



8 / SIMPLICITY OF ORNAMENTAL HUMAN FIGURES

When my daughters were little, I used to carve wooden dolls for them. Even in the simple task of making a wooden children's doll, the process of making centers must still govern.

First, at the stage of carving. What matters is not if the doll is lifelike. What matters is the definite arrangement of centers and the disposition of parts, to make a powerful center. For example, in the doll below, it is the definite shape of the hat, and the tuck of the waist, which make the centers. Really, even as a carving, the thing can be viewed quite abstractly, as a system of centers, and nothing else — not as a lifelike thing at all. And then the feeling which it has, and its feeling of life, comes from the fact that there is a beautiful system of centers there, not from the fact that it “resembles” a human figure.

Then, when it comes time to paint it, the same thing. I start by putting gesso on the doll.

Then I use gouache to paint it. But the colors can be wild, unrelated to the colors of real people or real clothes.

For instance, in the first doll, my daughter Lily said she wanted it to have blue hair. It seemed very strange. But we gave it blue hair. And then the next color, a purplish pink, was chosen to produce as much of the inner light as possible. And the next. And the next. And the next (page 663). Just as the carving is, the coloring, too, is completely abstract — intended only to create the field of centers as sharply as possible, in a way which melts. And these dolls do have feeling in them — almost a deep feeling. You feel something from the heart. You experience the feeling in the doll almost as if it were a person. It is a real feeling, not like the feeling you might have towards the picture of a person, but more like the feeling you have towards the person himself.



Hand-painted doll I made for my children, pine and gouache.

You get it, because the field of centers produces such a feeling in you. And it is to produce that feeling that the system of centers was created.

From the examples I have given, you may recognize that the drawing of animals, flowers, human beings are different when they are done in the framework of unfolding. The life in the carved animal, akin to the real life of a real animal, makes the drawn or carved animal different.

More surprising, I think you will find — as the primitives did — that it is natural, even necessary, for animals, plants, flowers, to appear in buildings. I believe that this itself occurs — not from a primitive symbolic idea about orna-

ment, nor because of animistic superstition, nor even just from the love of animals and plants. Rather, I think you will find, the more deeply you have experienced this process, that the impulse to make animals, people, faces, flowers, trees — on the surface of the building walls, carved into the columns, scratched on the surfaces, molded into the materials — follows naturally, and inevitably, from the process of making.

It is a natural outgrowth of the fundamental process with its emphasis on centers — the true unfolding process — and it will play a profound role, ultimately, helping to reconcile you to the land and to our origins.

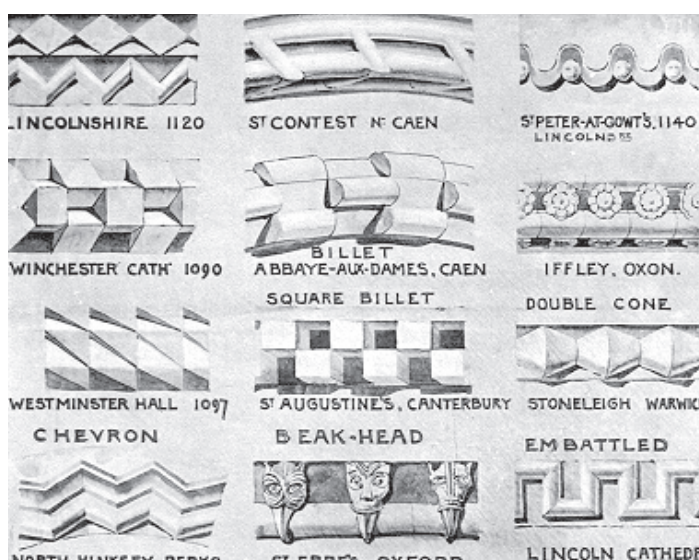


9 / STRUCTURAL QUALITIES CREATED
BY THE FUNDAMENTAL PROCESS IN ALL ORNAMENT

The ornaments which follow from the fundamental process can take an almost infinite variety of forms, yet — because of the way they arise from the embellishment of latent centers in the whole — will have a certain restricted structure in common. They are, most often, space-filling geometric structures of repeating symmetries. In

traditional architecture, we see these kinds of things on Nigerian panels, Japanese textiles, on medieval stone-carved ornaments, on Islamic plasterwork, on Turkish tiles, on Russian and Norwegian woodcarving.

Of course there is no reason why one should copy any one of these particular traditions. Our



Mirrors of the self in every standard ornament of Norman architectural forms and moldings.