement to readings of prints coming from the textile industry and the academic field. The reading of museum images may make a special contribution to the reflexion on the presented work.

In Brazil, aesthetic readings of prints have a more technical focus within the textile industry, because there are few cultural spaces to enable the aesthetic and artistic analysis of prints. In art museums, where appreciation occurs in works of art, textile play a supporting role, whereas in history museums more attention is given to fabric restoration rather than to aesthetic appreciation. Printed fabrics are permanently exhibited as outstanding works at Casa da Marquesa de Santos, state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Museu da Indumentária e da Moda, state of São Paulo, Brazil; Museu da Moda, state of Rio Grando do Sul, Brazil; and Museu da Moda de Belo Horizonte, state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. However, currently, there is no theory of aesthetic reading specific for fashion (in the different examples: fabrics, prints, pieces, fashion productions, catwalk shows, exhibitions, etc.), especially for beginner viewers. A cultural space is required, with theoretical fundamentals for analysis and an education department engaged in understanding how viewers interpret textile art. Together with schools, universities, and museums, it would be possible to improve artistic experience with textile printing.

## **Development of aesthetic understanding according to Abigail Housen**

There are several popular methodologies to read images in art teaching. For the present research, we selected a method that can be used in the aesthetic understanding of prints.

Abigail Housen created a reading process that integrates reading and reflecting upon the work of art, leading the viewer to think and verbalize about the image. She proposed learning stages of aesthetic appraisal. They are not ranked by age, because the theory is focused on beginner viewers (HOUSEN, 2000).

The maturation of aesthetic reading of art occur occur concomitantly with the production of textile printing. In the teaching of surface design in technical and undergraduate courses in Fashion, educators insert their students into the process of creating prints. This experience always starts with a small search for references on topics, materials, trends, and audience. In this information survey, there is contact with several artistic creations and prints. The appreciation of works of art usually helps to define the topics of art collections.

Learning stages depend on interactive, educational, and self-taught opportunities experienced by the viewer. Therefore, when there is repeated contact with prints during investigations, students increase their understanding on these art pieces. This way, it is possible to balance description, analysis, revelation, interpretation, and rationale during aesthetic appraisal (HOUSEN, 2000).

According to the museologist Philip Yenawine, who worked with Abigail Housen, the education theory proposed by the latter arose from an open investigation, without

preconceived hypotheses. He performed indirect interviews asking “What do you see in this image?”, which does not provide information for an objective narrative of educator. This method was used in the MoMA-NY by Yenawine to reach the most basic levels of visual literature (YENAWINE, 2000).

Housen’s stage classification remained flexible, analyzing viewers according to their aesthetic responses about images, regardless of age. Housen believes that the most experienced viewer is not the older one but rather the one who have a better aesthetic understanding due to constant, repetitive, and systematic contact and experiences with art. Viewers build their knowledge (HOUSEN, 2000).

Housen’s learning theory is interesting because it uses the concept of “learning by testing”. Students/viewers gain knowledge as contact with works of art is repeated. Thus, the experience of “memorizing” dense temporary information for a test is replaced with content gradually obtained via long-term little significations.

Since this was an open investigation, students were also encouraged to think out loud and express their criticisms about the image, since the indirect question allows for several arguments and reduces the fear of providing the wrong answer. This method is centered on students/viewers, who are stimulated to seek knowledge, respecting their rhythm.

## **Methods**

One can compare each stage of aesthetic interpretation of work of arts proposed by Housen with the appreciation of textile printing. This method is used to analyze few textile products considered historical or museum pieces. Teaching of prints rarely pays much attention to the reading of drawings, focusing of their production. If textile printings are considered artistic images, they require great attention that considers image reading and creation and contextualization of pieces (according to a triangular approach for art teaching).

To enable the comparison of image readings of works of art and printings, a qualitative investigation was conducted with fashion students, fashion and art professionals, and elementary education students (who had art lessons). This research was directed to beginner viewers of printings and viewers with a more frequent contact.

An important reflexion on the discussion made previously to the survey reveals the diversity of opinions, ideas and questions on the fashion world, how to make art, or, on the contrary, how to read it. Underlying this diversity, one can notice the distance between the complex reality involving learning in schools, museums, universities and, conversely, opinions, ideas and observations from relationships outside these fields, including the influence of media, with findings similar to those obtained in Spain by Agirre Arriaga (2013) in a similar educational context.

In a subsequent stage, we performed a teaching activity, which constituted the material for the complete research, consisting of works of group creation involving handcrafted textile printing in the classroom to promote collective discussions observing engagement and findings.

In this initial stage, each participating viewer analyzed five prints from different creators, periods and styles. Although Housen encourages the use of more figurative images that may promote a better interpretation beyond viewer's feelings, we decided to include abstract prints, since most textile prints are abstract geometric designs. Thus, our selection of prints aimed to represent different print patterns.

The survey with the participating viewers was conducted from December 17, 2014 to December 30, 2014 using an online questionnaire (Google forms<sup>5</sup>). To instigate visual analyses, viewers were asked to provide open-ended answers, with no maximum number of characters, to the following question: "What do you see in this print?"

We also considered the concept of cultural action in the art field to justify the diversity of participants and previous studies stating that schools, museums, and other spaces are dynamically related areas (FREIRE, 1997; HERNANDEZ, 2011; ARRIAGA, 2013), particularly in the interdisciplinary field of textile printing, which combines art and fashion. Therefore, a research was conducted with first-year high school students of ETEC Presidente Vargas, in Mogi das Cruzes, state of São Paulo, teachers, alumni (some of which became college textile and/or fashion students and later worked also as a teacher), artists, and textile and fashion professionals with dynamic relationships in São Paulo and Brazil.

Housen proposes a group investigation to promote shared learning by reflecting and discussing about each image for 10-20 minutes. However, we decided to use an online questionnaire for this study, in order to allow freedom of time for participants to answer the questionnaire and to prevent them to feel inhibited or embarrassed. Additionally, this online instrument allowed us to expand the research target audience, especially in terms of educational background, geographical location, and age.

The first print included in the questionnaire was a batik patterned fabric made in Zimbabwe by an unknown maker and documented in a picture taken by the photographer Robert Fried (figure 1).

**Figure 1** - Batik patterned fabric



Source: Fried, 2014.

**5-** The form is available at: <<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1jQaHH0JCsNu1raL7FsvUwuPQVaj3fo6seOCRgt1TuDY/viewform>>.

The second print, entitled *Narboneta*, was designed by the Italian company named Missoni in 2012 (figure 2). This print is part of *Girandole* collection of decorative articles by Missoni Home and was created by the designer Rosita Missoni. Missoni has been known by its zigzag patterned fabrics inspired in optical art and in African tribal designs. Initially, textile patterns were knitted; later, the founders Rosita and Ottavio Missoni also used prints to project “zigzag” patterns of varied colors and shapes.

**Figure 2** - *Narboneta*, a print from Girandole collection by Missoni Home



Source: Missoni, 2012.

The third print was created by the fashion stylist Ronaldo Fraga and is part of the collection entitled *F.U.T.E.B.O.L.*, which was presented at the summer catwalk shown at São Paulo Fashion Week in 2014 (figure 3).

**Figure 3** - Print from the *F.U.T.E.B.O.L.* collection by Ronaldo Fraga



Source: Fraga, 2014.



The fourth print, entitled *Strawberry Thief*, was created by William Morris in 1883 (figure 4). This print was designed in a decorative fabric and is one of the most-well known works of this artist, designer, theorist, and activist. The birds portrayed in the print are long- and short-tailed thrushes and were designed by Philip Webb. The print also has blue sea dock leaves and red strawberries. The leaves of this plant were initially present in arabesques and ornaments from classical architecture and then became popular during Renaissance, being used in representations of funeral rituals, and is associated with long life. These elements are designed on dark blue background with a cenário típico do movimento *arts & crafts* movement, an aesthetic movement from the late XIX century (EDWARDS, 2012).

**Figure 4** – *Strawberry Thief*, a cotton fabric printed with stamps



Source: Morris, 1883.

The last print was entitled *Alice in Wonderland* and was created in 1920 by the architect and designer C. F. Annesley Voysen (figure 5). This print was designed on a chita cotton fabric and was produced by roller printing. Chita is a painted or stained fabric originally from India and popular in Brazil. It is made of satin cotton, printed by screen printing and produced with fine hand-twisted warp yarns. These yarns have a rustic appearance and are loosely twisted. Prints include several designs, usually floral-patterned ones, with many colors (more than five). Using some original illustrations by



attention. For them, the work of art has a proper life and tells a story. Additionally, viewers seek to discover what the image concretely shows. Since they spend little time analyzing the work, there is little emotional engagement with it.

**Figure 6** - *Girl before a mirror*, oil painting on canvas



Source: Picasso, 1932.

Housen (2000, p. 155-156) presents some examples of this narrative discourse in comments on the painting *Girls before a mirror* (figure 6), by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973):

Here it is orange, here it is black, here it is blue. Here this girl (points to the right) has some stripes. And there is something, some circle, some green.

... I see ... two women here ... They ... are looking at each other, looks like one of the women has a ... misfortune. They are upset with something ... Well, that one woman, she's ill with something ... planet. Looks like there is a lady right here. Looks like she is holding a man right here and looks like they might be living in a castle, they might be rich or something, and they're all dressed up, they just got back from a party ...

Most students entering surface design and fashion courses are this stage. They usually do a literal reading of each element appearing in the prints. Their evaluations narrate what is the theme of the work of art and they judge whether they like it or not, when they recognize the theme or when they have already observed the same elements in mass-produced fashion trends.

Most appraisals of prints are at this stage, because they are brief and superficial. However, narratives involve imagining the drawing itself, such as in the remark “water flowing through a transparent surface and illuminated by colored lights”<sup>6</sup> and may also involve the location of these prints in pieces, such as the following observation: “Floral print with birds. This is the type of print that I imagine as a hem of round dresses or in grandma’s curtains”<sup>7</sup>.

In addition, such as prints involve the image itself and its application, some comments narrate these two stories:

This type of image, with many happening at once, is both interesting and a little disturbing to me, because I always see emerging faces, such as pink-edged flowers? Lilac? They form eyes, the green part form noses, etc. It reminds me of young ladies, fountains ... I imagined a spacious living room with tiles with this image covering the walls and a large and white fountain at the center. A scene of a futuristic movie or a psychological thriller ...<sup>8</sup>

However, since most prints are not figurative and do not enable a natural narrative, in printed arts this stage is marked by judgment based on personal taste using senses and feelings. Therefore, common statements include “flowers, joy, peace, excitement, and tranquility”<sup>9</sup>. These emotions are attributed to the print due to the visual effect historically defined by the society, according to aesthetic clichés.

## Constructive

At stage II, according to Housen (2000), viewers are constructive. They start to define parameters to analyze images according to previous perception and knowledge of reality (such as in stage I), in addition to judging certain social and moral criteria and pre-established conventions. These viewers also know little about the formal properties or the visual language of the work, but develop an interest in how the image is produced and whether it meet known standards. In their opinion, works of art should follow traditional characteristics in terms of themes and techniques. Changes in standard shapes and colors or references to death and sexually tend to shock these viewers. Images should be integrated into viewer’s culture and family conventions with regard to language, history, religion, customs, art, etc.

In the case of prints, if the image is not part of viewer’s repertoire, it receives a negative judgment. In the remark “It reminded me of *Alice in the Wonderland*. If this

**6-** Reading of *Narboneta* by J.A.A., translator and teacher.

**7-** Reading of *Strawberry Thief* by N.C.C., undergraduate student in Textile and Fashion.

**8-** Reading of *Strawberry Thief* by M.Y.I.

**9-** Reading of *Strawberry Thief* by J.B., undergraduate student in Textile and Fashion.

is a fabric, I do not like it”<sup>10</sup>, the viewer undervalued the print because its theme is not common in fabrics. The same case occurs with the comment “Weird, maybe childish, I do not like it very much”<sup>11</sup>: since this image has an unusual pattern, the viewer believes it does not belong to printing traditions.

Different from accountive viewers, constructive viewers make detailed associations and become aware of artist’s intentionality. They start to look for signs that help them to understand why the image was designed that way. Their observations are always related to a concrete reference from the work, rather than an imaginative one. These viewers carefully question themselves several times, ask themselves how the work was done, and see all parts as a whole. Furthermore, they give greater value to the time spent in creating the work and the difficulty in producing it. In the comment “Patterns that seem to show superheroes seen from above. They seem to be designed using colored pencils, without much elaboration”<sup>12</sup>, the viewer mentioned the limited difficulty in creating the image that might have required less effort and elaboration because it uses a simple technique (colored pencil) and has a simpler final scratch.

In prints, this stage begins only when the viewer is able to understand what is in the print. This occurs because most prints depart from figurative elements. “For a moment, I believed that it showed cars on a race, then I thought it showed robots. In any case, looks like children’s print”<sup>13</sup>. In this stage, viewers perform a second analysis of the work, in which they observe it several times and notice new aspects.

Housen reports a comment typical of the second stage on the above mentioned work *Girl before a mirror* (figure 6): “A very odd picture Human faces ... There are only faces and no bodies...” (HOUSEN, 2000, p. 156).

In other words, the viewer was able to identify the faces but felt sort of a “strangeness”, due to Picasso’s cubist style.

In this stage, viewers begin to develop an interest in the artist’s intentions as they distance themselves from the concrete work of art, because the emotions caused by the appreciation of the work are better unveiled (HOUSEN, 2000).

## Classifying

Stage III comprises classifying viewers. Their analysis aims to identify the work of art in terms of which style, school, artistic movement, technique, artist, and time. They decode the message of the work using the category into which it was classified. Their criticism is justified by a greater level of rationalization (HOUSEN, 2000).

The reader aims to understand the work from a contextual point of view similar to that of History of Arts, i.e., based on the analysis of pieces of information. The major aim of these viewers is to identify the work of art and its technical and historical data.

This stage can be observed in the comments of students finishing undergraduate and technical courses in fashion. Remarks such as “Missoni print contrasting hot and cold,

**10-** Reading of *Alice in Wonderland* by L.R.S., craftswoman.

**11-** Reading of *F.U.T.E.B.O.L.* by L.R.S., craftswoman.

**12-** Reading of *F.U.T.E.B.O.L.* By J.O.F., fashion designer.

**13-** Reading of *F.U.T.E.B.O.L.* by L.A.S., undergraduate student in Textile and Fashion.

a color graph [...]”<sup>14</sup> are examples of this stage. In this case, the viewer classified the work according to its creator.

Other examples include the following opinions: “I believe this is a William Morris’ print, block printing technique. It is a wonderful work...”<sup>15</sup> and “arts & crafts, William Morris, complex shape, and a color palette including analogous colors”<sup>16</sup>.

Due to the amount of information already obtained, this observer takes a more technical perspective and considers the methods used for the creation of the work of art in addition to the work itself. However, since this is an applied art, categorization goes beyond image and applies also to the category of the product to which the drawing was superposed, the target audience, and the marketing aura that goes beyond artists and their work.

Playful print directed to a young audience familiarized with fairy tales. It has an interesting repeated pattern, but it is not interesting for reproduction, because the direction of the print makes it difficult to arrange molds. Colors are complimentary and intermediate, which provides a different look to the print.<sup>17</sup>

It was possible to note stage III viewers included survey respondents who already worked with the creation of stamps and who taught course on printing. They brought a great deal of information on image provenance, creator, production, applicability, and the feelings that this piece of art evoked to users/viewers. However, most remarks were somewhat impersonal, and, when the viewers provided personal judgments, they sought to make technical criticisms suggesting improvements. These criticisms were not re-creative, because there is no intimate involvement and re-interpretation.

In Housen’s study (2000, p. 156), a viewer of figure 7 at this stage says: “I’m looking at, I guess it’s a reproduction of a painting that seems to be abstract. I think it’s by Picasso...”.

## Interpretative

Stage IV comprises interpretative viewers. At this stage, associations are no longer so rational when comparing the feeling that other artists, styles, and works evoked. The message of the work is received as one finds out its details. Critical skills are put in the service of intuition and feelings and judgments may change after each new encounter with the work (HOUSEN, 2000).

Each graphical element is interpreted and construed as metaphors. Colors speak, as well as shapes, harmony, lines, each part and the whole.

The message of the image is beyond what one sees, involving what one understands from it. Iconography, typography, and colors pass on some values to those who see images. Colors allude to energy, movement but also to wisdom and importance.<sup>18</sup>

**14-** Reading of *Narboneta* by C.O., fashion stylist.

**15-** Reading of *Strawberry Thief* by P.R., textile designer.

**16-** Reading of *Strawberry Thief* by L.M.M., plastic artist.

**17-** Reading of *Alice in Wonderland* by T.R., teacher and designer.

**18-** Reading of the batik patterned fabric by M.M., entrepreneur.

Viewers at this stage seek to relate personally with the work and rely on the experience provided by this encounter. Therefore, re-encountering the image promotes re-interpretations based on memory and intuition.

At first I saw little birds, then I noticed that they don't have wings and looked more like table football players ... The "home-made" feeling evoked by color pigmentation brings identity and personality to the image.<sup>19</sup>

When appreciating prints, reanalysis is main characteristic of stage IV viewers, because there are so many pre-established messages in the field of fashion production that determine the feelings to be conveyed by classic prints. These commonplaces are present from the constructive stage on, such as the association of subtlety and romance with flowered patterns, of elegance and sophistication with black and white, of lighting and flashes of lightning with zigzag patterns, etc. Therefore, careful study enable interpretative viewers of prints to make a more personal, individualized, and richer analysis.

Housen (2000, p. 157) exemplifies this stage with a detailed analysis of figure 6:

"...different colors, represented on this picture – they are likely to represent different experiences of her. Well, the red color—is probably some aggressions, and blue is on the contrary some feeling of rest... it's tension between these two colors... Here...changes, as she discovers something in herself... It usually occurs when one learns something about oneself, and even the perception of one's body changes. This feeling of bifurcation creates some illusions. And maybe here there is a certain vision reflecting ... it ... And she ... she also ... I mean, when she looks at herself, at what she is inside, a sort of whole not, here she starts to perceive herself being so not integrated, mutable ... To my mind the point of this picture is some certain change, some new view, maybe several views of a person towards himself, maybe. Perhaps, there is quite another, absolutely different meaning of this all. Perhaps there is a woman that painted some picture and while painting this picture she gradually learned about herself..."

## **Re-creative**

Finally, stage V comprises re-creative viewers. This is the rarest type of viewer. None of viewers of print in this study were at this stage. This is because the re-creative viewer have established a long history of viewing and reflecting about works of art. The image is reanalyzed several times, on different occasions, promoting different meanings every time one looks at the work. Thus, viewers Drawing on their own history with the work, these viewers combine a more personal contemplation with one which more broadly encompasses universal concerns (HOUSEN, 2000).

This viewer is familiar with art and has a strong critical sense. Their cognition is balanced with emotion to structure aesthetic experience. Housen (2000, p. 157) reports the

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**19-** Reading of *F.U.T.E.B.O.L.* by A.G.S.O., trilingual executive assistant

discourse of a re-creative viewer who demonstrate this more intimate relationship with the work:

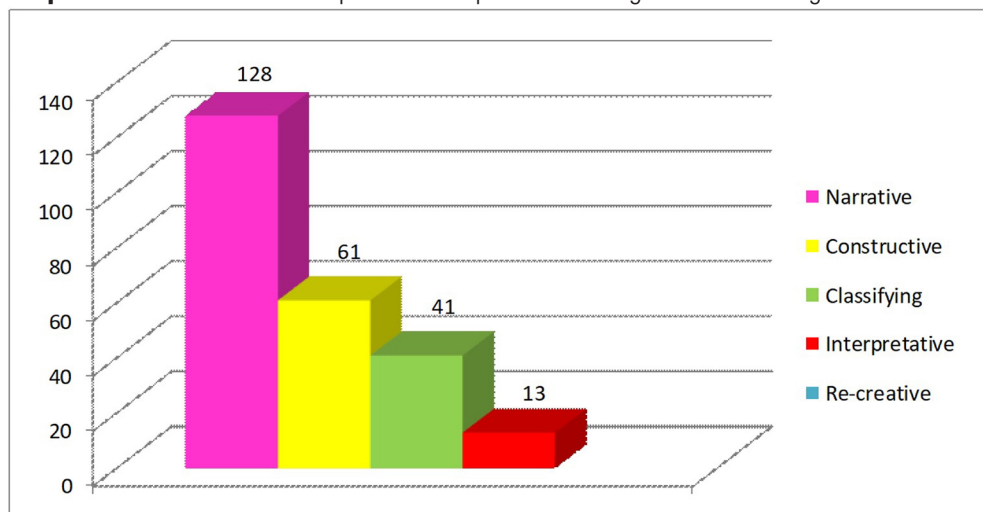
“...I think it would be interesting to....sit and watch Picasso do that because...yo have this fantasy that it was this...this...very continuous, easy, sure, spontaneous...creation of all these forms that one flows right to the other...I wonder...if it was that easy for him... it always seemed to me that he knew exactly what he was doing. It would be interesting to...have been there...”

## Analysis of results

Our brief research aimed to highlight some point that distinguish the appraisal of images from works of art and from prints. New research stages are required, such as a field investigation exploring the few existing fashion museums and specific classrooms at schools and universities. However, our results evidence some of these differences, which are mainly related to the attention given to the image. Those viewing prints spend little time analyzing these images and are little interested in discovering author’s intentionality and work’s meaning. Their appreciation is focused on harmony and relationship between elements and how they are arranged. Feelings seem to be evoked from the work as a whole, with no careful search for the element that caused such feelings.

Of the 243 image readings analyzed, the majority (128 responses) was at the accountive stage, followed by 61 at the constructive stage, 41 at the classifying stage, and 13 at the interpretative stage (graph 1). Although based on a small sample, our results show that most participants are accountive viewers. Even fashion students or professionals specialized in prints were classified into this stage, because there is no established routine to appraise images.

**Graph 1** - Classification of interpretations of prints according to Housen’s stages



Source: Research data.



Analyzing the interpretations of each print, they maintained this same order of predominance (most viewers at the accountive stage, followed by constructive, classifying, and interpretative stages), except for two prints: the batik patterned print (figure 1) and *Strawberry Thief* (figure 4). These two prints had more classifying (11 in the batik patterned print and 14 in *Strawberry Thief*) than constructive viewers (10 in the batik print and 6 in *Strawberry Thief*). The difference between these type of viewers is minimal in the batik patterned print and may be attributed to the acknowledgment of the African and tribal provenance of colors, shapes, and symbols present in the fabric. Conversely, *Strawberry Thief* were acknowledged and classified based on its author William Morris and the aesthetic movement to which it belonged: arts & crafts, showing that the popularity of images has a major influence on the stage into which viewers were classified. Well-known prints designed by renowned authors, such as Missoni House (figure 2) and William Morris (figure 4), evoked more classifying interpretations when the viewer had knowledge on prints.

Classifying viewers were also more “stable” in their analyses. In other words, three viewers had all their interpretations categorized as classifying (in addition to nine viewers who were always classified as accountive viewers). This was a peculiar characteristic, because most viewers had their interpretations classified into different stages for each of the five prints, since these viewers had much previous knowledge and were limited to technicity, seeking to make more impersonal analyses. Classifying viewers did not want to make personal comments about the image, which was consistent with the professional profile they intended to show in the fashion market.

However, the use of varied prints, including figurative, flower, geometric, tribal, referring to other works, contemporary, and historical patterns, did not lead to significant changes in the number of viewers at each stage. It shows that no print pattern may be considered the most renowned, understood, and disseminated. Thus, all printed styles need to be addressed equally with regard to interpreting visual languages in textile prints.

Overall results show the importance of art teaching methods and of Housen’s stages for the study of textile prints. Therefore, there is a need for specific education on the aesthetic understanding of prints. Acknowledging teachers as mediators between printed fabrics and students expand interpretation and knowledge of these print arts. Housen proposed to establish routine analysis with groups of students in which the teacher guides the group with open-ended questions such as “What do you see in this image?”, complemented and encouraged by the question: “What do you see that makes you say that?”, i.e., a justification for the first answer.

Considering the answers viewers provided when analyzing prints, complementary questions may be required to induce more elaborate and reflective responses, such as “Which elements can you see?” and “Which feelings and emotions the image evokes?”. Why?”, “Which details you didn’t notice when you looked at it for the first time?”, “Does this image remind you of other works?”, “How do you think the print was created?”, “Do you think there is a message, a meaning, in the different parts of the print and in the overall work?”, “Would you change something in the image? Why?”, etc. These questions lead the viewer to make a more detailed analysis without providing irrelevant information. The viewer is instigated to seek greater knowledge through the image itself.

This is a simple but still uncommon practice in reflecting upon prints, whether in technical schools, museums, cultural spaces, or universities, but could promote advances in the state-of-the-art literature and in the understanding of textile aesthetics.

Nonetheless, we sought to go beyond presenting the analyzed case and aimed to perform an in-depth theoretical analysis and interpretation of the obtained results. We highlight the initial underlying reality of discussing the need of developing art teaching directed to reading and analysis of the visual language of textile printing. This need is mainly supported by the finding that this artistic practice and/or textile design tend to be focused on the technical content. However, the above mentioned Barbosa's triangular approach states that there is an association between reading, practicing, and contextualizing a work of art. In addition, more specifically with regard to visual language in textile printing, we aimed to show, based on the methodology proposed by Housen, that the development of this approach should have the purpose of promoting process of *visual literacy*. But *why* and *how* to understand this issue?

To maintain the coherence of our referential framework, we reinforce the relevance of student's *experience* and *interest* as stated by Dewey (2010), who uses these factors to support his pedagogy and substantiates the work of the specialists in art teaching mentioned in this paper. When critically reviewing Dewey's work, Freinet, other educator, considered that *experience* should be concretely related to the real world in the community and in the society, without being isolated from formal activities performed in laboratories or workshops, deepening the role of students as an active subject in education (KANAMARU, 2014). Paulo Freire (1997) contributed pedagogically to explain the experience of reading, writing and understanding the alphabet using a critical and collective methodology to enable formal learning of letters, but especially allow individuals to promote concrete awareness of the individual who undergo the experience of literacy as a being, especially as a being living in the real concrete world. In this process, one of the most important goals is to promote student's *autonomy* (FREIRE, 1997).

In the specific context of art education, also illustrated in reproducible images, Perkins (1994) states that art is essential for the development of autonomous thinking, because makes it possible to promote discussions and judgments without being restricted to rules. Eisner (2008) agrees with this inherent freedom of art and its role in teaching students to act and judge *autonomously*.

Hernández (2011, p.47) states that art teaching through projects enables the development of *identity* and thus of learning of other human and social aspects required for students to have a comprehensive social development.

Based on this conceptual framework, we provided grounds to demonstrate the relevance of visual literacy and its greater objective, even in textile printing.

However, one can question the adverse conditions of the European context, but Agirre Arriaga (2013), a specialist in school art education, observes that, even in important countries such as Spain, the art learning in schools and museums are distant from young students' reality. This author argues for a more collaborative and permanent relationship between these educational and cultural spaces. He also believes that the development of art teaching should not be considered as a mere formal school subject, since it disturbs

dominant interests, because it promotes the emergence and strengthening of *critical subjects* towards the *establishment* in contemporary societies (ARRIAGA, 2015).

But how this should occur in textile printing in the field of art teaching. In *O Espírito das Roupas*, Gilda de Mello e Souza (1996) discusses fashion in Brazil during the XIX century and shows how clothes reproduce dominant economic and cultural relationships in colonial Brazil and impose social identities and functions in that conservative and slavery culture. In this sense, thinking and understanding the visual language of textile prints and, by extension, their use as objects of art or in clothes, or more broadly, in education and fashion, may ultimately promote awareness of their modes of production and cultures deriving from them. The process of producing textile prints may be observe from the creation of yarns to the manufacture of mesh and thread, production (using slaves or free employees?), use (elitist or democratic access?), and disposal (to where and how?).

From a Benjaminian perspective, reading and understanding of textile printing in technical schools may collectively promote, in a teaching situation, awareness and empowerment of students as *critical subjects* and citizens.

## Final remarks

Based on our finding, we reinforce the relevance of the conceptual and methodological framework proposed in Housen's approach for the reading and aesthetic understanding of textile printing in art lessons. However, we noticed the need of contextualizing her framework to the Brazilian culture and, in this specific case, to the environment of technical schools. In this adaptation, we observed the need to teach this specific understanding in art lessons, although there is an evident focus on performing works of art in technical schools and universities. Nonetheless, more than the simple finding of facts, we considered the need of reading and understanding visual language in terms of theoretical analysis, in which technique is present but is related to other factors and also to aesthetics and other project variables). Therefore, this implies a specific process of *visual* literacy. Hence, we understand that, beyond the mere transmission of techniques or aesthetics, there is also the need of a pedagogic approach to fully experience reading and understanding of visual language in textile printing. We believe that adequate reading promote important conditions to the comprehensive understanding of the object, its technical function, which has an inseparable form, and its production. This process allowed us to theoretically understand that the decisive contribution of reading and understanding of language in textile printing aims to promote the *critical awareness* of students-viewers and their autonomy and identity. As previously discussed, the nature of art involves the need of engaging in a systematic aesthetic discussion with oneself and collectively with others, consisting of experiences and actions that make it easier for students to become *critical subjects* of the process. In this sense, students go beyond the perception of technical learning, which assumes that there is an alienating division of labor in the textile and fashion fields, when it comes to art pieces, between those who produce and those who consume the object/image (textile print and its uses) as a product or commodity or between those who creatively work to create images and shapes as

opposed to those who are relegated to work exclusively in staining, sewing, carrying, etc. Pedagogical literacy for reading and actual understanding of visual language in textile printing allows for considering, in broad terms, the awareness role of *identity*, due to the need of having a critical and autonomous positioning in a democratic discussion, i. e., as a *critical subject*, which represent essential aspects for citizenship.

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