

## Use of experimental materials in illustrations: Illustrated notebook designs

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### Abstract

The illustration is a field kneaded with contemporary interpretation languages and finds a new breath with the forms used in new media environments. Similarly, this doesn't substitute for the traditional materials so artists continue to describe what is intended on various surfaces and encourage artists to develop alternative languages in their illustrations. When the tendency of illustrator's interpretation is combined with the idea of bringing paper and material together, the formation of originally designed areas is the result of this orientation. This article focuses on the diversity of the areas in which paintings are expressed. With the illustrations that also come to life on the surfaces of different textures, sketchbooks are transformed into valuable objects of design. The examination of this situation is covered by the method of the article, the formal analysis of the design objects is presented with examples, and the research is completed by examining the place of the experimental materials in the illustrations.

**Keywords:** Illustration, illustration language, illustration techniques, sketchbook, illustrated notebook.

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## 1. Introduction

Illustrations are meaningful and fictional drawings produced to visualise the idea that can be defined as a discipline between art and design. Illustrations which find a place as a field that is still present on different surfaces can go beyond being drawn on paper, artists can now use various surfaces and objectify their drawings on two-dimensional surfaces. Examples of notebook designs (sketchbooks) that provide a pleasant reading experience and illustrations that have become a hand-held product design are examined within the scope of this research article, and by examining travel books, selected artist sketches and notebooks; the use, interpretation and function of the pictorial languages on different surfaces are questioned.

Artists/illustrators can do their drawings to inform people about an event or topic. According to Alan Male, 'illustration influences the way we are informed and educated, what we buy and how we are persuaded to do things. It gives us opinion and comment. It provides us with entertainment and tells us stories' (Male, 2007). By telling this, he expresses that the best illustrations earned this achievement and there are five general and widely accepted content areas. These are information, interpretation, narration, fiction, persuasion and identity (Male, 2007). While the subject to be described is being expressed by the interpretation of the artist, the creation of a specific visual mind map and idea sketches is important at this stage because while the idea sketches are making it easier for the artist to go on a mental journey, they also play a role in determining the roadmap. At this stage, sketchbooks have always been an important tool for illustrators. The word sketch can be defined as a preliminary draft work done before drawing. Meeting of ideas and inventions with sketches in a notebook before producing a finished work is an action that has been used since the past. 'A sketchbook is often the best way of compiling insights, research and resources as well as keeping them in order' (Leonard & Ambrose, 2015). The portrayal and development of inventions developed in the mind can be expressed as an important way of working for the illustrator. Likewise, it can be said that the lack of effectiveness of the drawings, which are not thought over and which are not intellectual, is due to the lack of method in this sense.

The difference between the illustrations from photographs can be expressed as the transmission of the fictionalised feeling so much so that, it cannot be expected that the effect of illustration will be obtained by photographing. 'In the 19th century, photographs were seen as transparent windows opening to the stages which they portrayed. Therefore, they were not considered as a work of the art but as records of events, people and environments' (Burnett, 2012). It is also unlikely that photographs will be considered as journals with this thin line.

Over time, sketchbooks stopped being a tool of the method, and now they are starting to take place as an object of the art. In this sense, artist experimentation and difference of application area have directed the illustrators, and the beginning of drawing paper-based illustrations directly on the notebooks continuously and smoothly, and also the notebooks being a designed graphic product draw attention so much so that book design has gone beyond becoming a product of page design in graphic design. In the case of an art object for a notebook, the same situation can be mentioned.

## 2. Use of experimental materials in illustrations

Experimentalism in the field of imaging is a concept that can be described as a method of obtaining random results by handling different materials or an untested material. While producing works, artists can use different materials, objects and foundlings and make designs by combining various materials in the appropriate environment. In this process, the concept of drawing is also a term to be emphasised. While saying 'drawing is the principal faculty of illustration', Male (2007) expresses how important the drawing is for illustration. It can be said that every design or illustration must have a drawing skill experienced with a solid knowledge of anatomy. The drawing, which can be described as 'signs made on a piece of paper', can be defined as an action involving a variety of different activities

(Harrison, 2006). This process, in which ideas are visualised with sketches, brings with it the question of what material should it be completed with later. In this subject, Parramon (2004) states the place of predetermining the material used in the design process with his expression of 'before we ask how to make a drawing, we will start with questions about which material, which equipment, which environment and what techniques are going to be used'. Zeegen (2005) associates the illustration and drawing concept as 'drawing can be used for recording, representing and portraying. It can be observational or interpretative, can reflect a mood or a moment, or be utilised to purely convey information. Drawing is a hugely broad discipline and in the context of illustration, in the hands of illustrators, it is pushed to its very limits'.

Drawing materials offer a wide range of different tools and equipment either together or separately. The fact that each material has separate usage information also brings together the inability to use each material together to the extent that the importance of acquiring material knowledge is important at this stage because every technique requires different tools and materials. It is expected that the illustrators who have made the illustrations also have the knowledge of using materials in order to develop the appropriate technique for them. Likewise, the ability to use the material required by the application will determine the dominance of the technique and the style in which it is made. For this reason, it is the required situation for every illustrator to have an experience on every material and being able to choose the most suitable one in his/her style and produce works with that material. Therefore, it is not expected for every illustration for the artist to use every drawing and painting material. The use of various materials together in the production process and the arrangement of selected pieces with a certain design concept will develop the experimental design process. By experimenting, working on them more than once and using different materials in combination with various possibilities, this experimental process is reinforced by the use of materials.

### **3. Alternative seekings/applications in illustrations**

The subject covered in the illustrations, the message it is carrying and the audience it is addressing have encouraged the illustrators to use experimental materials to make various applications. Various seekings such as using paper and paints, experiencing three-dimensional materials on a two-dimensional surface, using waste objects as materials in illustrations, making illustrations by using photographing and collage technique and so on, can be considered as alternative seekings for the artists. The question of what is the new meaning that each of the objects with different meanings will create when they come together is an important problem in the process of creating a holistic perception for the illustrators. In this context, creating idea sketches by experiencing and observing, keeping sketchbooks and taking notes of observations and ideas can be considered as a worth-stressing step in the creative process.

Applications such as illustration with traditional materials and in digital media, animated illustration, illustrations with three-dimensional objects and illustrations with waste and foundling materials and so on can be shown as examples of such alternative applications. Illustrated notebook designs in this context also find themselves as an alternative seeking for illustrations. So much so that, the notebooks that gain value as an art object, gain personality with the original interpretive languages of the artists and the subject described on each separate page can tell a whole story. These visual designs, which evolve as a result of the artist's observation and intellectual weighing, become objects that reflect the artist's identity. When it is produced, for this reason, the place, space, condition and environment reflections are handled with artist sensitivity and turned into visual notepads. When appropriate, visually illustrated objects with and without text are designed addressing the visual and tactile senses of people. For this reason, in order to be able to read thoughts and to witness time, the illustrated notebook designs can be considered as thoughts and visual notes.

The use of different materials and applications in illustrations is a subject that should be developed one within the other by the illustrators' concern for message transmission. 'Having an understanding of the audience is essential for the successful transfer of messages' (Male, 2007). For this reason, the people to whom the illustrations are addressed must be predetermined and the subject (if any) must be developed. The viewer's interpretive action is activated at this stage.

The first phase of visual perception begins with the visual sense, and the act of seeing is expressed as a perception system that operates based on the eye (Ertan & Sansarci, 2016). Sense-making is developing at different frequencies in each person. Individuals' socio-cultural situations, educational levels, experiences, levels of intelligence and aesthetic values are defined as phenomena that differentiate the sense-making in question from person to person. According to Ertan and Sansarci (2016), the more a work (illustrations) is loaded with the image, the deeper the viewer perceives the way the artist perceives it. It is also believed that these images also help the correct interpretation of the work in the historical period of change and provide a way to compare different perspectives and approaches between the period in which the work was created and the period in which it was followed. In this context, the skill of observing, interpreting, analyzing and conveying nature can be listed as the features that individuate the notebook designs.

#### **4. Illustrated artist travel books/notebooks/sketchbooks**

The subject covered in this section is divided into artists' travel/observation, sketches and notebooks, and sample reviews are made under these headings. Under each heading, the book designs of the artists who produced work at this field are handled, the technical and original interpretive language they use is evaluated and the source is offered to those who want to work on this topic.

##### **4.1. Sample reviews: Travel notebook designs**

Born in the city of Sydney, Australia, Liz Steel uses his architectural background to illustrate her observations in her sketchbook by drawing with watercolour technique and brings her observations to the art through analytical analysis and transfer. The sketchbooks are designed with compositions that are handled like a diary and blended together with text and visual material. The artist who is using watercolour as a technique expresses inspiration from Renaissance and Baroque architecture, urban spaces and local dwellings (<https://www.lizsteel.com/about-liz-steel/>). As you can see in Figure 1, Steel keeps a visualised diary of the trip plan and its progress on the page. The audience can read what Steel does in a day, which buildings she has seen during the day, what she ate at lunch and what she is planning to do by looking at Steel's book. They do not just express what she sees, what is being evoked in her mind by the things she has seen and observed can also be seen in her designs of visual logbooks. It can be said that the maintaining of visual notes and the convey of observation experiences allow the artist to substitute a kind of role to the reader by transferring the role of traveler.



Figure 1. Liz Steel, Travel Sketchbook, *Sketchbook Pages*. Web: <https://www.lizsteel.com/some-favourite-sketchbook-pages-and-layouts/>

#### 4.2. Sample reviews: Note/sketchbook designs

Born in Rome in 1973 and raised in Bonn, Germany, artist Lars Henkel is studying and teaching illustrations at the University of Applied Arts and the Academy of Media Arts. The artist, whose many works are published and awarded in magazines and books, makes paintings under the influence of the painting tradition of the authentic and German paintings. The collage technique and its successful use symbolise the distinctiveness of its paintings. Along with his illustrations, his sketchbook designs represent graphic products designed beyond sketches and scratches that carry the artist style. In general, the artist who appeals to the viewer's visual senses only by using a visual element, creates a process of meaning-making with his illustrations, unlike the travel notebook. In the whole notebook, the technique and language used by the artist are personalised by converting the book into a design product.





Figure 2. Lars Henkel, *Collages*, Sketchbook Design. Web: <https://larshenkel.myportfolio.com/sketchbook-collages>

Another artist is James Jean, born in Taiwan in 1979 in China. Completing his studies at the School of Visual Arts in America, Jean is an illustrator who has participated in many exhibitions. He designs drawings with digital and traditional methods and also designs jewellery designs. There are illustrations on different surfaces in his portfolio. Wall, panel and wood are some of these surfaces. He has also carried out his illustrations on the notebook that his sketch simplicity has now been transformed into a design of a complete illustrated notebook. In the notebook design shown in Figure 3, the illustration language differs from the technical sense in Figure 4 and has its own language integrity. In the illustrations blended with traditional paint materials and resolved by watercolour effect, the artist changed the use of colour on the opposite pages.



Figure 3. James Jean, *Sketchbook Moleskine*, 2009, Sketchbook Design. Web: <http://www.jamesjean.com/sketch2009/z5vyfnz2wiih27hjwb98nhvsrpheyg>

Jean's each of two notepad designs is complemented by a different language. In Figure 4, the notepad design is formed only by illustration and is used as an integrated design area with two opposite fictionalised page layouts. The composition is handled on two pages, used as a single surface.



**Figure 4. James Jean, Wasps, Nest, Arson, Mudhead, 2011, 2010, Sketchbook Design. Web:**  
<http://www.jamesjean.com/sketch2010/>

Another artist, Reeo Zerkos, was born in China and is an illustrator who graduated from the Film and Animation Department of the Chinese Academy of Arts in early 2012. When he realised a large part of his life is drawing, he continued his education in England. Zerkos who received his undergraduate and graduate education from Camberwell Art Academy worked as a freelance illustrator between London and Hangzhou and was interested in film photography. With the style, he develops in his illustrations. Zerkos combines his hand drawing skills with digital media and evokes his own unique style in his sketchbooks. In his notebook designs also, he benefited from texts and visual objects; the colour usage was chosen in accordance with the meaning and significant colours were used related to the content.





Figure 5. Reeo Zerkos, *Moleskine No: 7, 2014*, Sketchbook Design. Web: <http://www.reeozerkos.com/Moleskine-NO-7>

## 5. Result

Alternative seekings in illustrations are the act of obtaining new approaches in field applications, developing authentic language and getting unattempted applications. The so-called seekings, which are accepted as the expression of a production process that has entered into many experimental applications, allow the illustrators to develop a new language of expression for themselves. In this research article, also artist notebooks, which are one of the alternative approaches in illustrations and in which the artists keep their drawing/travel notes, develop their sketches and develop their drawings based on thought, were discussed. The artist notebooks (travel, note, sightseeing, observation, etc.), which are defined as illustrated notebook designs, are handled with the concept of illustration and become an object of the art. Being no longer a book all by itself, it is in the position of an object that mediates the artists' inner world, worldview, observation and transfer experience, intellectual and visual note-taking. Notebooks that can also be defined as personal records of the artist can be turned into past from the future and can also be undertaken as a document from which information can be acquired. For this reason, it can be said that the notebooks, which illustrators have experience of using various materials, have a functional benefit of observation, experience and knowledge of the past.

The design and design process are also covered in the illustrated notebook designs. According to Ambrose and Harris (2017), in the design process, 'most designs are produced to serve an existing purpose so that the existing culture becomes a common reference or influence that attracts the target audience'. This approach can also be felt in sketchbooks, as designers use popular cultural elements such as colour, font and accepted social norms about the time they live in their work. In this context, place, period and time are the impressive elements of the productions of the artists.

Illustrated notebook designs, which can be expressed as one of the alternative seekings in paintings, manifest themselves as an area of work that can be further improved by the artist's original approach and content saturation. In this context, considering the fact that the illustrated notebook designs are considered as the object of art, it is also the result that it can carry a resource value from which information about the past can be obtained.



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