

Be inspired by the natural world for online design and advertising

As an artist, I take my inspiration from the natural world. My reasoning is this: evolution has given us the profusion of life that surrounds us on Earth. Each of those billions of designs, and their prior iterations, have been subjected to rigorous testing, and the proof of their success is their continued existence. That form must follow function is a necessity scarcely worth pointing out, and that beauty should so frequently embody form is a fact of life that has inspired lyrical outpourings of poetry since human beings first became capable of forming words. It is the conceptual perfection of the natural world that enables me to focus on what is real, and important.

What are the greatest displays of advertising in the natural world? The iridescent feather spread of a peacock? The summer flowering of Japanese cherry trees? The bioluminescence of certain jellyfish, and other invertebrates? Even the humble pheasant, which is common enough in my home county of Yorkshire, is a beautiful, richly coloured animal, which brightens up the countryside. Or the males do at least. As is the case with peacocks, the very obvious sexual dimorphism has evolved to help females choose the best mates.

Natural displays

Without sexual reproduction the world would be a much duller place. It encourages animals and plants to look their very best, and to use creativity to make themselves stand out against the competition. As advertisers and designers, we can learn something from this, if we choose to look beyond our own human-centric realm.

Let's look at the example of the peacock, displaying his feathers. What are the qualities inherent to the spectacle that makes it so compelling? The many eyes testify to the power of repetition. The chromatic variation of the feathers

adds interest, and a sense of mystery. The overall geometry of the composition creates a hypnotic effect. The delicacy and mobility of the feathers adds a fragile sense of beauty.

The reproduction of these qualities would powerfully remind the viewer of a peacock. However, the extraction of just one or two of these qualities might evoke *something* of the peacock, without creating a picture of the animal itself. Think of banner advertisements unfurling in feathery fronds, like the brush strokes from a Van Gogh painting, sparkling with iridescence.

Or, how about designing your website using the colour palette from a male pheasant, puffed up in all its finery? Copper, crimson, orange and gold, edged with dark purple and inky blue-black. It might not scream “pheasant!” at you but, done just right, it might evoke the natural splendour of the animal.

Embrace Technology

The feather analogy can be extended further within a digital setting – for example, by making use of better processing and software packages, websites need no longer be restricted to a succession of inert pages. Translucency and fractured transitions between screens offers the opportunity to combine colours in artistic ways and to reveal information subtly, and beautifully. Of course, this can also be applied to online advertising.

Think of the colours, shapes, sounds and movement of the natural world inhabiting the digital arena, enriching the user experience and gold-plating the brand identities of the most innovative companies.

That is one possible way forward, for those who want it.

17th June 2015

