Annotated bibliography [2]

Critical Question:

How can traditional *Anatolian kilim motifs* be reinterpreted in contemporary contexts while respecting their cultural origins and adapting to modern aesthetic and communicative demands?

Benjamin, W. (1936) *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. New York: Schocken Books.

Benjamin's reflections on the loss of "*aura*" in mechanically reproduced art resonate deeply with the transition that traditional kilims have undergone. A key characteristic of handwoven kilims is their imperfections – subtle mistakes, unique asymmetries, and variations that appear across the pattern. These "*flaws*" are not errors but marks of human touch, capturing the individuality of each weaver and embedding in every piece. However, as the craft has modernised, machines have taken over much of the production, and with them, the imperfections that gave these works their personality have vanished.

The notion of "*aura*" – the authenticity tied to an artwork's unique time and place of creation – has been invaluable in understanding this shift. Today, even if the same original designs, layouts, and materials are used, machine-made kilims lack the irregularities that handwoven pieces naturally have. This mechanisation process strips the kilims of a certain intangible value, a loss that aligns with Benjamin's observations about art becoming detached from its roots in the pursuit of mass production and replication.

The transition from handwoven to machine-made kilims symbolises a broader narrative of tradition yielding to modernity, where efficiency replaces individuality, and perfection erases personality.

Ording, P. (2019) *99 Variations on a Proof.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Like Ording's exploration of diverse methods and techniques in approaching a single proof, I have experimented with various approaches in my project to transform the kilim into a digital wallpaper. From the outset, I have aimed to reinterpret the traditional kilim through varied methods, creating 100 iterations with this philosophy in mind. In the initial stages, I manipulated the kilim using digital techniques, sometimes blending with coding and other times utilising pixelation. I explored mathematical methods, useing polygonal transformations and the kaleidoscope technique to break down and reassemble the wallpapers.

Later, I decided to extract individual symbols from the kilim and work on them one by one. In doing so, I considered different materials and techniques, embracing contemporary materials and methods to render these motifs. This exploration allowed me to combine traditional patterns with modern, experimental approaches, adding new dimensions to each symbol and motif.

Inspired by the various trials in Ording's book, I have also incorporated some experimental kilim and motif attempts in this booklet as text-based elements. These explorations offer an additional layer to my project, reflecting Ording's spirit of iteration and variation.

Metahaven (2010) 'Sealand', in *Uncorporate Identity.* Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, pp. 6–49.

In *Uncorporate Identity*, the *Sealand* section by Metahaven explores how identity and truth are constructed, often relying on "*hypothetical truths*" and subjective interpretations. This resonates with my approach to kilim motifs, where understanding may have shifted over time. Historically, it is possible that the women weaving these motifs did not consciously assign symbolic meanings to each kilim; rather, they likely created patterns they found visually appealing or that reflected other kilims. Over time, however, these motifs have acquired layered meanings through interpretations by carpet merchants and academics. (Metahaven, 2010, pp. 42-44)

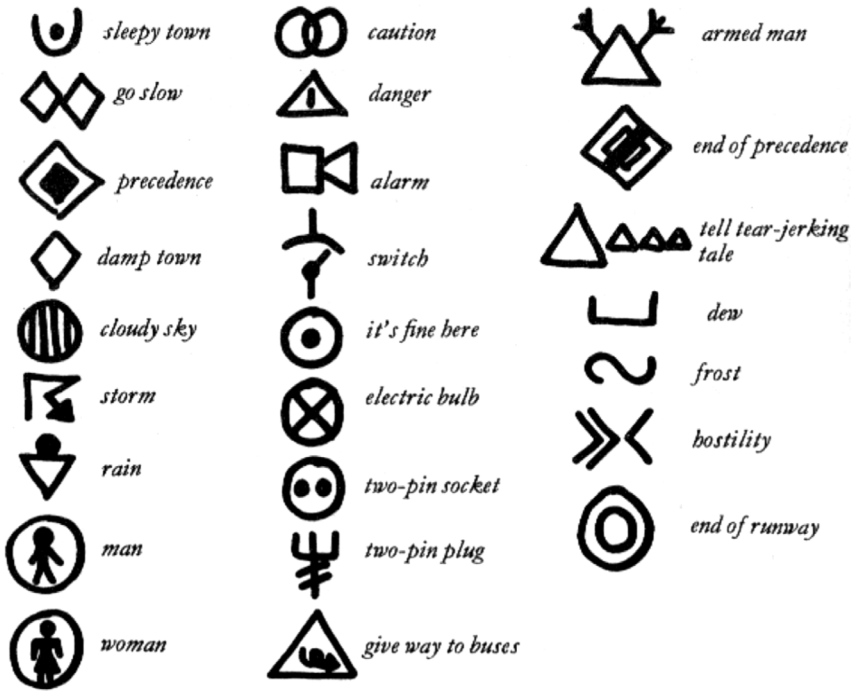
One of the notable quotes, *"Why waste time trying to discover the truth, when you can so easily create it?"* (Metahaven, 2010, p. 42), emphasises this idea, suggesting that meaning can be constructed rather than discovered. This perspective challenges my project to question how much of the traditional symbolism assigned to kilim motifs is an authentic historical truth versus a modern construct.

The book's exploration of how information can serve as a form of *"branding"* for nations or objects also encourages me to think critically about how kilims symbols are perceived today.

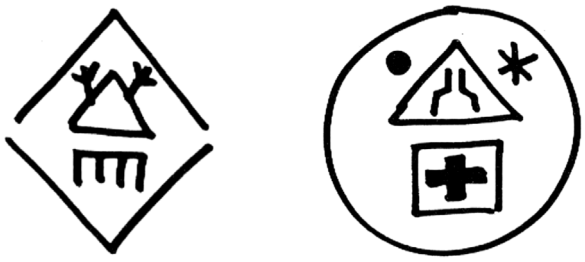
Reinfurt, D. (2019) 'G-E-S-T-A-L-T' in *A New Program for Graphic Design* Los Angeles: Inventory Press, pp. 98-170.

In the *G-E-S-T-A-L-T* section of *A New Program for Graphic Design*, Reinfurt goes beyond simply outlining Gestalt principles; he explores how these principles form the backbone of visual perception in graphic design. For instance, numerous figure-ground relationships appear in kilim motifs as woven illusions where certain motifs can be perceived alternately as the main subject or background. His exploration of Gestalt has broadened my understanding of the woven illusions in kilims and encouraged me to observe these hidden patterns more deeply.

Reinfurt also discusses Bruno Munari's work, which has a playful approach to visual literacy and his "*language of signs and symbols.*" Munari describes visual symbols as structured systems with their own grammar and vocabulary, encompassing elements like electrical schematics, road signs, and hobo symbols. These symbols served as coded messages for travellers, indicating resources or the local environment. [↓] (Reinfurt, 2019, pp. 134-135).



These symbols could be creatively combined to convey more complex messages; for example, [↙] represents "*armed man plus fierce dog*", and [↘] combines symbols to mean "*I am in a narrow place between rain and snow, please help*". (Reinfurt, 2019, pp. 134-135). I think it is an excellent example of utilising the power of symbols as a storytelling method.



Pater, R. (2016) *The Politics of Design: A (Not So) Global Design Manual for Visual Communication.* Amsterdam: BIS Publishers.

In The Politics of Design, Ruben Pater discusses the cultural and political values that influence visual communication, asserting that design is never truly neutral. This perspective is significant for my exploration of Anatolian kilim motifs, where external reinterpretations often shift their original meanings. Pater suggests that all design "reinforces or subverts" existing structures (p. 130), aligning with the need to approach culturally significant symbols with care, as they carry deep historical and cultural weight.

Pater also touches upon themes like Cultural Thievery (p. 126), where he examines the risks of reappropriating cultural motifs without complete understanding. He draws attention to how cultural symbols can easily be misrepresented or stripped of their original significance when borrowed and used out of context. On the other hand, in the "Learning from Cave Paintings" part (p. 144), Pater reflects on some of the earliest symbolic forms used in human history, underscoring the value in respecting cultural symbols that, like these ancient forms, contain a rich shared human narrative.

This broader critique within The Politics of Design highlights the responsibility of using cultural symbols thoughtfully, reminding me of the importance of maintaining a balance between honouring the original significance of kilim motifs and reimagining them for today's visual language.

Baudenbacher, B.K. (2022) *Somewhere Yes: The Search for Belonging in a World Shaped by Branding.* New York: Fast Company Press.

Baudenbacher explores human identities, cultures, and symbols, describing them as a "complex, intricately woven structure". This analogy resonates deeply with my project on Anatolian kilims, where each motif and pattern forms part of a collective cultural memory. Just as Baudenbacher illustrates society's interconnectedness through symbols and shared experiences, kilim motifs represent centuries of stories, beliefs, and shared identity within Anatolian heritage.

Baudenbacher further highlights the role of choice in self-definition by noting, "We have the power to create our identities instead of passively accepting pre-established ones" (Baudenbacher, 2022, p. 64). This perspective aligns with my approach to reinterpreting kilims in the contemporary context. By reimagining these symbols, I aim to honour their origins while allowing for new, self-defined narratives that speak to today's audiences. In doing so, I am inspired by Baudenbacher's notion of identity as something dynamic an adaptable.

In discussing symbols, Baudenbacher emphasizes that they often step in "when language falls short," serving as a powerful visual shorthand (Baudenbacher, 2022, p. 113). Kilim motifs function similarly, transcending language and culture, conveying meaning through form and pattern. My project leverages this universal language, using familiar motifs to bridge past and present, tradition and modernity. I view each reinterpreted kilim pattern as a symbol of change and continuity.

Keefer, A. (2011) *An Octopus in Plan View.* New York: The Serving Library.

In *An Octopus in Plan View*, Keefer's discussion of how octopuses communicate through colours, textures, and shapes without words offered inspiration, particularly when thinking about kilim patterns. Keefer explains how octopuses convey complex messages through a visual "*language*," bypassing spoken or written forms. This approach resonates with the non-verbal language of kilims, where each colour and symbol carries meaning without a single word. Keefer's perspective helped me view kilim patterns as a kind of silent dialogue, where the viewer and the maker connect beyond language in a traditional form of visual storytelling.

As Keefer highlights the octopus's shape-shifting abilities, my project similarly focuses on the transformation of kilims as they transition into digital formats. Just as the octopus adapts and shifts to suit its environment, kilim patterns should also adapt to digital spaces or contemporary contexts, taking on new forms and meanings.

Benbrahim, D. (2023) 'Woven in Oral History: An Incomplete Taxonomy of Amazigh Symbols', in Sales, K. (ed.) *Centered: People and Ideas Diversifying Design.* New York: Princeton Architectural Press, pp. 120-135.

In *Woven in Oral History:* An Incomplete Taxonomy of Amazigh Symbols, Benbrahim explores the Amazigh symbols woven into rugs by women as a powerful medium of cultural resistance, identity, and memory preservation. This resonates deeply with my approach to kilim motifs in a contemporary context. As Benbrahim notes, Amazigh women crafted these symbols not just as designs but as forms of storytelling – a way to pass down narratives, beliefs, and resilience against forces of erasure. This inspired me to view each kilim motif I work with as more than a pattern. Instead, it is a message, a fragment of cultural memory that deserves to be preserved even as it transitions into contemporary forms.

Benbrahim also highlights the impact of colonial and patriarchal pressures on these weavers, who, despite such challenges, manage to keep their heritage alive through craft. In adapting and reforming the kilim motifs, I find a similar challenge – to retain these designs' authenticity and cultural weight while making them accessible to a broader audience.

Ahmed, F. (2014) *Deconstructed Carpets.* [Exhibition] Dubai: Cuadro Gallery. September 14 - November 30.

I have admired Faig Ahmed's work since my initial interest in kilims began. He blends heritage with modernity. In his projects, he radically reinterprets traditional Azerbaijani carpets by distorting, melting, or glitching their designs. In the *Deconstructed Carpets* [↓], Ahmed "*deconstructs*" the rug, separating it layer by layer and presenting it as fragmented forms. This method invites the viewer to engage with every component as an essential piece of the whole, enhancing the perception of each motif's individual significance.

Ahmed's approach has significantly influenced my exploration of kilim motifs. By isolating each motif, he encourages viewers to see them as independent elements with unique narratives that can be preserved or reinterpreted. This approach aligns with my project, where I aim to present each kilim motif as a symbol with historical depth that remains relevant in contemporary contexts.



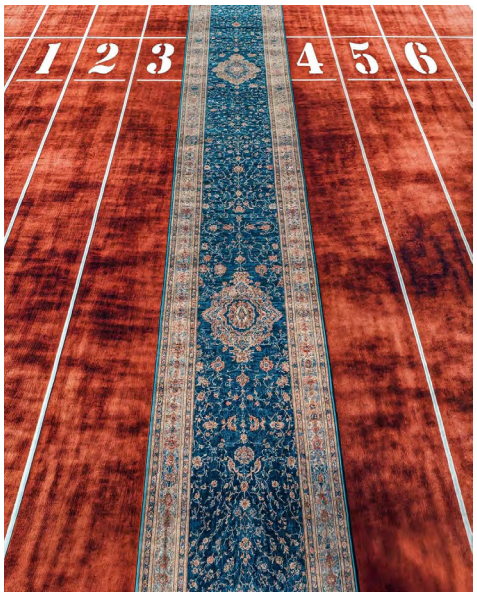


His process has guided me to view each kilim motif as a bridge between past and present, preserving cultural heritage while allowing new interpretations that connect traditional meaning with modern relevance.

Mekawi, C. (2023-2024) *Carpet Court, Carpet Aquatics and Athletics, Olympics Edition.* [Digital Art, AI Installation]

Chafic Mekawi's Carpet installations during the 2024 Paris Olympics reimagine traditional Middle Eastern carpet motifs in contemporary athletic settings, like tennis courts, to create a unique intersection between heritage and modern sport. While traditional carpets are familiar to us, seeing them outside their usual context evokes a different feeling. Mekawi uses generative AI to position these carpets in unexpected complex environments, achieving something normally challenging to imagine or implement. Carpet Aquatics [↙], Carpet Athletics [↘].







Carpet Court [↖]
Mekawi, C. (2024)

Mekawi's work inspired me to envision traditional kilims beyond their customary uses and settings, encouraging me to explore how they might exist in contemporary contexts. This approach aligns with my own project goals, as I aim to adapt kilims to environments that challenge the viewer's usual perceptions. Through his project, Mekawi demonstrates that traditional design's power lies in preservation and its ability to transcend boundaries and find relevance in new environments. His installations remind me that kilims can resonate with today's audiences by bridging past and present.

Sagmeister, S. (2022) *Belleza en Cifras (Beatiful Numbers).* [Exhibition] Mexico City: Museo Franz Mayer.

Sagmeister's *Beautiful Numbers* exhibition continues his exploration of happiness, progress, and data-driven optimism. This theme is also repeated in his book *Now is Better*, where I discovered his work. In *Beautiful Numbers*, Sagmeister showcases visual data to highlight how various aspects of human life have improved over time, contrary to popular belief. Through carefully designed infographics, the exhibition challenges the negative bias in public perception, presenting data on metrics like health, wealth, and safety to argue that, statistically, life today is better than in previous generations.

This approach resonates with my project's exploration of traditional Anatolian kilim motifs, as Sagmeister's work suggests that data and visuals can reshape perceptions. Just as he uses compelling visuals to transform complex data into something accessible and uplifting, I aim to reinterpret kilim motifs in ways that are visually engaging and culturally resonant. Sagmeister's integration of minimal colour palettes and impactful iconography pushes me to think about how kilim patterns can be simplified yet retain depth, using design to tell a story that bridges past and present. *Beautiful Numbers* demonstrates that data, like cultural symbols, can be recontextualised to encourage viewers to see the world—and their heritage—through a new, more hopeful lens.

Reading and Writing [↓], 10 ⅝ x 8 ¼ in. (27 × 21 cm)

Number of children receiving an education worldwide, per one hundred children, 1820 vs. 2020.



1820: *17 (red)* 2020: *86 (black)*

Data Source: Max Roser and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, "*Primary and Secondary Education,*" Our World in Data, 2013, www.ourworldindata.org/prim ry-and-secondary-education.

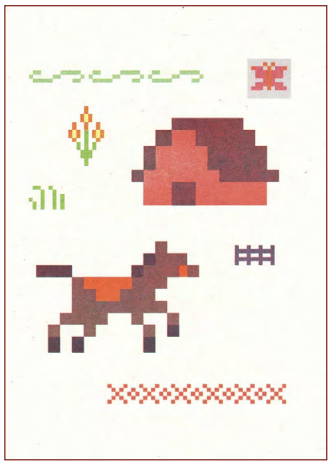


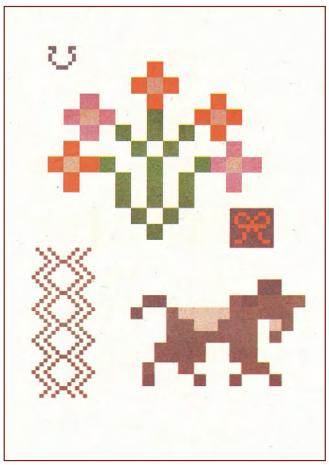
Cory, L. (2024) *Homestead.* [Exhibition]
Edinburgh: Out of the Blue. February 10 - March 30.

Lauren Cory's *Homestead* blends retro gaming graphics with traditional Scottish textile motifs, creating warm, familiar landscapes that feel both nostalgic and modern. Using pastel tones and the unique texture of Risograph printing, she layers pixel art with classic elements from cross-stitch, medieval tapestries, and even maps from vintage Pokémon games. Her scenes feature pixelated trees, fences, and flowers, giving a cosy, universal feel while keeping that personal touch.

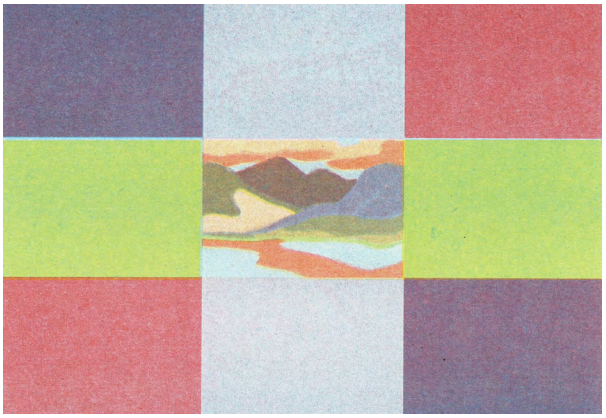
This project connects directly to my work, where I reinterpret kilim motifs in the contemporary context. Like Cory, I am taking something traditional and giving it a fresh twist, aiming for that balance between cultural roots and modern appeal.

Her use of pixelation and limited colours pushes me to think about how traditional kilim patterns could be adapted in similar ways, using simplified forms and diverse colours to resonate with today's audiences. *Homestead* shows that reimagining heritage visuals does not mean losing their depth – it is about finding new ways for viewers to engage with them.









Line of Enquiry

This project explores how traditional Anatolian kilims can be reimagined within contemporary settings. Initially, I experimented with photo manipulation techniques on a reference kilim, exploring coding and interactive methods. This process evolved into extracting individual motifs and reimagining them one at a time using contemporary materials and techniques, aiming to evoke new emotions.

My objective is to examine the historical significance of these motifs and how they resonate within today's cultural landscape. This approach seeks to create a refreshed motif set that balances traditional narratives with contemporary Anatolian values. Ultimately, the goal is a cohesive guide that enhances understanding and appreciation of kilim motifs, making their stories accessible for modern audiences.

Inspired by artists like Faig Ahmed and Chafic Mekawi, and informed by theoretical insights from Benjamin, Ording, Keefer, and others, this project positions kilim motifs as adaptable elements bridging tradition and modernity. Benjamin's reflections on reproduction highlight the importance of cultural integrity in transformation. Ording's iterative approach to exploring concepts guides my experimentation with motifs, while Keefer's views on symbols reinforce the idea of kilims as visual narratives. Together, these influences shape the way I approach kilims as cultural symbols that connect the past with the present.