

PATTERN & INVENTION

Ornament Prints: 1500-1800



Yale University Art Gallery

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Exhibition and Text Prepared by
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Foreword

The Modernism of the Ornament Print

From the very first moments of printmaking—those of the late fourteenth century from which the merest trace survives—pattern and ornament were central to the mechanization of image production. The earliest woodcut blocks were used to stamp repeated pattern onto linen cloth in imitation of the pomegranate designs of near-Eastern brocaded fabrics. With the advent of copperplate engraving in the early years of the fifteenth-century, the linear abstractions of the goldsmith found their way into the printed image, rooting the art of engraving as much in the decoration of the plane as in the depiction of volumetric figures in constructed space. While the intricate webs of the ornament print were thus central to the very origins of printmaking, it could even be claimed that the very idea of mass production, which took hold in the fifteenth century, was considerably indebted to the implied division of labor among designer/engraver, publisher, and eventual user of the ornament print. But along with its utility as a provider of models for decoration, it was the *indexical* quality that kept the ornament print alive through four centuries. By indexical, I refer to its objecthood: before it was a picture of anything else, the ornament print was a direct imprint of work, of the kinds of marks that could be made in wood and copper by the knife, gouge, burin, and needle, and the way those marks could be logically organized. It was a virtuoso performance about printmaking itself.

Consequently, ornament prints of every description flourished; they were ceaselessly invented, avidly collected, and carefully classified. Yet, while great collections of ornament prints still survive, interest in them has all but vanished. The educated public has not the slightest notion that thousands upon thousands of these objects once shared centerstage with the

greatest images of Dürer, Rembrandt, and Goya. Their demise reflects manifold changes in taste and technology, not the least of which has been the dissemination of visual design through photo-mechanical reproduction. In addition, the last century witnessed a gradual erosion of the appetite for traditional kinds of ornament, if not for applied decoration altogether.

The present exhibition, which is drawn from the combined modest holdings of Wesleyan's Davison Art Center and Yale's Art Gallery, can offer only the slightest hint of the richness of the tradition of ornament prints. For this opportunity, we are indebted to Lyle Williams, National Endowment for the Arts Intern in the Yale printroom for 1991, who, as an historian of Dutch seventeenth-century architecture was precisely positioned to undertake this task. Our joint thanks are once again extended to our colleague, Dr. Ellen D'Oench, curator of the Davison Art Center, for permitting us total access and choice. At Yale, Elisabeth Hodermarsky supervised much of the preparation of the exhibition and its catalogue. The prints themselves were restored and readied for exhibition by Theresa Fairbanks and Christopher Foster, and were matted by Amy Hsieh, Yale College '95. But none of our efforts would have come to fruition without the generous and devoted support of an anonymous contributor in New Haven and the printroom's old friend, Mrs. Carl Selden. At the moment of this writing, Florence is herself involved in a complex struggle to restore order and pattern to her internal world; we all hope that she will find consolation in the beauty and intricacies offered by this exhibition.

Richard S. Field, *Curator of Prints,
Drawings, and Photographs*

Introduction

Luckily it is a mistake to think that what cannot be defined cannot be discussed.

E.H. Gombrich
The Sense of Order

Vast numbers of ornament prints once served to transmit decorative designs and styles throughout the continent of Europe and were accorded an important place in the collections of the great print connoisseurs. Unfortunately, interest in these artifacts of design and collecting history has waned and ornament prints have been virtually forgotten by all but a few specialists. The purpose of this exhibition is to display some of these often masterful examples of the print-maker's art and to examine some of the issues with which ornament prints are concerned.

The diversity of ornament prints makes it very difficult to define them. Perhaps the type of ornament print most easily understood is that which was used as a model for the decorative arts. Many ornament prints, for instance, were produced for publication in books like Visentini's *New Book of Ornaments* which was printed in London in 1753 and whose title page (1983.89.3a) clearly declares its usefulness "to Painters, Carvers, Engravers, & c."

To regard all ornament prints as models or patterns for the decoration of walls, woodwork, furniture, or metalwork, however, would be a mistake. Other works which are invariably included in cata-

logues of ornament prints were never intended as designs for the decorative arts but rather were created for collectors who valued their technical mastery and beauty. An example is the work of the so-called Little Masters (Beham, Pencz, Aldegrever). While many objects were decorated with designs taken directly from their prints, the main impetus behind their production seems to have been aesthetic and cultural rather than utilitarian.

The sixteenth-century print market was desirous of such intricate, small-scale works inspired by the fashionable art of ancient Rome. Perhaps the best definition, therefore, is also the simplest: an ornament print privileges a decorative pattern or design over all other concerns. The communication of pattern—of decorative invention—regardless of intended use is its quintessence.

Even this definition, however, is defective. The most casual observer will find works in this exhibition whose decorative and narrative concerns are equally stressed. Printmakers, always conscious of the marketability of mythological, classical, and religious themes during the Renaissance, often combined ornament with such well known subject matter, as in the five prints from Virgil Solis' *The Nine Worthies*. The combination suggests that these prints, as well as others in the exhibition, were created for two separate markets: collectors *and* craftsmen. While the Renaissance collector would have prized the classicizing aspects of the Solis prints, the craftsman would have found both the ornamental frames and the figures useful to his work.

The desire, or perhaps more precisely, the need to ornament is older than history itself. Even Neolithic peoples decorated the most utilitarian objects with rudimentary, carved designs. It has only been in our own century that the less-is-more aesthetic of Modern architecture denounced ornament as almost criminal and as a vice to be avoided. Perhaps proving our innate tendency to ornament, however, is the return of ornament in Postmodern architecture, one of the primary goals of which is the creation of buildings more attuned to human needs and concerns. While attempting to explain our propensity for ornamentation is beyond the scope of this exhibition, it is not unreasonable to explore the attraction that ornament prints held for those who created or collected them.

Though ornament prints contain representations of animals, human figures, foliage, and other things, their basic subject matter is design. The artist who created an ornament print allowed himself considerable freedom from the constraints imposed by other types of prints. Freed from the Christian dogma that dictated the content of religious subjects, freed from the burden of having to accurately depict portrait sitters, historical events, and daily life, and freed,

in fact, from the very laws of nature, the printmaker could create lines in an ornament print which did not have to describe anything, lines which existed on their own as elements of design. Ornament prints, therefore, encouraged the artist to concentrate more on how he actually etched or engraved his lines into copper or cut them into wood. This emphasis on the process of printmaking was appealing not only to artists who wanted to explore and refine their craft, but also to collectors who appreciated the finely printed line for its own intrinsic beauty.

Another benefit to the artist of the relatively abstract subject matter of the ornament print was the freedom of invention. The printmaker could invent as well as borrow from many disparate sources including his own imagination. Such freedom led to the creation of the rich, fantastic imagery of prints like Beham's *Little Fool*, Hopfer's *Madonna and Child in an Ornamental Rondel*, della Bella's *Ornamenti o grottesche*, and Pillement's *Book of Chinese Ornament*. What kept ornament prints from degenerating into mere printed doodles, however, were their mesmerizingly complex structures, like those of Dürer's *Knots*, the creation of which certainly taxed the mental and physical faculties of the artist. This challenging aspect of ornament prints contributed to their attraction to artists who wanted to test and enhance their abilities as printmakers and to collectors who appreciated the time and effort that

went into their production. It is the combination of the technical challenge and the creative freedom of ornament prints that accounts for the vast number of artists who produced them and for their honored place in the printmaking repertoire.

Ornament is but the guiled shore to a most dangerous sea.

William Shakespeare
The Merchant of Venice

It has long been held that the kind of ornament produced by a society reflects the morality of that society. This idea started with Vitruvius (fl. 46-30 B.C.), the great architectural theoretician who decreed that ornamentation should only serve to logically and rationally complement the structure and order of architecture. In other words, ornamentation was to be limited largely to the decoration of columns, capitals, and friezes. Not surprisingly, Vitruvius condemned the designs of the late wall paintings at Pompeii, in which plants serve as architectural supports or have fantastic creatures growing out of their stalks. "Such things," he wrote, "neither are, nor can be, nor have been." Vitruvius' critique served for centuries as a model of architectural criti-

cism for purists who viewed any deviation from the classical tenets of balance and rationality as immoral. Vitruvius' arguments were used, for instance, in the eighteenth century by the Neo-classicists who saw the imbalance and asymmetry of Rococo ornament (note the work of Marillier and Demarteau) as a visual metaphor for the decadence of the ruling class in pre-Revolutionary France.

Vitruvius' influence is to be found even in the architectural criticism of our own day. In a recent article discussing John Russell Pope's design for the National Gallery in Washington (1937), Paul Goldberger wrote: "His [Pope's] works do not dazzle with the intricacy of their ornament, and they do not tire us with the prissiness of their details."

Sixteenth-century Ornament Prints

In the early sixteenth century, the rediscovery of ancient Roman decorations, the rise of a merchant class with money to spend on domestic adornment, and the recently developed ability to produce multiple images contributed to the advent of the ornament print. Among the first artists to begin producing prints based on the designs of ancient Roman wall decorations were the Italians Nicoletto da Modena and Enea Vico. The type of ornament seen in their work is most often referred to as “grotesque,” a term derived from the Italian word for cave, *grotto*. Many of the Roman wall paintings, uncovered in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, lay long buried by time and successive constructions.

The grotesque style of ornament—characterized by the fantastic creatures and irrational juxtapositions of form that Vitruvius had condemned in the late wall paintings of ancient Pompeii—quickly spread northward from Italy through objects and images carried along the trade routes. Inevitably, this Roman style was combined with the intricacy of late Gothic ornamentation, with styles borrowed from the Near East, and with the inventions of individual artists. Albrecht Dürer referred to these inventions as “dreamwork” and said that “whoever wants to do dreamwork must mix all things together.” Many northern print-makers did this with great enthusiasm. Hans Vredeman de Vries, for instance, used not only grotesque motifs and altered classical cartouches but also strapwork, a type of ornament composed of twisted, interweaving bands, which was

common in Spain, but which probably originated in the Near East. His work, the style of which is usually called Flemish Mannerist, because of its perversion of classical forms, was rarely used as models for applied decoration, but rather “remained in the world of fantasy.” (Schama 1987)

Another trend of sixteenth-century ornament is seen in the Fontainebleau School. The prints of Ducerceau, Boyvin, and Mignon all reflect the influence of the decorative programs designed by some of the leading Italian Mannerists at the palace of Fontainebleau near Paris. The most important of these programs was the Gallery of Francis I in which highly ornamented frames composed of strapwork, grotesque masks, and contorted classical nudes surrounded scenes from mythology. Though not derived directly from the Gallery, the prints exhibited here contain many of the same elements.



16 Daniel Hopfer, *Madonna and Child in an Ornamental Rondel*

Heinrich Aldegrever
(German, 1502-1555/61)

- 1 *Ornament with Masks*, 1530
Engraving
Bartsch 236, Hollstein 236,
Amsterdam (1988) 230,
Berlin (1939) 9,
Berliner (1926) 67.7, Guilmar 18
Gift of Edward B. Greene, B.A. 1900
1928.111

- 2 *Ornament with
Child Holding Foliage*, 1532
Engraving
Bartsch 244, Hollstein 244,
Amsterdam (1988) 238,
Berlin (1939) 9, Guilmar 18
Gift of Edward B. Greene, B.A. 1900
1928.112

Hans Sebald Beham
(German, 1500-1550)

- 3 *Ornament with a Mask*, 1543
Engraving
Bartsch 231, Hollstein 235/11,
Pauli 235/11, Amsterdam (1988) 292,
Berlin (1939) 4, Berliner (1926) 175.1,
Guilmar 12
Everett V. Meeks, B.A. 1901, Fund
1971.59

Georg Pencz (German, ca. 1500-1550)

- 4 *Ornamental Vase with Two Figures*
Engraving
Bartsch 124, Amsterdam (1988) 424.2,
Berlin (1939) 6.2, Guilmar 13
Everett V. Meeks, B.A. 1901, Fund
1957.9.9

The artists whom we call the Little Masters had knowledge of ancient Roman grotesques either through travel or printed images and were among the first artists to introduce this style of ornament to the North. They created literally dozens of ornament prints containing many motifs taken directly from Italian grotesques: figures whose bodies turn into geometric or foliate forms, grimacing masks, and classical vases. Their prints also contain examples of the intricate foliage patterns characteristic of arabesque ornament, another decorative tradition which spread northward from Italy. These small-scale Little Master prints were very popular with collectors who included them in their *Kunstkammern*, private museums in which men of learning attempted to recreate the world in miniature.

Hans Sebald Beham
(German, 1500-1550)

- 5 *The Little Buffoon*
Engraving
Bartsch 230, Hollstein 234/11,
Pauli 234/11, Berlin (1939) 4
University Purchase
1955.9.62

The inscription on this print reads: "ON DIR HAB ICH GERISEN DAS ICH MICH HAB BECHISEN" (I have written on you that I have beshit myself). This could be an allusion to the fascination ornament prints held for printmakers, who found the complex patterns challenging to their mental and physical skills. Here perhaps Beham was so "wrapped up" in the creation of this little gem that he "beshit" himself. The combination of an earthy, humorous theme and the ingenious decorative scrollwork indicate that this print was probably created for two distinct middle class markets: collectors and craftsmen.



5 Hans Sebald Beham, *The Little Buffoon*

Hans Sebald Beham
(German, 1500-1550)

- 6 *Ornament with Two Fighting Tritons*
Woodcut
Pauli 1346, Geisberg 333, Dodgson 156,
Berlin (1939) 4, Guilnard (Dürer) 1
Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University
1967.10.2

Not all of Beham's work consisted of small engravings. It has been suggested that this woodcut, which utilizes many of the same motifs as Beham's engraved prints, was printed repeatedly on sheets of paper that were then glued together and placed at the top of an interior wall to create a frieze. If such were the case, this print, like the niello-manner engravings of 1573 by Delaune, would have served as an ornament in itself rather than just as a model for some other medium.

René Boyvin
(French, ca. 1525-ca. 1580)

- 7 *Acetes Accepts the Dismembered Corpse of Absyrté*, from a set of twenty-six sheets illustrating the story of *Jason and the Conquest of the Golden Fleece*, 1563
Engraving
Robert-Dumesnil 54, Berliner (1926) 134-138, Guilnard 10
Everett V. Meeks, B.A. 1901, Fund
1987.50.2

Abraham de Bruyn
(Flemish, 1540-1587)

- 8 *Phineus*, from a set of six oval cartouches illustrating the *Life of Perseus*, 1584
Engraving
Hollstein 106, Wurzbach 39,
Amsterdam (1988) 28.5, Berlin (1939) 233,
Berliner (1926) 219, Guilnard 25
Everett V. Meeks, B.A. 1901, Fund
1964.9.17

Marcus Gheerærts
(Flemish, 1521-ca. 1604)

- 9 *Christ Carrying the Cross*, from a set of thirteen oval cartouches illustrating *The Passion*
Engraving
Hollstein 87-99, Wurzbach 81,
Amsterdam (1988) 85.9, Berlin (1939) 230,
Berliner (1926) 222.1, Guilnard 16
Library Transfer
1954.18.15

Virgil Solis (German, 1514-1562)

- 10 Five Sheets from *The Nine Worthies*
Engraving
Bartsch 57.59-62,
Amsterdam (1988) 454,
Berlin (1939) 21.8, Guilnard 27
Davison Art Center,
Wesleyan University
1943.D1.302.1-5

Prints unified by common themes derived from classical mythology or Christian doctrine were often produced in series such as these in the sixteenth century, providing printmakers with a vehicle for the exploration of different ornamental motifs. Note, for instance, the variations Solis achieves by using different combinations of grotesque ornament and strapwork in the five prints from *The Nine Worthies*, a set depicting Biblical, mythological, and historical heroes. As interesting is Gheerært's use of the symbols of the Passion—the crown of thorns and the nails—in the ornamental framework of *Christ Carrying the Cross*. The inclusion of these most potent of Christian symbols is quite unique to this set of prints and, like Solis' variations, characterizes the inventiveness of northern European ornament printmakers.

Etienne Delaune
(French, 1518/19-1583)

- 11 *Three Ornaments*, from a set of eight, 1573
Engraving (niello manner)
Robert-Dumesnil 383, 387, 388,
Amsterdam (1988) 556, Guilnard 5
Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University
1944.DI.192.1-3

These prints derive from a type of metalwork, called niello, in which decorative lines were engraved into very small gold or silver plaques and then filled with a black enamel-like substance called nigellum, which served to create a striking contrast between the intricately engraved lines and the polished metal. The precious and expensive objects created by this process were quite popular in fifteenth-century Italy for the adornment of religious items. Niellists—the most famous of whom was the Florentine Maso Finiguerra (1426-1464)—often produced prints from their metalwork to examine the engraved design before the addition of the nigellum.

These trial proofs inspired later artists to create niello-manner copper engravings with similarly intricate, linear designs. Unlike the prints of the niellists, however, that were a means to an end, niello-manner prints, like those of Delaune, were produced as decorations in themselves and were often glued to small household objects as a form of instant ornamentation for the middle class.

Jacques Androuet Ducerceau
(French, ca. 1510-1584)

- 12 *Love Shooting his Arrows*
Etching and engraving
Bartsch (Anonymous) 125, Berlin (1939) 283,
Guilnard 4
Everett V. Meeks, B.A. 1901, Fund
1986.II.2

Albrecht Dürer (German, 1471-1528)

- 13 *The Third Knot*, 1505-07
Woodcut
Bartsch 142, Hollstein 277, Meder 276/11b,
Amsterdam (1988) 653, Berlin (1939) 1,
Guilnard 1
Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University
1956.7.1

- 14 *The Fourth Knot*, 1505-07
Woodcut
Bartsch 143, Hollstein 278, Meder 277/1,
Amsterdam (1988) 653, Berlin (1939) 1,
Guilnard 1
Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University
1961.27.1

Dürer's *Knots*—a title coined by the artist—are based on drawings by Leonardo—known to Dürer in later engraved copies called *The Academy of Leonardo da Vinci*—which are often regarded as a statement of the great Italian master's conviction that manual skill and mental ability are of equal importance in the creation of art, a conviction undoubtedly shared by Dürer. It has been suggested that the complex linear patterns of *The Knots* are ultimately derived from Islamic, or more generally, arabesque, ornament and may have been used as designs for the decoration of leather book covers.

Peter Flötner (German, ca. 1485-1546)

- 15 *Ornament*, 1546
Woodcut
Hollstein 78, Bange 52, Passavant 29,
Dodgson 31, Amsterdam (1988) 329,
Berlin (1939) 19, Berliner (1926) 176,
Guilnard 7
Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University
1944.DI.237

This print is of great interest since it translates the fine and capricious grotesque ornament seen in the engravings of da Modena and Vico into the language of the woodcut, a decidedly German form of expression. The overall character of the print, however, is actually closer to its Italian models than the engraved work of the Little Masters, Flötner's compatriots.

Daniel Hopfer (German, ca. 1470-1536)

16 *Madonna and Child in an Ornamental Rondel*

Etching

Bartsch 37, Hollstein 40,

Amsterdam (1988) 336,

Berlin (1939) 3.1, Guilmar 4

Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University

1947.D1.69

While some printmakers like the Little Masters were content to mix only a couple of decorative traditions such as the grotesque and the arabesque in their works, Hopfer in his *Madonna and Child in an Ornamental Rondel* combines not only these (note the extraordinary creatures inhabiting a world of twisting foliage) but adds an important Gothic element. The four main tendrils of the arabesque pattern of this work form four circles with the Madonna and Child at their intersection. These circles or lobes form a quatrefoil, a typical Gothic tracery motif which has the appearance of a four leaf clover. In a more profound combination of cultural traditions, Hopfer set an important Christian icon in a decorative framework of pagan (grotesque) and Islamic (arabesque) derivation. This is a particularly jarring juxtaposition since, in its pure form, arabesque ornament, in accordance with the laws of Islam, is devoid of representations of figures or animals. Hopfer's disregard of such rules is indicative of the freedom of invention that artists enjoyed when creating ornament prints.

Lucas van Leyden (Dutch, 1494-1533)

17 *Ornament*, 1528

Engraving

Bartsch 164, Hollstein 184,

Amsterdam (1988) 97,

Berlin (1939) 200, Berliner (1926) 76.3,

Guilmar 2

Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University

1946.D2.57

Though certainly not a Little Master, Lucas van Leyden did create a few ornament prints which are very similar in scale and content to the work of his German contemporaries, Beham, Aldegrever, and Pencz. Unlike them, however, his fascination with the grotesque and arabesque decorative styles seems to have been short lived as he produced only a handful of ornament prints with these kinds of motifs. In fact, far fewer ornament prints in general were created in the Northern Netherlands (Holland) than in Germany, France, Italy, or Flanders during the sixteenth century. And, perhaps owing to Calvinist aversion to ostentatious displays of wealth, Dutch ornament prints from the seventeenth century are rarer still.

Jean Mignon (French, fl. 1537-1540)

18 *Satyr Leaning to the Right*, ca. 1543-45

Etching

Zerner 10

Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University

1987.20.1

Nicoletto da Modena
(Italian, fl. 1500-1512)

19 *Ornamental Panel with Bound
Slaves and a Birdcage*

Engraving

Bartsch 56, Hind 105, Amsterdam (1988) 612,
Berliner (1926) 31.2, Guilmar 7
Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University
1938.D1.56

Enea Vico, (Italian, 1523-1567)

20 *Ornamental Panel with
Ganymede, from *Picturae quas
grotesches vulgo vocant*, 1541*

Engraving

Bartsch 475, Berlin (1939) 534, Guilmar 24
Davison Art Center, Wesleyan University
1939.D1.193

The rediscovery of the so-called Golden House of Nero on the Esquiline Hill in Rome in 1488 sparked a revival of the motifs found in ancient Roman wall decorations, called grotesques. Many artists including Raphael began to produce decorative programs based directly on those early designs, the most famous being Raphael's frescoes in the *logge* of the Vatican (1518). Prints such as these by da Modena and Vico served to spread the revival throughout Italy and northern Europe. In both, elements of the grotesque style—fantastic creatures, plants serving as architectural supports—are stacked along a central vertical axis with other elements branching symmetrically to either side. This arrangement is typical of the “candelabra” manner favored for the composition of grotesque panels and also appears in the exhibited work of Flötner and Desrais.



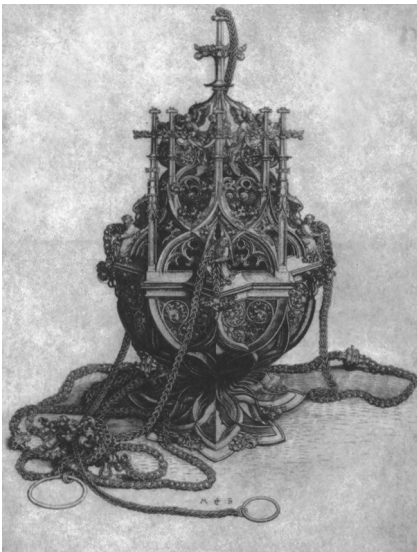
19 Nicoletto da Modena, *Ornamental Panel
with Bound Slaves and a Birdcage*

Martin Schongauer
(German, ca. 1430-1491)

21 *The Censer*

Engraving
Bartsch 107, Lehrs 106,
Amsterdam (1988) 440,
Guilmard 4
Bequest of Lydia Evans Tunnard
1981.60.35

Printmaking was a recently developed technology in fifteenth-century Europe. Consequently, prints created during this time are rare and fifteenth-century ornament prints are even more rare. Dominated by the elements of the Gothic style (i.e. pointed arches and intricate organic tracery) favored for the decoration of ecclesiastical objects, Schongauer's *Censer* is one of the truly great early ornament prints. Though not technically within the time frame of this exhibition, the Schongauer has been included to show the state of northern decorative design before the sixteenth-century invasion of Italian styles like the grotesque and the arabesque.



21 Martin Schongauer, *The Censer*

Hans Vredeman de Vries
(Dutch, 1527-1606)

22 *Set of Ornamental Cartouches*,

ca. 1560-63
Etching and engraving
Hollstein 520-543, Mielke 8,
Amsterdam (1988) 167,
Berlin (1939) 217,
Berliner (1926) 171-172
University Purchase
1955.9.45-60

Regarding the Mannerist ornament of Vredeman de Vries, Karel van Mander (1548-1606), the great Dutch theoretician and proponent of classical restraint, said:

This rein is so free and this licence so misused by our Netherlanders that in the course of time a great heresy has arisen among them, with a heap of craziness of decorations and breaking of pilasters in the middle...very disgusting to see.

These few lines contain not only a condemnation of the style of Vredeman de Vries which, at the time, exerted a profound influence on Dutch architectural and decorative design, but also a definition—albeit a rather biased one—of Mannerist ornament. The “breaking of pilasters,” for instance, refers to the Mannerist tendency to alter the classical orders of architecture while the “heap of craziness of decorations” refers to the Mannerist tendency to add disparate elements to classical forms. These prints by Vredeman de Vries illustrate both of these proclivities since they include twisted versions of classical cartouches with grotesque additions.

Seventeenth-century Ornament Prints

Far fewer ornament prints were produced in the seventeenth than in the sixteenth century. A moralist would argue that the precipitous drop in ornament prints after 1600 reflects the repressiveness of puritanical regimes like the Calvinist oligarchy in Holland. There were, however, some significant ornament prints produced during this time. Most of them, including the work of Lepautre, reflect the then dominant *grand goût* or grand style of Louis XIV, a style characterized by its monumentality, symmetry, and rectilinearity.

Lepautre created more than a thousand prints in a style reminiscent of the massive ornamentation of Louis XIV's Versailles, where the most important decorative commissions of the seventeenth century were completed. One of those commissions, the main stairhall of the palace, was designed by Charles Le Brun, the man who virtually dictated architectural and decorative tastes at the court of Louis XIV. The prints after his designs incorporate many of the ornamental themes popular during both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: suits of armor, trophies, signs of the zodiac, the months, and even figures representing the continents. Exhibited is a print depicting America after Le Brun's design for the ceiling of the stairhall.

Le Brun's death in 1690 paved the way for a new artist to define the ornament style of the court of Louis XIV. The new

arbiter of taste was Jean Berain, a furniture designer at the court. His ornamental designs created what is now called the late Louis XIV style, a style which was lighter and less rectilinear than Le Brun's and a style which, with its elegant curvilinear forms such as those in the two exhibited sheets, presaged the eighteenth-century Rococo. Another great and prolific ornament designer of the seventeenth century was the Florentine Stefano della Bella, who actually created some of his more influential works, including *Ornamenti o grottesche*, while in Paris from 1639 to 1650. Like the work of Lepautre, Le Brun, and Berain, della Bella's designs borrow from sixteenth-century ornament conventions but are executed in a highly personal style of etching.



26 Jean Lepautre, Sheet from *Grandes Cheminées à la Romaine*

Etienne Baudet (French, 1636-1711)

After Charles Lebrun (French, 1619-1690)

23 Sheet from *Plafond du Grand Escalier du
Chateau de Versailles*

Etching and engraving

Guilmard 4

Library Transfer

1991.38.2.3

This print records one of Charles Le Brun's designs for the decoration of the Stairhall of the Ambassadors at Louis XIV's Palace of Versailles, the grandest of all palaces built during the seventeenth century. Le Brun's first-hand knowledge of the architecture of Rome informed his designs with the great monumentality that impressed visitors to the court of the Sun King.

The print was issued as part of a set illustrating the greatness of Versailles and, therefore, of Louis XIV. It is an excellent example of how many of the ornamental motifs seen in the exhibition—trophies, grotesque masks, etc.—were actually included in a decorative scheme.



24 Stefano della Bella,
Ornamenti o grottesche

Stefano della Bella (Italian, 1610-1684)

24 *Ornamenti o grottesche*,

set of twelve, ca. 1640

Etching and engraving

De Vesme 1003-1014

Everett V. Meeks, B.A. 1901, Fund

1991.100.1.1-12

Despite the fact that he borrowed many motifs, especially grotesques and arabesques, from the ornament prints of his predecessors, Stefano della Bella created in his *Ornamenti o grottesche* a work strongly informed by his own highly individualized etching style. Compare the second print in della Bella's set with Aldegrever's *Child Holding Foliage*, a work of the previous century. While appearing quite disparate at first blush, their common motif of a child holding decorative foliage suggests that della Bella was inspired by Aldegrever. What separates the two prints, besides chronology and technique (one is an engraving, the other is etched and engraved), are the different mark-making styles of the artists. While Aldegrever's tight, precise lines create an intricate, jewel-like perfection, della Bella's fluid lines and feathery textures create a warm sensuality.

Completed soon after della Bella's arrival in Paris as a member of the Medici embassy to the court of Louis XIII, his *Ornamenti o grottesche* proved to be extremely influential for successive generations of French designers and craftsmen. Even in the work of the Rococo artist Charles Eisen such as *Riches Fontaines* and *Cariatides* created a century later, one can still discern the expressiveness of della Bella's etching style. It could also be argued that the themes and playful quality of some of the motifs of della Bella's *Ornamenti o grottesche*—i.e. hunting themes, animals whose tails become arabesques, putti blowing bubbles—influenced similar Rococo motifs.

Johan Christoph Hafner

(German, 1668-1754)

After Jean Berain (French, 1637-1711)

- 25 Two Sheets from *Commodes et Lustres*
Etching
Guilmard 27
Library Transfer
1959.38.23, 1991.38.1

Like the prints after the designs by Charles Le Brun, these two works are good examples of Louis XIV ornament. And like Le Brun's work, they exhibit many ornamental motifs developed in sixteenth-century prints. The small grotesques on the side panels of the commode in the print inscribed "No. 2," for instance, are very similar to those of Vico and da Modena. Nevertheless, these etchings were completed toward the end of Louis XIV's reign and manifest some traits associated with the eighteenth-century style of Louis XV, the most obvious element being the cabriolet legs of the commodes.

That the prints were actually executed by a German artist working in Augsburg demonstrates the dominance and popularity of French design throughout Europe.

Jean Lepautre

(French, 1618-1682)

- 26 Three Sheets from
Grandes Cheminées à la Romaine
Etching
Guilmard 2
Yale University Art Gallery
1988.1.1-3

- 27 Six Sheets from *Grotesques et Moresques à la Romaine*
Etching
Berliner (1926) 293.2, Guilmard 2
Everett V. Meeks, B.A. 1901, Fund
1985.27.1.1-6

One of the most prolific masters of the ornament print, Lepautre helped to propagate the *grand goût* or grand style of Louis XIV. The prints from his *Grandes Cheminées à la Romaine* are especially exemplary of the monumentality and heaviness of this style. By dividing these prints in half and creating two separate designs on each, Lepautre has provided two options for the ornamentation of each fireplace.

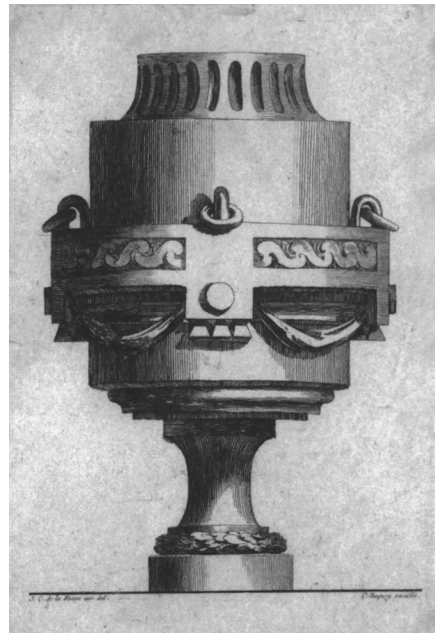
Eighteenth-century Ornament Prints

Eighteenth-century ornament prints chronicle the many different trends in the decorative arts after the death of Louis XIV: the Rococo, the vogue for Chinese ornament or *chinoiserie*, and the rise of Neo-classicism.

Perhaps in rebellion against the oppressively heavy ornamentation of Versailles, early eighteenth-century designers began to create very fanciful and, according to their critics, very frivolous ornament prints often filled with lighthearted merriment, courtly love, and other saccharine themes. These elements, seen in the works of Aveline, Desrais, and Marillier, came to characterize the Rococo. Note that the strict symmetry and rectilinearity of Louis XIV ornament is completely abandoned, replaced by imbalance, a fine decorative line, and, most typical of the Rococo, elegant S and C curves. Another “flavor” of the Rococo is seen in the work of Jean Pillement. His *Book of Chinese Ornaments* reflects the taste for Chinese decorative motifs in eighteenth-century France.

Towards the end of the century, the tide of decorative taste turned against the Rococo. Critics, borrowing heavily from Vitruvius’ condemnation of late Pompeian wall painting, faulted the irrational and fanciful characteristics of this style—and, no doubt, the aristocracy that propagated it—and advocated a return to classical order and rationality.

Contributing to the rejection of the Rococo and to the rise of Neo-classicism, were certainly the writings of the German archaeologist Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768), which aroused in all of Europe a renewed interest in ancient art and design. Winckelmann’s first hand knowledge of the excavations at Pompeii and Herculaneum and of the great Roman sculpture collections led him to declare that the ideal qualities of true classical design were harmony, balance, and above all, “noble simplicity.” These attributes, so antithetical to the Rococo, were greatly admired by the Neo-classicists and certainly inspired Delafosse to create the prints exhibited here.



31 Jean-Charles Delafosse, Sheet from
Vases Antiques

Pierre-Alexandre Aveline
(French, 1702-1760)
After Jean-Antoine Watteau
(French, 1684-1721)

- 28 *The Charmer*
Engraving
Guilmard 173
Bequest of Ralph Kirkpatrick,
Hon. M.A. 1965
1984.54.1
-

Gilles-Paul Cauvet
(French, 1731-1788)

- 29 *Frieze from Recueil d'ornements à l'usage des jeunes artistes*, 1777
Etching
Berlin (1939) 483, Guilmard 28
Yale University Art Gallery
1991.1.48
- 30 *Ornamental Panel from Recueil d'ornements à l'usage des jeunes artistes*, 1777
Engraving (crayon manner)
Berlin (1939) 483, Guilmard 28
Yale University Art Gallery
1991.1.54

Though not a Neo-classicist, Cauvet was one of the first designers to reject the Rococo. Balanced and orderly, his work represents a revival in France of the *grand goût* or grand style of Louis XIV. The *Ornamental Panel* by Cauvet is done in the crayon manner, a type of engraving which attempted to reproduce the qualities of a crayon drawing.

Jean-Charles Delafosse
(French, 1721-1808)

- 31 Two Sheets from *Vases Antiques*
Etching
Berlin (1939) 465.2 Guilmard 18
Yale University Art Gallery
1991.1.51.1-2

Following the tenets of classical ornament set forth by Vitruvius and propagated by Winckelmann, Delafosse's designs exhibit a clear, rational, and stable order characteristic of Neo-classicism. The large, volumetric forms have a sober presence and a sense of permanence which are antithetical to the Rococo.

Gilles-Antoinne Demarteau
(French, 1722-1776)

- 32 Two Sheets from *Plusieurs Trophées*
Etching and engraving
Berlin (1939) 432, Guilmard 88
Yale University Art Gallery
1991.1.49.1-2

The asymmetrical composition, fine decorative lines, and lack of coherent structure clearly define these prints as Rococo. Typical of this style are the actual ornamental motifs used: hunting rifles, horns, flowers, and bonnets, all associated with the pastoral life so fancied by French aristocrats of the day. One need look no further than the farm—complete with Sèvres milk pails—that Marie Antoinette had built on the grounds of Versailles to find one of the sources for such aristocratic tastes.

Claude-Louis Desrais
(French, 1746-1816)

- 33 Four Sheets from *Cahier d'Arabesques*, 1789
Etching
Berlin (1939) 507, Guilmar 109
Yale University Art Gallery
1991.1.50.1-4

In our own time, the word arabesque is sometimes misused to refer to any complex decorative design. Even by the seventeenth century, however, the term had lost its specific reference to the complex patterns of Near Eastern ornament and was often used interchangeably with the word grotesque. Desrais' imprecise usage of the term for the title of his work is particularly noticeable since the *Cahier d'Arabesques* contains more grotesques than arabesques. The grotesque was never actually dropped from the ornament repertoire, but its popularity did fluctuate over time. During the reign of Louis XVI (1774-1792) when the *Cahier d'Arabesques* was completed, interest in ancient civilization, and therefore in grotesques, was renewed.



- 37 Clement-Pierre Marillier, Sheet from
Nouveaux Trophées et Cartouches

Charles Eisen (French, 1720-1778)

- 34 *Cariatides*, 1749
Etching
Guilmar 87
Yale University Art Gallery
1987.1.15

- 35 *Riches Fontaines*
Etching
Guilmar 87
Yale University Art Gallery
1987.1.14

An important element of the Rococo, the *rocaille*—loosely translated as rock-work—was often used for the decoration of fountains and for other garden structures such as grottoes, the man-made caves which first became popular in sixteenth-century Italy. Often draped with moss, *rocaille* motifs, as their name suggests, were derived from rock and shell formations and were designed to appear as if they had developed naturally, without interference from man. Though often obviously artificial, *rocaille* ornament represents one of modern civilization's first yearnings for a nature undisturbed by human activity and, thus, presages the landscape designs of the Romantic period. Eisen's inclusion of several *rocaille* elements in his prints give them a wonderfully rich, organic, encrusted texture. Note, for instance, the use of the shells in his *Riches Fontaines* or the moss—nature conquering the works of man—growing on his ruin-like *Cariatides*.

Carlo Lasinio (Italian, 1759-1838)
36 Three Sheets from *Ornati Presi da
Graffiti e Pitture antiche*, 1789
Etching
Berlin (1939) 598, Guilnard 35
Yale University Art Gallery
1991.1.52.1-3

Neither Rococo nor purely Neo-classical, these etchings by Lasinio reproduce ornaments which were to be found in Italy in the late eighteenth century. Most of the works reproduced are those that were inspired by the rediscovery of ancient Roman wall decorations—grotesques—in the late fifteenth century. Inscribed at the bottom of the prints is the location and, in some cases, the artist of each work. The name Giovanni da Udine (1487-1564)—a follower of Raphael and one of the major proponents of the grotesque style—appears on the print numbered “25.” Like the *Cahier d’Arabesques* created by Desrais in the same year, Lasinio’s prints represent a renewal of interest in ancient art and design.

Clement-Pierre Marillier
(French, 1740-1808)
37 Four Sheets from
*Nouveaux Trophées et Cartouches
représentant les arts et les sciences*
Etching and engraving
Berlin (1939) 461, Guilnard 45
Yale University Art Gallery
1991.1.53.1-5

While these works may seem out of place in this exhibition, they are very much a part of the ornament print tradition. In the eighteenth century, painted ornamental panels featuring the arts and sciences became very popular. Many prominent Rococo artists, including Francois Boucher (1704-1770) and Jean Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806), painted such commissions to adorn the walls of the chateaus of the aristocracy. The dedication to a painter on the title page suggests that these were meant as models for painted ornamental panels. In fact, a fine set of similar panels by Boucher depicting the arts and sciences with their various attributes may be seen at the Frick Collection in New York City.

Jean-Baptiste Pillement
(French, 1728-1808)
38 *A Book of Chinese Ornaments*, 1755
Etching
Guilnard 80
Everett V. Meeks, B.A. 1901, Fund
1983.89.1 a-f

These prints combine the curvaceous style of the Rococo with ornamental elements derived from imported Chinese porcelains and lacquer ware: figures dressed in Chinese costume, pagodas, and dragon-like creatures. Painted wall panels with such exotic motifs were common in France in the eighteenth century and were created by leading artists of the day like Antoine Watteau (1684-1721). These prints would have served as models for such decorations.

A motif which frequently appears in Pillement’s work is the *poussah*, a small, smiling, usually rotund figure based on representations of the Chinese god of contentment, Pu-T’ai. Given the hedonistic atmosphere of courtly life in eighteenth-century France, it is no wonder that the *poussah* makes so many appearances in Pillement’s prints.

Antonio Visentini (Italian, 1688-1782)
After Angelo Rossi (Italian, 1670-1752)
39 *A New Book of Ornaments*, 1753
Etching
Guilnard 25
Everett V. Meeks, B.A. 1901, Fund
1983.89.3 a-x

Glossary

Arabesque/Moresque—a type of ornament consisting of stylized interlaced foliate patterns which originated in the metalwork of the Near East and which was introduced into Western Europe by Muslim craftsmen working in Venice at the end of the fifteenth century. In northern Europe, arabesques were often mixed with other types of ornament such as grotesques. An example of a typically intricate arabesque pattern is seen in the *Madonna and Child in an Ornamental Rondel* by Hopfer.

Cartouches—panels with ornamented frames which are thought to be derived from the shape of scrolls and which are often used for inscriptions. See the work of Vredeman de Vries and Marillier.

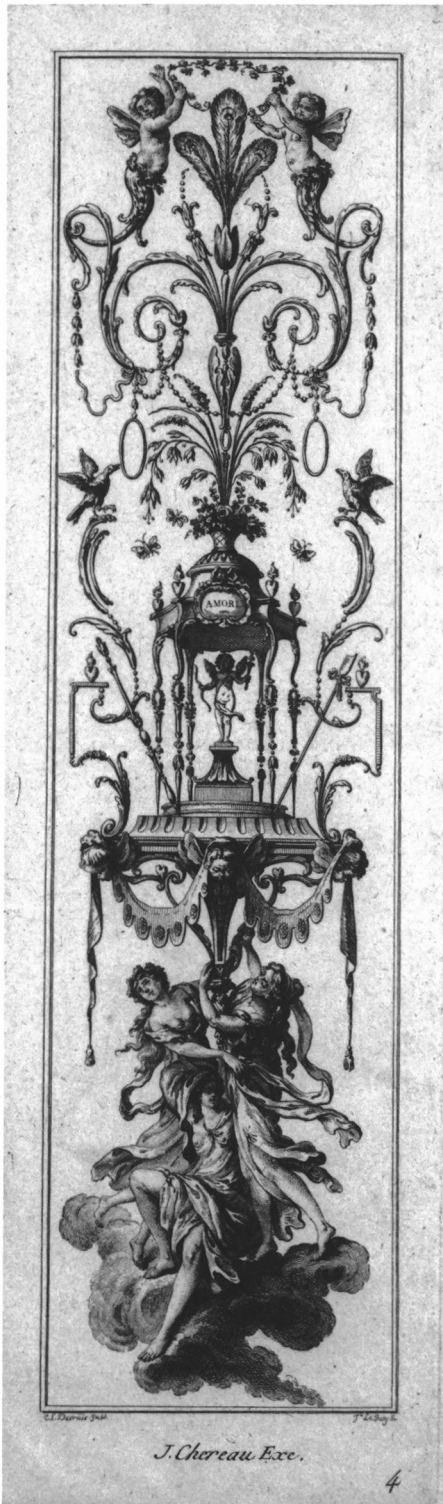
Caryatids—standing female sculptures which serve as architectural supports, often taking the place of columns. Eisen's *Cariatides* of 1749 contain not only caryatids but also *Atlantes*, male half figures who, like their mythological eponym Atlas, struggle to hold up a great weight.

Chinoiserie—A manifestation of the Rococo period's infatuation with the exotic, Chinoiserie refers to the eighteenth-century vogue for the decorative and fine arts of China. In response to demand for Chinese decorative motifs, Pillement created many prints such as the ones in this exhibition.

Classical—a term used to describe decorative elements based on Graeco-Roman architecture's tenets of order, restraint, structure, and symmetry.

Friezes—a decorative horizontal band or strip derived from Classical architecture.

Gothic—A stylistic term usually used to the describe the architecture of the late Middle Ages, Gothic can also refer to a decorative arts style whose motifs derive from such architecture: intricate tracery (like that of Gothic windows), pointed arches, and quatrefoils. See Schongauer's *Censer*.



33 Claude-Louis Desrais, Sheet from
Cahier d'Arabesques

Grotesques—a type of decoration based on the ancient Roman wall decorations such as those found in the Domus Aurea or Golden House of Nero on the Esquiline Hill in Rome in 1488. The term derives from the Italian word for cave, grotto, as many of the ancient structures in which the decorations were discovered lay long buried beneath the ground of Renaissance Rome. The grotesque style of ornament is characterized by its fantastic creatures and delicate foliate forms which often serve as structural elements. The ornaments of Vico and da Modena are exemplary of the grotesque.

Louis XIV—Perhaps no century has been so dominated by a single decorative style as was the seventeenth century by the *grand goût* or grand style of Louis xiv. This monumental and rectilinear style was best expressed at Louis xiv's palace at Versailles and was rejected after the death of the Sun King by eighteenth-century artists who found it too severe and oppressive. The Rococo style developed, in large part, as a reaction to the style of Louis XIV and is almost diametrically opposed to it. The works of Lepautre are excellent examples of the *grand goût*.

Mannerism—a sixteenth-century style of decoration which both derives and deviates from classical design, often twisting, perverting, and adding to it to create a completely different yet related style. Mannerist artists often expand upon classical themes by either taking a classical element to an extreme as is done at Fontainebleau—the contortion of the classical nude into impossible positions—or by adding disparate elements as did the Flemish Mannerist Vredeman de Vries.

Neo-classicism—Just as the Rococo was a rejection of the style of Louis xiv, Neo-classicism developed in the late eighteenth century in opposition to the Rococo. Rejecting its frivolity, irrationality, and imbalance, Neo-classicism signified a return to the order and sobriety of the classical. Delafosse's *Vases Antiques* are an excellent example of the reserve of Neo-classical design.

Rococo—After the death of Louis xiv in 1715, many aristocrats, who—at the king's insistence—had lived at Versailles, moved back to Paris where they decorated their elegant *hôtels* in a style quite different from that of Louis xiv, the Rococo. The decoration of Versailles was serious, dramatic, and monumental, the Rococo was light, merry, and elegant. The Louis xiv style was symmetrical and composed of straight lines and right angles, the Rococo was playfully imbalanced and filled with elegant S and C curves. Louis xiv ornament contained references to mythology and the greatness of the King, the Rococo was concerned with courtly love, the pleasures of the aristocracy, and the exotic. See the works of Aveline, Demarteau, Marillier, and Pillement.

Strapwork—A characteristic element of Mannerist decoration, strapwork was common in ceiling decorations in Spain but probably derives from Near Eastern decorative art. Like arabesques, it consists of intertwined linear elements and was often combined with grotesques. Whereas arabesques, however, are usually composed of foliate forms, strapwork is composed of forms having the appearance of strips of leather or metal.

Trophies—Beginning in ancient times, the collecting and display of the arms of a defeated enemy signified a victory. For this reason, trophies are sometimes referred to as the first collector's items. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, trophies became a popular decorative motif. In the eighteenth century, thematically related objects and attributes were combined to create trophies which symbolized the arts and science, the seasons, and other subjects of interest to the aristocracy. See Demarteau.

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