

## FUTURESCAN 4: VALUING PRACTICE

### A pedagogical approach to creative copying from photographic imagery: A drawing-led practice-based research inquiry

Mark Parker, Heriot-Watt University, [m.w.parker@hw.ac.uk](mailto:m.w.parker@hw.ac.uk)

#### Abstract

The author is a textile designer and academic with extensive experience of both working from his own photographs and of encouraging his printed textile design students to use their photography imaginatively in their designs. His recent involvement in academic research has made him aware that much of his established drawing practice has been implicit and that, while drawing every day, it is only relatively lately that he has paused to interrogate the techniques he adopts. This paper describes the latest stage in an extended research project conducted with a colleague to re-evaluate traditional, drawing-based, copying methods for seeking reference and inspiration from visual sources. (Here, the term 'visual sources' is used to describe existing images, for example archival sources or photographs.) While traditionally being acceptable pedagogical methods, drawing-based copying techniques have now become undervalued on some textile design courses, and the term 'copying' has become associated with unacceptable forms of practice that can have both damaging effects on the textile industry and undermine student creativity. After a practice-based investigation whereby the author systematically explored copying techniques from a photographic source, the author utilized both the experience gained and the methods established in earlier research to deliver a Constructive Copying Workshop to second year textile design students. Predicated on a list of terms for copying techniques, the workshop was intended to focus students' attention not only on methods of copying from visual sources, but also to encourage their intellectual reflection on this type of drawing activity.

**Keywords:** practice-based research; drawing-based copying; visual sources; pedagogy for creative processes; drawing studies

#### Introduction and Background

This paper focuses on two practical investigations conducted to identify ways in which paper-based drawing can be used to explore the complexity of copying techniques, encourage a reflective practice of drawing-based copying from visual sources, and demonstrate the distinctive opportunities of copying from photographs. Two members of the Drawing Research Group (DRG) at the School of Textiles and Design at Heriot-Watt University have, for some time, been engaged in research to re-evaluate the role of drawing-based copying from archival sources in textile design and in textile design education. This includes the Constructive Copying Workshop they have devised and delivered in two consecutive academic years, which has led to some important conclusions. One being that the students have become more reflective about their use of drawing and have achieved better understanding of the range of copying techniques available to them (Schenk and Parker 2019a, 2019b). Building on his experience of developing, delivering and subsequent analysis of the outputs of these workshops, the author has now moved on from this collaboration to explore the efficacy of their pedagogical methodology when copying from photographic rather than archival sources. As part

of this undertaking, he has initially conducted a drawing-based investigation, testing a matrix of terms initially assembled for the constructive copying workshops, and contemporaneously recording, and reflecting on, his reactions. By revising the earlier workshop teaching materials, he has conducted a new workshop by encouraging second year textile design students to explore the techniques of copying from a photographic source while prompted by the terms in the matrix.

As a teacher of textile design, the author is aware of the ease with which readily available technology, for example mobile phones, tablets and laptops, can facilitate casual collection and repurposing of found imagery in student design. As a senior academic whose duties include serving on specialist review panels and acting as an external examiner of textile design courses, he realizes that his concerns are shared by other academics. Whilst acknowledging the benefits of being able to access up to date information on market trends, etc., he admits to an overriding apprehension about the effects of downloading non-referenced or decontextualized images by textile design students. This also includes their inability to differentiate between using gathered images to inspire their own work, and passing highly derivative ideas off as their own.

### Research Methods

The DRG is engaged in various research projects including an investigation of the potential role of drawing-based copying from various types of visual sources. During the progress of this investigation a range of research methods has been adopted including practice-based investigation, systematic analysis of drawing practice and outputs, review of written accounts, and both opportunist and structured interviews, and the author has been involved in all of these methods in earlier stages of the investigation.

In preparation for the latest development, i.e. copying from photographic sources, the author explored copying methodologies while recording his own ideas in a reflective journal identifying his growing insight into copying techniques. This process was predicated on the use of the copying vocabulary matrix (see table 1). Through the use of opportunistic and semi-structured interviews, he also elicited the opinions of both academics and students on the nature and the value of copying and, where appropriate, both his and their views are given verbatim.

1) trace	2) reproduce
3) investigate	4) deconstruct
5) memorize	6) interpret

*Table 1: Copying Vocabulary Matrix.*

### Historical and contemporary attitudes to copying

Historically the establishing of Designs Schools during the beginning of the nineteenth century gave validity to the copying of decorative forms on the curriculum for trainee designers (Bell 1963). However, perhaps largely due to the sheer volume and sophistication of digital copying methods available, contemporary attitudes towards teaching drawing-based copying techniques on the design curriculum have become less positive. Ashwin (1982) reports that one of the peculiarities of the modern practices of teaching of drawing is the degree to which copying has declined in esteem, whereas, throughout most of the history of design education, copying was regarded as a central aspect of learning. Cain (2010) implies that we adopt different forms of copying as a means to improve our



drawing technique namely, 'copying to replicate, copying to transcribe and copying to learn', and skilled drawing practitioners are able to copy from existing drawings as accurately as if they were drawing from life (Tchalenko 2009). This approach continues the tradition of nineteenth century artists historically copying from other artists and encouraging their students and apprentices to do the same as a means of learning (Petheridge 2010). The virtues of copying as a means of learning have been recommended into the twentieth century (Camp 1981; Drew and Harrison 1987).

By relying heavily upon the internet for gathering visual imagery, thereby making their data collection appear plentiful, students can confuse general information gathering with gathering appropriate source material for their design development (Browne et al. 2000; Dazkir et al. 2013). It is recognized that in both commercial and educational practice there are a number of different approaches when working from a specific visual source, and these include literal adaptation, simplification and abstraction (Eckert and Stacey 2003). Marks (2015) also indicates that there can be different methods of 'borrowing' visual information from the source, namely imitation, adaptation and transformation. Visible appropriation can, in some cases, be seen to be desirable by giving some credence to the original, or it can be deemed simply unoriginal in the formation of a new design output (Britt and Stephen-Cran 2014). However, it would appear that when students are given a specific theme to design around they 'perform' better in terms of the level of creativity than when they are given a more open brief (Mete 2006).

Recent academic opinion implies that students are sometimes unaware of the similarities of their own designs compared to their visual source material and that the prevalence of downloaded visual material may have blurred the boundaries between copying and originating for some student designers. While the custom of 'learning from the master' seems appropriate to some academics, there is also resistance to the concept of creating replicas of existing designs instead of the promotion of the student's individual identity. However, the choice of their own photographic images as opposed to published material is generally endorsed. While it is accepted that student learners will copy from their own photographs at certain points in textile design course work, it is also agreed that they do not always consider the copying techniques that they use.

### **Copying from a photographic source**

The author draws most days and regularly exhibits these drawings on Instagram ([www.instagram.com/starsaboveus](http://www.instagram.com/starsaboveus)) attracting comments from many 'followers' usually relating to the drawing style or narrative of the subject. The style of drawing is illustrative and decorative, and is derived from his commercial printed textile design background. Through the drawings he aims to capture the familiarity of a place, the adventure of a journey, or the special visual characteristics of a group of objects that he feels a connection with.

Working with the terms from the copying vocabulary matrix developed for the constructive copying workshop (table 1), and copying from the photograph shown in figure 1, the author carried out a systematic investigation of his own drawing practice. He also kept a reflective journal to capture thoughts while working and trying to define the drawing techniques he was exploring.



*Figure 1: Visual source, Mark Parker, coloured photograph, 2018.*

The drawn copies were produced A4 size and in monochrome using only a range of black pencils as stipulated in the guidelines for the earlier constructive copying workshops. Based on the terms in the matrix (table 1), a set of six drawings was produced, one for each of the terms given and in the order shown, beginning with 'trace'.

Despite being much more experienced both as a designer and as a draughtsman, many of the author's written reflections on approaches to his investigative drawings turned out to show strong similarities in opinion to those formed by students in the early workshops. However, the markedly different approach he took in response to the term 'trace' proved the exception.



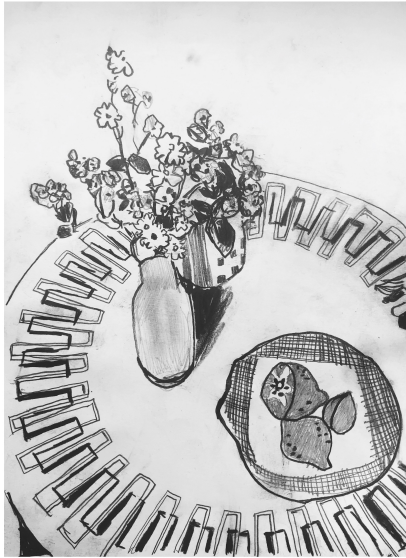


Figure 2: Trace, pencil on paper, Mark Parker, 2018.  
Figure 3: Reproduce, pencil on paper, Mark Parker, 2018.

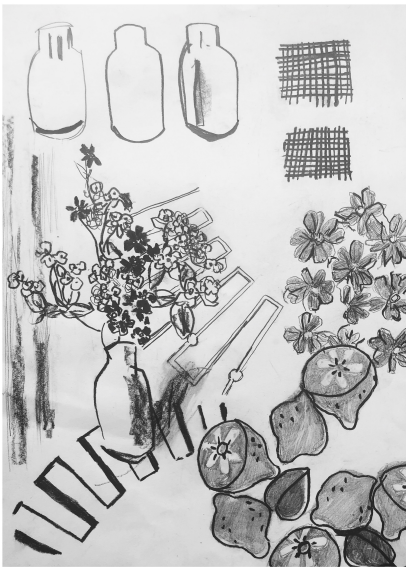


Figure 4: Investigate, pencil on paper, Mark Parker, 2018.  
Figure 5: Deconstruct, pencil on paper, Mark Parker, 2018.



Figure 6: Memorise, pencil on paper, Mark Parker, 2018.  
Figure 7: Interpret, pencil on paper, Mark Parker, 2018.

The author was conscious that the drawings produced by students for 'trace' had tended to be pale in tone and with the characteristic of a linear blueprint. On the other hand, for his own drawing (figure 2) he reflected that 'I think tracing gave me more information than just a line. I wanted to give the tracing life and confidence using the original I have to work from' (Parker 2018). This drawing was executed on cartridge paper on a light box and this in itself determined part of his approach. 'I made the flowers loose as I couldn't see the detail through the light box' (Parker 2018). For the author the word tracing implies an action that has an energetic connotation. Therefore, for this response there was layering of different thicknesses of line and tone working directly over the original as a guide.

Working from the term 'reproduce' the author was 'very conscious that he wanted this drawing to look realistic' (figure 3). He spent longer on this drawing than the others and had in his mind a photographic reproduction-like outcome, i.e. for the drawing to look almost like a black and white photocopy. To a certain extent the term 'reproduce' placed on the author the restriction of everything being in its place with little room for artistic freedom, unlike the term 'investigate' that, to him, implied a focus of examining parts of the photograph he found interesting (see figure 4). He reflected on his intention to create a worksheet approach to show the different elements he was interested in. 'The shape of the jug being one that I use a lot in my work'. It could also be envisaged that these little groups of motifs and drawn marks could be taken directly into further development compositions, and, whilst making this third drawing in the series, the author wrote in his reflective journal about how he missed colour when working in black and white.

In earlier workshops the term 'deconstruct' was described by the participants as 'disassembling', or 'taking apart something then putting it back together'. The author often breaks down his drawings into layers of linear detail and block colour to produce simple prints on paper that include overlays of colour produced either on a Canon home inkjet printer or in the screen print workshop. He applied this methodology of breaking down areas of line and tone and creating these exaggerated contrasts for the 'deconstruct' drawing (figure 5). Thus, he reflected, 'I feel more ownership of this drawing than the previous ones, whilst being a copy I like the invention of new mark-making approaches to drawing' (Parker 2018).

The creation of new types of mark-making was also evident in the drawing that defines the term 'memorize', shown in figure 6. The author identified a similar use of a selection technique described by an earlier workshop participant who had said, 'I studied the photograph and kept in my head the areas I wanted to remember', and he further reflected that the term 'memory' helps you get to the heart of the subject' (Parker 2018).

Based on his teaching experience, the author feels that the term 'interpret' is the most apposite of those in the matrix to inspire a design idea through copying from a visual source. He is aware that if a group of students were to be given the same image to 'interpret', then almost every one of them would produce a unique response. For this drawing (figure 7) the author reflected that 'I like the balance of having the essence of the original source but also feeling I had the freedom to make it my own, enjoying adding things, moving things around and using devices I have been employing recently (before this exercise) such as creating the impression of foolscap paper and blocks of tone' (Parker 2018).

### **The Constructive Copying Workshop: Archive**

In the first two constructive copying workshops students were given examples of historical textiles from textile archives to copy from, one being a floral, mid-twentieth century Liberty print, and the other an eighteenth century 'Toile de Jouy'. These types of images were chosen because of their relevance to the ongoing project in which the workshop was embedded. For both workshops, along with the archival sample, participants were also given a short introductory briefing and a handout with guidelines about the limitations in media and an explanation of the copying vocabulary matrix and its use. Each participant was then asked to produce six A4 size drawings, responding in monochrome on separate sheets to the matrix of copying terms. The limited media included a range of black pencils, cartridge paper and tracing paper and students were asked to bring these materials in advance of the workshop. Participants were also asked to keep reflective journals about their responses to the matrix of terms. Follow up interviews were held with selected participants a month or so after the workshops in order to gather their opinions on the different approaches they employed to the copying techniques. At the end of the project in which the workshops were embedded, visual and written outputs from the workshops including interview data were analyzed and findings accrued.

### **The Constructive Copying Workshop: Photograph**

Briefing material very similar to that developed for the 'Archive' workshop was adopted for the new 'Constructive Copying Workshop: Photograph'. The same procedures of interviews and subsequent analysis were also used. The workshop was conducted with a group of second year printed textile design undergraduate students. They were at the stage of generating sketchbook work for the first part of a project to create a contemporary and original version of the classic 'Toile de Jouy' design style based upon a place that was special to them. This workshop was carried out earlier in the second year of study than the previous ones. The workshop included the same guidelines as the previous two Constructive Copying Workshops and that of the authors own systematic investigation of his drawing practice.

The same coloured photographic image printed out at A4 size was given to each student to work from (as seen in figure 8). The author had selected this scene because it incorporated the natural forms of foliage set against block shapes of lawns with the architectural detail of a small building and fencing. This mix of both natural and structural shapes may be considered requisite in the generation of drawings to be developed stylistically into a Toile design. Furthermore, based upon the findings of the previous two constructive copying workshops it was felt that this choice of photographic image would stimulate both detailed and gestural approaches. to the responses to the copying terms.



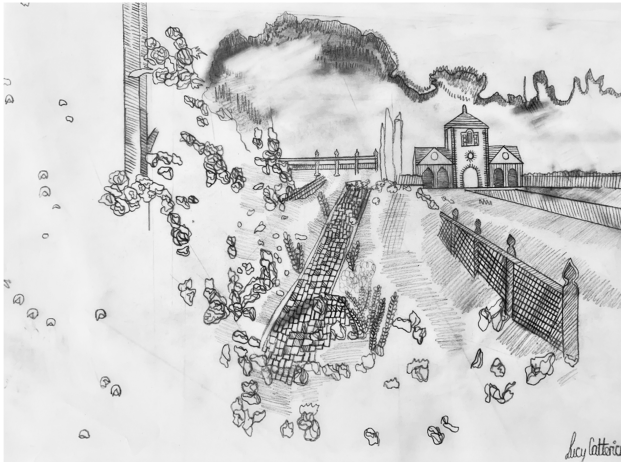


*Figure 8. Visual source, coloured photograph, Jane Askey, 2018.*

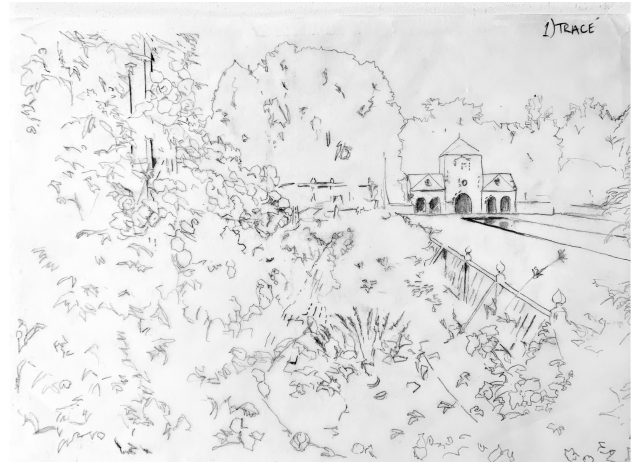
From the analysis made of the student participants drawn copies (see figures 12–19), their entries in reflective journals and answers to scripted interview questions, various findings were accrued. These suggest that not all participants expected to be successfully engaged with the workshop when they first heard the title. One expressed the view that ‘copying and photographs as words together made me feel like I was going to have to draw in a certain way. It conjured up a sort of photo realism approach for a drawing workshop. At my school this approach was encouraged, but it’s the sort of approach that put me off drawing’ (Printed Textile Student 1 2018). However, all students interviewed after the workshop felt it had been useful, and the majority felt the use of the matrix of terms made them think about how they should start drawing to develop a printed textile project. One expressed the opinion that, ‘I thought the drawing exercises really helped me think about how I use drawing in a project and the styles I might use in the future, rather than just start drawing and go for it’ (Printed Textile Student 2 2018).

Starting as before, with the term ‘trace’, it gave participants confidence as well as equipping some of them with a new technique, given that many had been discouraged from tracing by their school art department. One student commented that ‘tracing allowed me to see different things, and to draw things that I don’t normally draw. I used tracing as a guide, so it gave me confidence’ (Printed Textile Student 3 2018) (figure 9). Another student expressed her frustration that ‘tracing was more difficult for the flower garden area as it appeared as a mass, so I drew around the lighter areas i.e. the flowers and the borders structural edges’ (Printed Textile Student 4 2018). Figure 9 illustrates this confident approach to tracing, whereas figure 10 shows a more typical, lightly toned linear drawing on tracing paper.





*Figure 9: Trace, pencil on tracing paper, Lucy Catterick, 2018.*



*Figure 10: Trace, pencil on tracing paper, Holly Houston, 2018.*

There were generally two approaches evident when defining the term 'reproduce'. One is typified by the comment 'I took more notice of the details as I reproduced, drawing the window many times and getting the shapes the same' (Printed Textile Student 5 2018), and this approach of drawing the same motif many times is demonstrated in figure 11. Another of the drawings produced, illustrates a combined approach where copying detail combined in repeat evokes a printed textile (figure 12).



*Figure 11: Reproduce, pencil on tracing paper, Leila Barr, 2018.*



*Figure 12: Reproduce, pencil on tracing paper, Clare Carmichael, 2018.*

Another typical definition from this workshop group was for the term 'investigate', one participant saying that 'to me investigate means literally that, to investigate and focus on an area. To take an area and isolate it from the overall scene' (Printed Textile student 6 2018). Indeed, the term 'investigate' seemed to allow for 'a freedom in copying areas of personal interest' (Printed Textile Student 7 2018), as one student put it. 'I think my investigation drawing was my best drawing. I spent the most time on it and I enjoyed being able to add all the detail' (Printed Textile Student 8 2018). In contrast, the term 'investigate implies drawing something in detail almost like a photocopy. This style of drawing is not my thing'(Printed Textile Student 1 2018). However, across the whole set of drawings produced for the workshop there were a number of decorative approaches to patternmaking emerging. Figure 13 shows a decorative use of line used to describe grass and foliage.

The term 'deconstruct' was taken by most participants as meaning 'to take an image apart and to look at the components that make it up in order to re-create it'. One student thought there was an analogy with cooking for her drawing shown in figure 14. 'My first thoughts are to separate the elements and



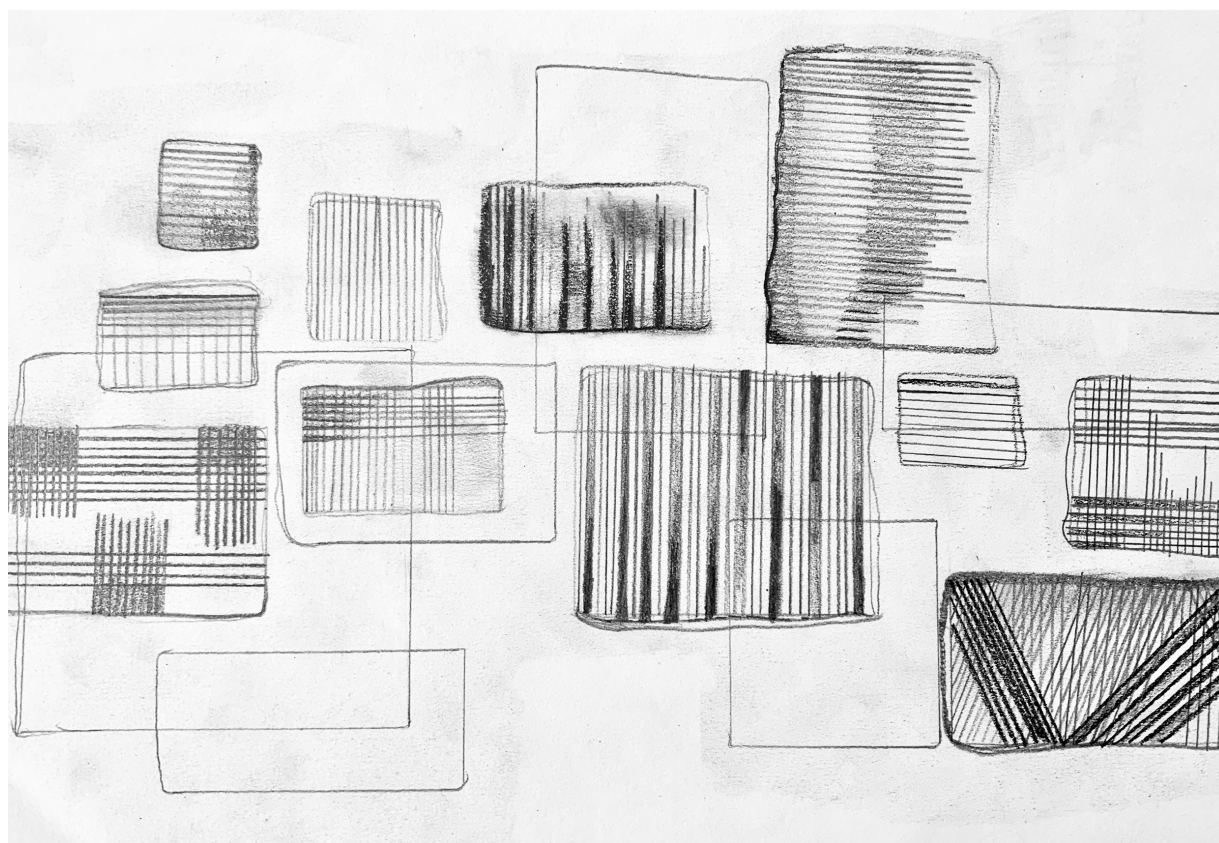
lay them all out as such. A bit like what the chefs do on MasterChef with their puddings' (Printed Textile student 9 2018). She continued, 'The four main elements are the rose bush, the building, the trellis fence and the pagoda type thing at the back (Printed Textile student 9 2018). There is a clear contrast in choice of motif with the 'deconstruct' drawing in figure 15 that investigates more abstract shapes.



*Figure 13: Investigate, pencil on tracing paper, Leila Barr, 2018.*



*Figure 14: Investigate, pencil on tracing paper, Louisa Marston, 2018.*



*Figure 15: Deconstruct, pencil on paper, Lucy Catterick, 2018.*

Students enjoyed working from memory and one picked up on it by saying 'I think "memorize" is a good word – it suggests the feeling of a place and a 3D experience as opposed to a flat image. This combination of senses gives a rich approach to drawing' (Printed Textile Student 10 2018). Another student commented on having to 'think first before holding a memory in order to be able to draw it' (Printed Textile Student 11 2018). Analysis of the drawings reveal that a quick sketchy approach tends to be used quite often to represent the word 'memorize', with an emphasis on gestural mark making

(figure 16). However, in this workshop there was a more dreamlike approach to some of the drawings that almost facilitated images coming in and out of focus with devices like smudging and the use of different scales, and small-scale repeating patterns (figure 17).



*Figure 16: Memorize, pencil on tracing paper, Kareen Murrery, 2018.*

*Figure 17: Memorize, pencil on tracing paper, Clare Carmichael, 2018.*

Most participants agreed with the following opinion about the matrix term ‘interpret’. ‘When interpreting I thought I could use my own style and marks. I enjoy drawing natural things, so the image had lots of things I like to draw’ (Printed Textile Student 12 2018). One student expressed this same view about her drawing in figure 18 as ‘I could have interpreted the whole picture but I decided to focus on flowers as they stood out to me’ (Printed Textile Student 13 2018). The floral study detail in figure 18 contrasts with a sketchy drawing that is a simplified view of the student’s choice of things to draw from the photograph, as shown in figure 19.



*Figure 18: Interpret, pencil on tracing paper, Lucy Catterick, 2018.*

*Figure 19: Interpret, pencil on tracing paper, Louisa Marston, 2018.*

## Conclusions

Current opinion elicited from academics indicates that, whilst copying through drawing from photographs is acknowledged on the textile design curriculum, the copying methods encouraged are not always explicit. The author's own practice-based investigation, participant workshop findings, journal entries and follow up interviews, identify ways in which the use of specified terminology can structure copying activity and promote innovation. Whilst the photographic source remained the same there was a wide variety of responses to the matrix of terms. A number of students felt that, by working with these terms they discovered elements in the image that they had overlooked on first seeing the photograph. It may also be the case that some of the varied responses from the students initiated the first stages in exploring textile patternmaking, with its emphasis on repeat formation and rhythmic qualities. It was also found that some participants interpreted figurative objects in a more abstract or decorative way suitable for the development of printed textile fabrics. In the author's view, the workshop which involved drawing from a photograph, encouraged participants to use a wider range of approaches prompted by the terms in the matrix than either of the workshops based on archival images.

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