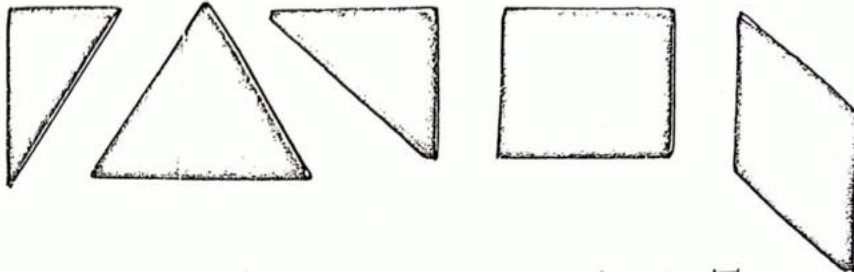


Five shapes and six colours – An essay in interpretation By Harry Johnson



There are 300 of these pieces in each set. The subject is told “make anything you like with the pieces.” Ordinarily, no further comment is made. Frequently the subject will try to get more specific instructions out of the examiner. In such cases scrupulous care is taken not to give “informing” answers. For example, if the subject asks: “How many should I use?” the reply will be “As many or as few as you like.” “Shall I make a house?” “You may make anything you wish.” The pieces are painted in bright saturated enamel colours with a matt surface.

“Every man has his own *style*, like his own nose,” said Lessing. “A mask tells us more than a face,” said Wilde. “*Le style est d’homme même*,” said Buffon. “Tell me the things you love, and I’ll tell you what you are,” said Ruskin. “No man was ever writ down but by himself,” said Dr. Johnson, who knew that nothing extraneous to the man could affect the true and final estimate.

“Style,” said Schopenhauer, “is the physiognomy of the mind, and a safer index to character than the face.” And this thing called “style” (which no man yet has been able clearly to define) is the way the artist paints the picture, the way we write a book, the way we speak, the way we dress, the way we walk, the way we work. When Crichton the butler became king of the island, he still on occasion “washed his hands with invisible soap in imperceptible water.”

In chess, a Nimzowitsch or an Alekhine game can be identified as confidently as, say, a portrait by John: it is *signed*. And a John painting is “signed all over the canvas” as the critics say.

The graphologist, Saudek, says that the peculiar “y” written by Suzanne Lenglen was really an instinctive picture of her long forehand stroke with the racket.

Carlyle passed Chelsea Hospital, *and saw it was the work of a gentleman*. And is not the personality, the character, of every architect expressed in his work?

Now upon this expression of personality, in this form or that, the psychologists have seized – and presented us with some remarkable essays in the interpretation of character.

A principle method of “measuring personality” is the Lowenfeld “mosaic test.” This was devised by the eminent psychotherapist, Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld, “to supplement the tests already in use.” The following notes are based upon material supplied by her:

The “apparatus” of the test was selected from a variety of possible materials. Through experiments with a large number of subjects, a collection of “mosaic pieces” was gradually assembled in the following shapes: the square, the right-angled triangle, the equilateral triangle, the scalene triangle, the diamond. In a single box there are the following numbers of each shape in each of the six colours: 4 squares, 8 right-angled triangles, 6 equilateral triangles, 12 scalenes, 8 diamonds. The pieces are 1/16 in. thick, and approximately the size of half a crown.

By the use of these pieces, an infinite number of patterns can be formed. All the pieces obviously lend themselves to the formation of certain combinations, as, for examples, the making of the eight-pointed star by use of the diamond shapes. Many of the patterns formed may be said to be fundamental – they are universal in European geometrical design.

The colours of the mosaic pieces are the four jewel colours – ruby, emerald, sapphire, topaz, plus black and white.

In setting this “design test” it is important that uniform instructions shall be given, for very slight differences in presentation vary the significance of the results considerably. Scrupulous care must be taken to avoid “guiding” or influencing the subject in the making of the design. Adults are told the shapes and colours in the set, and that they may use as many pieces as they like, that there is no restriction in time, and that, if possible, they should continue with the pattern until they like the pattern they have made. If they do not like the pattern, they should notice how they feel towards it. To all questions about how the mosaics may be used, the invariable answer should be, “You may make anything you like.”

The writer of this article was recently a member of a small dinner party among whom the following were guests: Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld, Dr. Margaret Denton, Mr. Alfred Bossom, F.R.I.B.A., M.P., Mr Philip Hepworth, F.R.I.B.A., and Mr. Rodney Thomas, F.R.I.B.A.

Here, indeed, was a golden opportunity to learn what the work of these prominent architects owed to their personality.

Gathered in the corner of the lounge of a quiet hotel, the proceedings of our little group must have occasioned much speculation in the minds of the uninitiated. Sets of the “mosaic test” were before us. Were we intent upon a game of Mah-Jong? Or puzzling over the pieces of some super jigsaw?

Alfred Bossom tackled the pieces at once with a readiness and an assiduity characteristic of him – fitting piece to piece with an industry that was not to be shaken by any of Philip Hepworth’s persiflage. He worked with a dogged industry that revealed the character of the man more perhaps than could any “test.”

Rodney Thomas’s long form leaned back in a bowed curve that was reminiscent of one of his own “mobiles” but with no movement, and with his chin stuck in his hand. He remained so for a long time – for nearly twenty minutes, I think – until some of us thought perhaps he

had gone to sleep or did not wish to “play.” Then quietly he began to assemble the pieces of his pattern, as one would assemble the components of a prefabricated building for which all the drawings had been carefully made.

Philip Hepworth attacked the test in a quite different way. For some moments he studied the tray and the mosaics before him as a chess player might study the men upon the board. Then he set about the job confidently, and did not pause until there appeared before us the highly-coloured bird here reproduced.

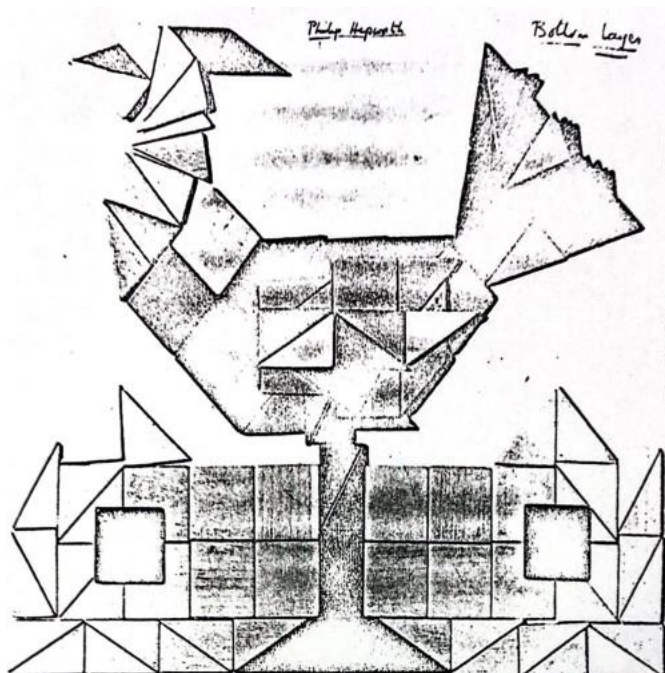
It was perhaps a coincidence that Rodney Thomas should also have chosen a bird as the subject of his pattern. We had been talking about bird-watching at dinner, but this, it seems, had nothing to do with his design.

Five shapes and six colours... By our use of them the trained psychiatrist can tell us what we are. We never design twice alike, but the expert can make it quite clear to us that even our variations are individual and personal. Or we may affect a manner of design which is not our own. We may pose; we may wear a mask; the mask will tell more than the face. For good or for ill, for better or for worse, “the style is the man himself.”

How different from a Raphael’s would have been a Madonna by Cellini! – how different the minds and the personalities, showing through their works, of a Lutyens and of a Le Corbusier. And one quick look through Owen Jones’s “Grammar of Ornament” reveals the characteristics of national design.

When the divination of character from our architectural work becomes an exact science, who of us will risk designing even a small house?

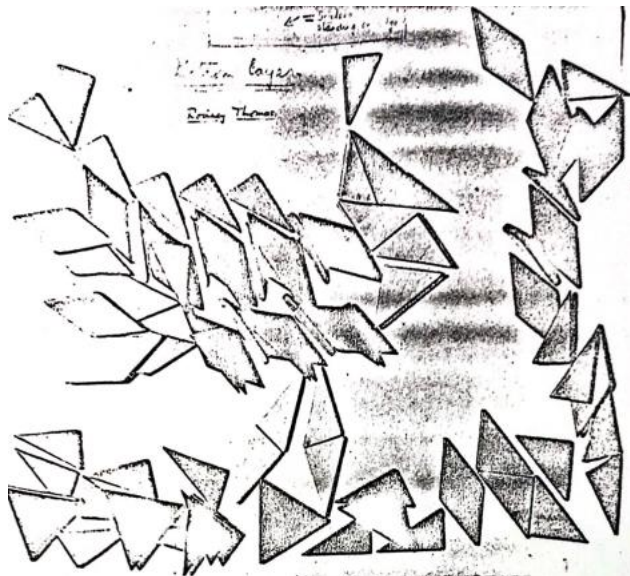
Philip Hepworth



A dominant – rather aggressive? – personality, very sure of its own strength and at times “thirsting for a fight” – not with men, but with materials. A nature which focuses with intense concentration on its task and is capable of exhaustive attention to every detail of that task, giving his undivided attention to every detail of that task, giving his undivided attention to it alone. Extracts from himself a high standard, and is merciless both to himself and others in the detail of the carrying out of any task set by himself.

Ingenious and imaginative – able to wring a good and harmonious result out of stubborn and difficult material. His attitude to colour is combinative rather than selective, and has a high degree of skill in the use of contrast to produce brilliance of effect. The solidity of his work is its grounding in fact. Solidly aware of human and physical appetites and the less decorative sides of life. Nimble – quick witted – difficult to know. Suspicious – proud – and rather touchy – but warm hearted and human with vigorous *joie de vivre*. A “young” spirit, but mature in execution. The design in question shows great vigour of thought and will and a dramatic sense of life and light. Shows latent power and possibilities as yet unrealised.

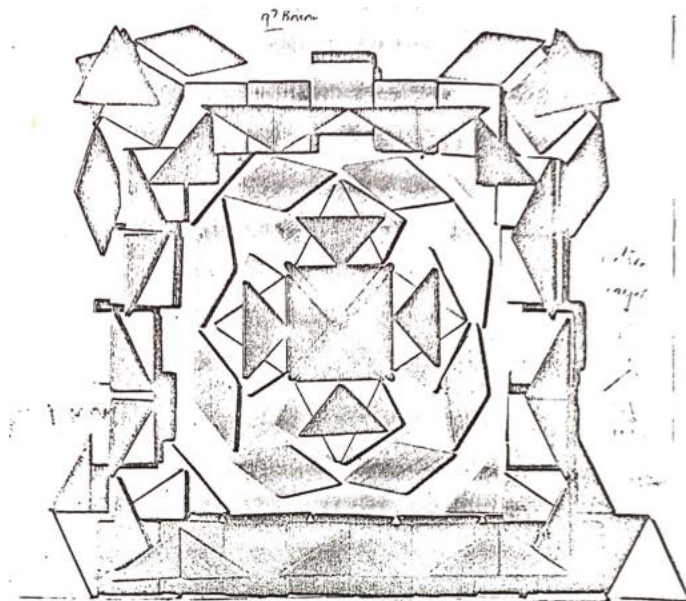
Rodney Thomas



The central characteristic of the subject shown in this design is a desire to find new ways of working with the materials to his hand. It is not so much an impulse towards unconventionality as that the problems he tackles do not present themselves to him in the terms in which other people see them. His mind finds its own ways of dealing with tasks involving manipulation of material, and he tends to be more interested in the qualities of the material itself than in the combination of objects to achieve a given end – or the use of different types of material to achieve a co-ordinated result. He has a delicate appreciation of colour and is sensitive to natural forms, and if he painted would possibly tend to feel more at home in watercolour than oil. He is very ingenious in the manipulation of material and intuitive in respect of the probable practical result of unusual approaches to material problems. The pattern suggests that his mode of approach to work is that of intuition rather than deductive reasoning concerning the material of his problems, and that he tends to see in each problem its own qualities rather than to see it as part only of a complicated and multi-dimensional whole. He has a gifted sense of display and one would expect him to find

original ways of displaying qualities of materials and dispositions of objects in a manner pictorially attractive. One would expect him to dislike rigidity of form or behaviour; to be resistant, and uninterested in or even unaware of tradition. His strength will always lie in his inventiveness and in his capacity to see new uses of material in relation to a whole envisaged by himself, though this may well not be the whole which is either obvious to, or desired by other people.

Alfred C. Bossom



The maker of this design is an individual of very considerable drive and ability. Essential quality is awareness of the human crosscurrents in any situation in which he is actively concerned, combined with determination to realise the objectives he has set himself. Has tremendous energy and persistence and a nice perception of the adaptability of means to ends. Is interested in and perceptive of beauty, particularly in massive form, and is capable of remarkable ingenuity in the manipulation of material to achieve solid ends. Is reserved in nature, self-protective, and reticent as to his aims and his real feelings about any situation, warm-hearted and generous where his interest is aroused, and capable of the expenditure of great energy in the carrying out of any project. His temperament is lavish and cheerful, with keen enjoyment of the good things of life. He has considerable organising ability and is capable of originality and enterprise in the use of both men and materials in new ways and to fresh ends. He is a quick learner and very adaptable when he wishes to achieve an end, and has his own qualities well under control. He has a very long endurance and can show astonishing persistence in the patient working out of a given scheme. Is sensitive to barbaric rather than sophisticated beauty, and impatient of weakness. He has a reliable sense of form combined with a willingness to try new methods – above all, a fundamental fund of energy and vitality, which will carry him through both tedium and difficulty. He tends to avoid opposition rather than oppose it, and to achieve his end by adaptability of means and in relation to the ends desired by other people.