

THE LANGUAGE OF ORNAMENT

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The Language of Ornament

The Language of Ornament explores the history of ornament in the Western design tradition. It examines a series of motifs, charting their appearance and reappearance in design from Classical Antiquity through to the twenty-first century. In the debates about art and modernity taking place in the cultural ferment of Europe in the nineteenth century, the nature and meaning of ornament occupied a significant position. Numerous publications appeared exploring the richness of world ornamental traditions and examining the diverse ways in which ornament was employed.

Many ornamental motifs have a lineage stretching back to Antiquity. Classical motifs and architectural principles formed a basis for ornament in the Renaissance period, and reinterpretations of these motifs have constantly reappeared throughout the centuries until the present day. From the sixteenth century onwards, non-Western ornamental traditions – Persian, Indian, Chinese and Japanese – also became increasingly influential on European design.

At times we observe a turn against ornament, a conscious rejection of decorative embellishment such as that pursued by the more stringent strands of twentieth-century modernism. Nevertheless, any attempt to deny ornament has tended to be short-lived, as evidenced by the reassertion of ornament by the Memphis designers of the 1980s – the revenge of ornament on modernism.

Patterned and plain

A perennial feature of the Western artistic tradition since Antiquity, ornament has nonetheless experienced periods when it has been consciously rejected by craftspeople and designers. The re-evaluation of ornament's role and meaning can frequently be connected to social change. An emphasis on form, as opposed to applied surface embellishment, has often been associated with moral and political rectitude and a rejection of excess. Such historical shifts in the status of ornament within design aesthetics are, however, cyclical.

The prolonged denial of applied decoration in any given historical period often serves to reinvigorate an interest in the expressive power of ornament and lead to its revival. In the 1980s the sobriety of modernist design, with its emphasis on clean, unadorned forms, gave way to the riotous colour and surface pattern of postmodern designers. The once-innovative formal purity of modernism began to seem sterile and restrictive to these designers who seized upon ornament as a means of expressing individuality. Such a phenomenon is not unique to our age; the severe unadorned forms of the early nineteenth-century Biedermeier style giving way to the ebullient revived Rococo was a parallel reaction.

Minton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire

manufacturer
England est. 1793

Covered vase

1840

porcelain (bone china)

The Dr Robert Wilson Collection.
Gift of Dr Robert Wilson and Colin Lane, 2007

2007.695.a-b

The nineteenth century in Europe was characterised by a series of revivals of historical ornamental styles. This lidded vase by the Minton factory is an example of the Rococo revival, which looked to the eighteenth-century French court for inspiration. As was often the case with revival styles, the individual decorative elements here are eclectic in origin. The richly gilded rocaille-form scrolls are heavily modelled, owing more to gilt-bronze mounts than eighteenth-century porcelain forms. The vase shape itself is more Baroque than Rococo in inspiration, and the colours employed for the decoration are darker and richer than an eighteenth-century Rococo palette.

Reproduction

Owen Jones

England 1809–74

Grammar of Ornament

title page in *Grammar of Ornament* by Owen Jones, published by Day and Son, London, 1856, facsimile edition 1972

Shaw Research Library, National Gallery of Victoria

The nineteenth century witnessed heated debates about the nature and use of ornament in design. Design theorist Owen Jones published his *Grammar of Ornament* in 1856, richly illustrated with examples of flat ornamental pattern from diverse cultures from across the globe. Jones did not intend his book to be used as a source of pattern, to be copied by designers (although that was frequently how it was used), but instead as a textbook. In his preface to the *Grammar*, Jones invites readers to study the patterns presented and seek to discern the ordering principles – the ‘grammar’ – underlying them, thus equipping designers to generate patterns of their own.

Henning Koppel designer

Denmark 1918–81

Georg Jensen Sølvsmiede,

Copenhagen manufacturer

Denmark est. 1904

Fish dish, model no. 1054

1956 designed, c. 1980 manufactured
silver

Purchased with the assistance of Georg Jensen Silversmiths Ltd
to mark the centenary of Georges Australia Ltd, 1980

D433.a-b-1980

Henning Koppel trained in drawing, watercolours and sculpture. At twenty-seven years of age he began designing jewellery and tablewares for Georg Jensen, producing strikingly original designs that reflected his interest in the abstract sculpture of figures such as Jean Arp. Koppel's designs are primarily concerned with sculptural form characterised by pristine surfaces and expansive flowing lines. The pursuit of functionalism in his designs is tempered by an insistence upon lifelike, organic shapes. Surface ornament, if present, is absolutely minimal.

Reproduction

Adolf Loos

Austria 1870–1933

Ornament and crime

Ornament und verbrechen

1913

colour lithograph

© Getty Images

In his 1910 Vienna lecture 'Ornament and crime', architect Adolf Loos famously equated ornament with 'primitive' cultures. For Loos, modern humanity had evolved culturally and morally to a point where ornament was unnecessary. He argued that the invention of ornament had no place in modern society, was a waste of time and resources and as such was morally reprehensible and a 'crime'. Loos's thinking was enormously influential on nascent modernism. But Loos was also often misunderstood. He objected not to ornament per se, but to the *invention* of new ornament. Loos's own designs often employed historical ornament where it was appropriate to the materials being used.

Matteo Thun designer

Italy 1952–

Memphis, Milan retailer

Italy 1981–88

Alessio Sarri Ceramiche, Florence

manufacturer

Italy active 1980s

Pelicanus Bellicosus teapot

1982

earthenware

Purchased from Admission Funds, 1991

D84.a-b-1991

The Memphis Group was an association of Italian architects and designers founded in 1981 in Milan by Ettore Sottsass. The group's work was an open revolt against the constraints of modernism and its ideals. Memphis designers created metalware, glassware, ceramics, textiles and furniture that made use of riotous colour and pattern and frequently employed ephemeral materials. Forms became outlandish, often at the expense of functionality. This ceramic teapot designed by Matteo Thun is visually arresting both in its unconventional shape and use of strident colour and pattern; however, it is hard to imagine being able to successfully pour a cup of tea from it.

Reproduction

Memphis, Milan retailer

Italy 1981–88

Nathalie du Pasquier designer

France 1957–

Gabon, textile

1982

screen-printed cotton

Purchased with the assistance of the
National Gallery Women's Association, 1985

CT124-1985

Chinoiserie

‘With Indian and Chinese Subjects, greater Liberties may be taken, because Luxuriance of Fancy recommends their Productions more than Propriety, for in them is often seen a Butterfly supporting an Elephant, or Things equally absurd.’

**ROBERT SAYER, *THE LADIES AMUSEMENT;
OR, WHOLE ART OF JAPANNING MADE EASY* (1759)**

Imported works of art from China, Japan and India provided European artists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with entirely new visual sources to exploit. Asian depictions of people, costumes and landscapes differed from the conventions with which European artists were familiar, and they often misunderstood and misinterpreted what they saw. Any symbolic content connected to the original Asian imagery was also lost on Western viewers. The resulting creations by European artists working in what they believed to be an Asian manner are quite fantastic in appearance as a result. Imagery, often distorted, derived from Asian works of art is assembled in strange and creative ways, producing ornament which is exotic in flavour but completely European in character, reflecting little or nothing of the art and culture of Asia.

**Stevens & Williams, Brierley Hill,
Staffordshire** manufacturer

England est. 1846

James Benjamin Hill designer

England 1850–1928

Joseph Keller (attributed to) engraver

England active 1880s

Decanter

c. 1885

glass (rock crystal)

Gift of J. A. Wallace Esq., 1939

4654.a-b-D3

Minton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire

manufacturer

England est. 1793

Christopher Dresser (attributed to)

designer

England 1834–1904

Plate

1874

porcelain (bone china)

The Robert Wilson Collection.
Gift of Dr Robert Wilson, 2012

2012.161

Minton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire

manufacturer

England est. 1793

Christopher Dresser designer

England 1834–1904

Match pot

1869

porcelain (bone china)

The Robert Wilson Collection.
Gift of Dr Robert Wilson, 2012

2012.165

The decoration on this match pot was designed by Christopher Dresser, one of the most innovative British ornamental designers and theorists of the nineteenth century. The decoration shows the direct influence in both motif and colour palette of nineteenth-century Chinese embroidered textiles. Despite this greater fidelity to a genuine Chinese design source, the application of these motifs onto a European ceramic form is a wholly European conceit.

China manufacturer

Armchair

c. 1815

bamboo, ivory, cane

Gift of Rob Gould through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2015

2015.535.1

This adjustable armchair folds out to allow the sitter to recline. It was made in a Chinese workshop specifically for export to Europe. The armchair's form is not one employed in traditional Chinese furniture. It has been executed by Chinese craftsmen in materials, and with decorative details, that Europeans particularly associated with the idea of 'China'. The export trade thus led Chinese artists to become complicit in the fabrication of a European fantasy of Asia and its cultures.

De Grieksche A Pottery (Samuel van Eenhoorn), Delft manufacturer the Netherlands 1674–85

Plate

1674–85

earthenware

Felton Bequest, 1939

4562-D3

This late seventeenth-century Dutch earthenware plate is decorated in a white tin glaze with cobalt blue decoration in imitation of imported Chinese porcelain. The central reserve of the plate is decorated with an image of porcelain vases of Chinese model, one of which is filled with exotic flowers popular in Europe. The rim of the plate is decorated with a border design of European flowers and *putti*. This mixture of European and Asian-inspired motifs is typical of objects decorated in Chinoiserie fashion.

Chelsea Porcelain Factory, London

manufacturer

England c. 1744–69

Teapot

c. 1759–69

porcelain (soft-paste)

Anonymous Bequest, 1980

D40.a-b-1980

This delightful porcelain teapot is decorated with sophisticated tooled-gilt decorations on a mazarine blue ground. The teapot's form shows the influence of the Rococo style, with the handle, the finial on the lid and the spout all featuring scrolling rocaille embellishments. The gilt decorations include European swag, foliage and trellis motifs, all of curvaceous Rococo forms, while images of music-playing figures in pseudo-Chinese costume fill the reserves. The association between Chinoiserie and the Rococo was a common one, both styles expressing rejection of Western Classical conventions.

England manufacturer

Tankard

1683–84

silver

Felton Bequest, 1932

3309-D3

Metalware was often one of the first mediums to register the impact of new stylistic influences, and some of the earliest manifestations of English Chinoiserie occur on flat-chased decorated silverware. This seventeenth-century tankard is decorated with figures of men in dress inspired by Asian costume standing amidst extravagant foliage inhabited by strange, exotic birds. No single source for this imagery can be traced, but similar scenes are to be found on ceramics, textiles, lacquer and in illustrated travel books.

Antonibon Factory, Nove manufacturer

Italy 1728–1896

Plate

c. 1750

earthenware (tin-glaze)

Gift of Cyril Humphris, 1972

D14-1972

The form of this large earthenware plate is inspired by a European silverware shape. The delightful painted decoration, like the eccentric rock in the foreground, draws inspiration from motifs found on imported Asian ceramics, but combines these with European imagery, including Rococo scrollwork employed architecturally in the fence in the middle ground, to create a fantasy landscape.

Reproduction

Alfons Mucha

Czechoslovakia 1860–1939

Turandot

1926

colour offset lithograph

© Getty Images

Alfons Mucha was a Bohemian-born artist who became a leading exponent of the Art Nouveau style in the 1890s. This 1926 poster for Puccini's opera *Turandot* dates from late in Mucha's career and evidences his adoption of the fashionable Art Deco style of the period. The action of *Turandot* is set in ancient China and tells the tale of the cold and haughty princess Turandot who eventually falls in love with the hero prince Calaf. Mucha's poster presents a rather Caucasian-appearing Turandot, looking very much like a 1920s flapper decked out in pseudo-Chinese costume – an exercise in twentieth-century Chinoiserie.

The mask

The mask is an ornamental motif with origins in ancient Greek theatre. Performers in fifth-century Athens all wore masks, which formed a critical and highly symbolic element of every Greek play. Gradually the features of masks became more exaggerated, as can be seen on fourth-century vases from South Italy which depict the farcical costumes and grotesque-looking masks of *phlyax* comedies. From this central role in Greek theatre the mask developed into an ornamental motif in its own right, featuring on ancient vases at the base of handles; as roundels on volute handles; roundels on architecture; and, during the Roman Period, as part of frescoes and mosaics.

In the decoration of Roman houses, the mask became part of the standard ornamental repertoire which formed the basis for sixteenth-century Mannerist ornament, following the excavation of ancient Roman houses discovered in the late fifteenth century. This ornamental repertoire was known as 'grotesque' and the mask formed a central decorative element within this grammar, often taking inspiration from the exaggerated facial expressions of medieval drolleries in illuminated manuscripts. The mask remained popular throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was a favourite device for gold and silversmiths whose models were frequently copied by eighteenth-century ceramic modellers.

Otto Künzli

Switzerland/Germany 1948–

‘Oh, say!’, brooch

1991

gold, stainless steel

Purchased, 1997

1997.426

Rosalind Perry

England active 1970s

Brooch

1977

acrylic, cotton, silver

Purchased, 1977

D337-1977

Wedgwood, Staffordshire manufacturer
England est. 1759

Bough pot

c. 1785–1800

stoneware (green jasper)

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by
Mrs Norma Deutscher, Fellow, 1993

D21.a-b-1993

Saint-Cloud Porcelain Factory, Saint-Cloud manufacturer

France 1666–1766

Glass cooler *Seau à verre*

1720–30
porcelain (soft-paste)

Purchased with funds donated by
Peter and Ivanka Canet, 2011

2011.293.a

While this *seau à verre*, or glass cooler, is decorated with Kakiemon-style decoration copied from imported Japanese porcelains, its form is modelled directly upon a European silver form. Many eighteenth-century ceramics similarly took their inspiration from metalwork forms and their decoration. On this work, the ornamental references can be seen in the gadrooning (curved ribs) around the rim, as well as in the everted foot and vestigial handles in the form of grotesque masks with open mouths.

Vienna Porcelain Factory (Du Paquier), Vienna manufacturer

Austria 1718–44

Jug

c. 1725–30

porcelain (hard-paste)

Felton Bequest, 1940

4706-D3

The moulded mask that forms the underside of the spout on this jug is typically Baroque in inspiration, with its tasselled lambrequins (drapery) and bold, theatrical modelling of the facial features.

Italy, Apulia manufacturer The Ganymede Painter (attributed to)

Volute krater (Apulian red-figure ware)

330–320 BCE
earthenware

Felton Bequest, 1969

D88-1969

The masks on the volute handles of this vase represent Io, a priestess of the goddess Hera, at Argos, and one of the mortal lovers of Zeus. She is identified by the horns of the heifer into which she was transformed by the jealous Hera, wife of Zeus. Such elaborate volute handles, with modelled swans' heads at their base, would have required enormous skill to make and fire successfully. This vase would have been used as part of offerings to the dead and been placed in a tomb. It is not known why the mask of Io was chosen to ornament the volute handles.

The rocaille

The Rococo, which originated in the eighteenth century, is one of the most profoundly original ornamental styles in the Western tradition. It makes use of asymmetric, scrolling and shell-like forms known as rocailles. C-scroll and S-scroll shapes are employed to create curvaceous, irregular outlines and forms. Rococo self-consciously rejected the order and symmetry of Classical design, and embodied restless movement. It blurred the distinction between ornament and form, just as it blurred the distinction between the organic and the lapidary.

The rocaille allows sculptural or architectural forms to assume an almost natural, living character. Ornament looks as though it has grown onto a work of art, while entire objects are made to appear as if they are formed from shells, foliage, running water and other organic material. Experiencing its height of popularity in the first third of the eighteenth century, Rococo enjoyed a revival in the mid-nineteenth century; although the revived form of the style avoided asymmetry and was often heavier in line than its eighteenth-century forbear. Rococo's curvaceous and organic character also directly inspired the sinuous forms of early twentieth-century Art Nouveau.

Derby Porcelain, Derby manufacturer

England c. 1748–1848

Pair of vases

c. 1765

porcelain (soft-paste)

Felton Bequest, 1939

4618A.1-2-D3

These porcelain vases exemplify the manner in which Rococo ornament could come to encompass the entire form of an object. The vases are three-dimensional realisations of a Rococo cartouche, a flat ornament often encountered in architecture. The surfaces of the vase have modelled fluting and scrolling forms which reference the shapes found in seashells. The reserves on the sides of each vase are jarringly decorated with conventional landscape images and insects, imagery at odds with the fluid, organic conception of the vase shapes – a feature often encountered in English Rococo design.

Worcester Porcelain, Worcester manufacturer England c. 1751–1862

Two handled cup c. 1770 porcelain (soft-paste)

The Colin Templeton Collection
Gift of Mrs Colin Templeton, 1942

171.a-D4

This two-handled cup was intended to hold chocolate. It is decorated in a dark blue ground with reserves containing Chinoiserie imagery, a style often associated with the Rococo. The gilded borders of these reserves are formed of Rococo scrolls, although their overall forms are symmetrical. The cup's delicate handles assume the form of pierced Rococo scrolls. Rocaille here informs both the applied surface decoration and the very form of the vessels.

Ludwigsburg Porcelain Factory, Ludwigsburg, Württemberg

manufacturer

Germany 1758–1824

Johann William Götz modeller

Germany 1732–62

Winter, from The four seasons

c. 1760

porcelain (hard-paste)

Felton Bequest, 1940

4468-D3

The S and C scrolls of the Rococo here, in this porcelain sculptural group, become architectural form. Behind the pair of rustic musicians, a bust sits atop what, in Classical design, we might expect to be a column; however, here the structure has morphed into scrolling rocaille forms. The same Rococo scrolls spread out to encompass the edges of the figure group, confounding the distinction between architecture and landscape.

Paul de Lamerie manufacturer

England 1688–1751

Candlestick, snuffer and extinguisher

1734–35

silver-gilt

Felton Bequest, 1934

3575.a-c-D3

The rocaille had its origins in France, and first made its influence felt in England in silverware. As a luxury material and conspicuous marker of consumption, silver design tended to follow progressive fashions. In this candlestick by Paul de Lamerie, the most celebrated silversmith working in eighteenth-century England, the asymmetric scrolls, shell and leaf forms of the early Rococo shape the outline of the object, as well as providing surface ornamentation. The candle snuffer, by contrast, is of a purely practical, conical form: the Rococo elements are restricted to applied ornamental motifs.

**Baron Jean-Louis de Beyerlé,
Niderviller (attributed to) manufacturer**
France c. 1754–70

Pharmacy jar
c. 1755
earthenware

Presented by Mr Wittchind, 1939

4657-D3

Edward Farrell, London manufacturer

England c. 1780–c. 1841

Tea service

1817–19

silver, silver-gilt, ivory

Gift of Mr Raymond Nash, 1972

D89.a-c-1972

Backdrop

Jean Pillement

France 1738–1808

Drawing for Cahier de Balançoire Chinois (detail)

early 1770s

pencil on tracing paper; laid down

Felton Bequest, 1955

3221-4

Jean Pillement was a leading French Rococo artist who travelled and worked all over Europe. He specialised in landscapes and Chinoiseries, and these were often translated into wallpapers, porcelains and textiles. In this drawing a fantastical Chinoiserie landscape collapses into ornament, with ground, foliage and structures transforming into twisting rocaille scrolls.

Architecture as ornament

As much as architecture has been a primary vehicle for ornament throughout history, it has also, conversely, been a source of ornamental form in its own right.

Since the Renaissance period when the principles of Classical architecture, as laid down in the writings of the Roman architect Vitruvius, formed the guidelines for all building design, architecture and its various structural components – columns, capitals, pediments, archways and domes – have inspired designers to experiment with form, scale and the trompe l'oeil effect.

A building, by definition, represents an enclosed space, and for centuries designers have played with translating the scale of architectural forms onto domestic objects across a range of media, including ceramics, glass, furniture and metalwork. Classical architecture, with its symmetry and inherent principles of order and logic, has formed a focus of inspiration for artists over the centuries, at times being used as a vehicle to convey political and social meaning, especially in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for those with a classical education.

William Watkins, London (attributed to)
manufacturer
England active 1754–70

Set of four candlesticks

1769–70
silver, wood, fabric

Felton Bequest, 1932

3291.a-h-D3

Through his claims that forms in architecture could be related to the size and proportions of the human body, the writings of Roman architect Vitruvius exerted an enormous influence during the Renaissance. The role of the column was critical, as the column shaft and capital were equated with the body and head and from its proportions and type – Doric, Ionic or Corinthian, all other aspects of a building followed. In Classical architecture, each column type formed part of an order of decoration and proportion, thus forming a language of proportions, translated here to a domestic scale in these candlesticks.

Thomas Webb & Sons, Stourbridge

manufacturer

England 1837–1990

William Fritsche carver

England 1854–1924

Vase

c. 1875

glass (wheel-engraved)

The Dr Robert Wilson Collection.

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by

Dr Robert Wilson, Founder Benefactor, 2000

2000.165

Josef Hoffmann designer

Austria 1870–1956

Wenzel Hollmann, Vienna manufacturer

Austria active early 20th century

Oskar Meindl, Vienna manufacturer

Austria active early 20th century

Clock

c. 1912

ebonised wood, glass, brass, clock mechanism, enamel,
steel

Samuel E. Wills Bequest, 1976

D168.a-e-1976

Wedgwood, Staffordshire manufacturer

England est. 1759

Covered jar

c. 1795

stoneware (lilac jasper)

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria
by Mr Keith M. Deutscher, Founder Benefactor, 1993

D12.a-b-1993

This covered vase is a miniature piece of architecture with added ornamentation. The form references the famous ancient Greek Monument of Lysicrates, from the fourth century BCE, which formed the display base for an athletic or choral prize won at a festival. It is the only surviving ancient Greek monument to choirs and was the subject of much interest for eighteenth-century architects, including James 'Athenian' Stuart who built a copy at Shugborough, Staffordshire, for Lord Anson. It was well known to Wedgwood, who offered to make the bowl for the tripod proposed by Stuart for the top of the dome.

For kids

More than 200 years ago Mr Wedgwood looked for new ideas. His pottery factory made wonderful objects for peoples' homes. For this covered jar the idea of an ancient building was used, with columns, steps and a domed roof. It also has a chequerboard pattern of leaves around its walls. Nearby there is one other object shaped like a building. Can you see it?

Michael Graves designer

United States 1934–

Alessi, Italy manufacturer

Italy est. 1921

Tea and coffee service

1983 designed, 1985 manufactured
sterling silver, painted aluminium, opaque synthetic
polymer resin, silver, plastic, glass
ed. 17/99

Purchased, 1984

D22.a-i-1984

This Tea and coffee service by the American architect Michael Graves exemplifies his highly decorative approach to design during the 1980s. His playful use of colour and materials directly challenged long-held modernist principles of clean, streamlined forms with minimal decoration, seen in the sky blue plastic finials, the mock ivory handles and the black bakelite feet. Graves's designs often referenced past styles and this service pays particular homage to Josef Hoffmann's architecturally-inspired designs of the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, it is an example of the latest trends in post-modern design in the 1980s, as celebrated by the Memphis design studio.

England, Staffordshire

Teapot

c. 1745–50

stoneware (salt-glaze)

Purchased, 1974

D77.a-b-1974

Backdrop

Giovanni Battista Piranesi

Italy 1720–78

**Various columns in Greek architecture
taken from ancient monuments (detail)**

***Variae in Architectura graecanica
rationes ac symmetriae ex antiquis
monumentis excerptae***

1761

from the *On the grandeur and the architecture of the
Romans (Della magnificenza e d'architettura de' Romani)*
series, 1761

The vase

Originally created as a utilitarian object designed to hold water, wine and oil, the vase's form offered a continuous round image field that was enthusiastically exploited by artists in Classical Antiquity to present frieze-like pictorial compositions. Collected since the Renaissance, first in Italy and then throughout Europe, ancient vases had an enormous impact on contemporary artists of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, providing both examples of Classical narrative imagery for them to draw upon, as well as an elegant form which could itself be employed as an architectural and sculptural ornament. The vase's harmonious proportions and contours, as well as its surface, presented artists with dual opportunities and challenges for creative expression. It became such an emblem of Classical Antiquity for early modern Europe that even an image of a vase served to evoke the civilizations of ancient Greece and Rome – the vase became a motif which could be applied to ornament other objects.

England, Liverpool manufacturer

Tiles

1750–1800

earthenware

Presented by Mr and Mrs F. Hodgkin, 1939

4656.73-78-D3

These tiles are decorated with a screenprinting technique perfected in Liverpool in the mid eighteenth century. Such mechanical forms of decoration represent an important technological development that allowed the creation of attractive and affordable domestic ceramic items, appealing to an increasingly wealthy non-aristocratic clientele. The Classical vase is here employed as an ornament, evoking contemporary interest in the worlds of ancient Greece and Rome and associating this with fashionability and technological innovation.

Wedgwood, Staffordshire manufacturer

England est. 1759

Covered cream vase

c. 1790

earthenware (creamware)

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by Mrs Norma Deutscher, Governor, 1994

D24.a-b-1994

This beautifully proportioned vase, with its elegantly curving profile and Greek-style handles, is executed in the fine white earthenware body known as creamware, perfected by the eighteenth-century English ceramics entrepreneur Josiah Wedgwood. The vessel was intended to hold cream, and was destined for use in a fashionable pleasure dairy. The blue and brown painted bands of 'flute and wreath' pattern derive from Roman wall paintings and owe nothing to the decoration of a Classical vase. The white ground is also wholly eighteenth-century in conception. The vase is not a copy of an ancient ceramic but an evocation of the idea of the 'Classical'.

Ettore Sottsass designer

Austria 1917– Italy 2007, emigrated to Italy 1928

Memphis, Milan retailer

Italy 1981–88

Toso Vetri D'arte, Murano manufacturer

Italy est. 1981

Mitzar, vase

1982

glass (applied decoration)

Purchased with the assistance of the National Gallery Women's Association, 1985

D78-1985

The postmodern Memphis architecture and design group, founded in 1981, sought to overturn the canons of conventional taste. Their design embraced bright colour, asymmetry and the ephemeral, often referencing styles of the past in arbitrary fashion. Here a classically-inspired vase form is enlivened with bright primary colours and a bizarre, random placement of non-functional handles.

Paul Storr manufacturer

England 1771–1844

Cup and cover

1806–07

silver-gilt

Felton Bequest, 1932

3315.a-b-D3

A Classical vase form is here translated into the luxurious medium of silver-gilt by Paul Storr, one of the foremost English silversmiths to work in a Neoclassical style. Such grand silver pieces were typical of the robust classicism of the Greek-revival style in the early nineteenth century and were intended primarily for display. The Classical decoration on this vessel – acanthus leaves around the base of the bowl and on the cover, a leaf and floral frieze around the rim, and masks where the handles join the bowl – is largely architectural in inspiration.

Mythical creatures

Mythical creatures have been part of the ornamental repertoire since Antiquity. The Egyptian sphinx is one of the most famous images from the ancient world, recurring in Greece and subsequently becoming a standard motif of Classical ornament from the Renaissance period onwards. Griffins, similarly, occur in the arts of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and Iran, and appear in the vocabulary of Western decorative ornament from the medieval period onwards. Many mythical creatures, including unicorns, griffins, dragons and sea creatures, re-emerge in European ornament during the medieval period, particularly in association with the development of heraldry: animals chosen for their symbolic powers of protection and aggression.

Although dragons have featured prominently in European and Asian cultures throughout history, their symbolism is markedly different. In Asia, dragons are particularly associated with China and have traditionally had a benevolent nature, while European dragons are regarded as evil and destructive. With the import of luxury Asian works and the European taste for Chinoiserie during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Chinese dragons and phoenixes became popular ornamental devices on European decorative arts, in particular on ceramics – their exotic sinuous forms appealing to a European taste for the exotic.

**Bernard Moore, Stoke-on-Trent,
Staffordshire** manufacturer

England 1905–15

Cicely H. Jackson decorator

England active 1905–15

Bowl

1905–15

earthenware

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by
Sir Thomas and Lady Travers, Governors, 1982

D65-1982

George Hindmarsh, London
(attributed to) manufacturer
England active 1731–53

Pair of sauce boats

1743–44
silver

Felton Bequest, 1934

3563.a-b-D3

These extraordinary sauce boats with dragons forming the handles represent the height of Rococo fantasy in mid eighteenth-century England. Dragons emerged as a fashionable motif among the fantastic nature of Rococo imagery, with interest in exotic, mythical creatures reflecting the taste for Chinoiserie. Asymmetric Rococo scrolling forms adorn every part of these sauceboats, whose helmet forms are otherwise entirely Classical in inspiration.

Doulton & Co., Burslem, Staffordshire
manufacturer
England est. 1882

Bowl (Sung ware)
1925-1928
earthenware

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria
by John and Suzanne Playfoot, Fellows, 1998

1998.134

Burmantofts, Leeds, Yorkshire

manufacturer

England 1882–1904

Victor Kremer (attributed to) designer

France 1857–1908, worked in England 1870s–80s

Dragon vase

mid 1880s

earthenware

The Dr Robert Wilson Collection.

Presented through the NGV Foundation by

Dr Robert Wilson, Honorary Life Benefactor, 2002

2002.396

Victor Kremer is known for his extravagant work in majolica (colourful lead-glazed earthenwares), in particular his designs for vases with modelled lizards and dragons. This double gourd-shaped vase is vividly modelled with a large scaly dragon, mouth agape as it encircles the vase. Mythical creatures were popular subjects in late nineteenth-century British art, the revival in interest much influenced by Lewis Carroll's nonsense poem 'Jabberwocky' (1871), referring to a mythical dragon-like creature.

Ken Sugimori designer

Japan 1966–

TOMY Company, Ltd., Tokyo

manufacturer

Japan est. 2006

Charmander, fire-type pokemon

1997 designed, 2016 manufactured

plastic

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Script

The earliest known writing systems were originally pictographic in character, and the pictorial and ornamental potential of written script has been exploited since its very beginnings. Written text can be employed to form part of a decorative scheme, communicating linguistic content while functioning in an ornamental fashion – as in the case of an inscription on a building or the border of a plate. Such ornament was of particular importance in the Islamic tradition where, at various times in various artistic centres, figural ornament was deemed idolatrous and to be avoided.

Characters or letter forms might be employed in a manner that makes any linguistic content difficult to read but contributes to an overall surface patterning. Character forms themselves may be the objects of ornamental embellishment, such as the calligraphic flourishes of a formal cursive script, or the pictorial elaboration of an illuminated text. Ornaments that visually suggest the form of script but which are in fact nonsensical decorative forms may also be devised.

Wedgwood, Staffordshire manufacturer

England est. 1759

Charles E. E. Connor designer

England 1876–1960

Dish

c. 1914

earthenware (creamware)

Presented by the Bovell Trust on behalf of Nicholas Bovell, 2016

2016.77

England manufacturer
Willem Jacobsz. van Heemskerk
(manner of) engraver
the Netherlands 1613–1692

Covered goblet

c. 1680

glass (diamond-point engraved)

Felton Bequest, 1968

1846.a-b-D5

The diamond-point engraving on this ceremonial covered goblet is executed in a manner very close to that of the great Dutch amateur glass engraver Willem van Heemskerk. The bowl of the goblet is engraved with the words *Salus patriæ et Ecclesiæ* (Welfare of country and church), and the lid bears the words *Libertatis et Religionis* (Of freedom and religion). The highly accomplished engraving has all the freedom of the finest contemporary seventeenth-century ink-and-paper calligraphy. The fluid scrolling flourishes of the script, encompassing the whole of the bowl of the glass, are expansive to the point of becoming pure ornament.

Michael Powolny designer

Austria 1871–1954

Wiener Keramik, Vienna manufacturer

Austria 1906–12

Covered box, from the Gallia collection

c. 1908

earthenware

Samuel E. Wills Bequest, 1976

D182.a-b-1976

Emily Floyd

Australia 1972–

Important emerging artist

2004

composition board

ed. 19/35

Purchased through the NGV Foundation with the assistance
of the Joan Clemenger Endowment, Governor, 2005

DC1.1-296-2005

In this work by Emily Floyd, text is liberated from the page and realised in three dimensions as sculpture. The words 'Important emerging artist' appear from a random jumble of letters, enacting the manner in which published commentary on an artist's work can seemingly lift them up out of the circle of their peers and present them as a figure of talent and potential to be watched closely.

Martin Poppelwell

New Zealand 1969–

Plate

2000

earthenware

Collection of Reverend Ian Brown, Melbourne

Carlo Bugatti

Italy 1856–1940

Side table

c. 1900

ebonised wood, pewter, brass

Purchased with funds provided by
Peter and Ivanka Canet, 2015

2015.155

Carlo Bugatti's idiosyncratic design language drew inspiration from a range of sources, including the Islamic art traditions of North Africa and design from China and Japan. On this ebonised wooden side table, Bugatti uses pewter-inlaid ornament whose forms are clearly inspired by characters from Chinese and Japanese scripts; the individual motifs, however, are completely of Bugatti's own creation and are meaningless as text.

Backdrop

William Morris

England 1834–96

The Earthly Paradise by William Morris. Vol 1 (detail)

volume 1 (of 8) from *The Earthly Paradise* by William Morris

1897

letterpress text and woodcut borders

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria
by Dr Orde Poynton, Fellow, 1980
P89.1-1980

William Morris was the leading intellectual of the British Arts and Crafts Movement. Later in his life, book design became a passion and he founded the Kelmscott Press in 1891 to pursue the production of fine books. Morris oversaw every aspect of the works produced by the press, including the design of typefaces, the woodcut illustrations and the bindings and their ornament, even making the paper. He paid special attention to the layout of text and ornament on the page, transforming the printed page into a unified artistic statement.

The scroll

The scroll is a motif with close associations to nature whose origins can be traced back to Classical Antiquity. Essentially a curling line motif, the scroll was used where individual motifs were incorporated into larger line-work patterns, and in repeating designs where spiralling scrolls interlocked in continuous frieze-like patterns.

Scrollwork ornament was often embellished with vegetal, floral or figural ornament, in the form of grotesque or small animal motifs. Vegetal embellishment at times varied according to the regional origin of a print source; for example, holly, ivy and grape leaves were particularly used by German and Flemish artists during the early sixteenth century. The acanthus leaf was often incorporated into scrollwork, its soft, leafy fronds lending themselves to spiralling forms.

The scroll is present in all periods of art and is arguably one of the most universal of decorative ornamental motifs. It was employed in a broad range of contexts: not only as flat patterning on objects, armour, book illumination and textiles but also as three-dimensional friezes on architecture and furniture.

Villeroy and Boch, Mettlach

manufacturer

Germany est. 1836

Vase

c. 1880

earthenware

Purchased, 1881

404-D1M

This vase is covered with Classical-inspired ornament, its form referencing ancient Greek vases, in particular the Nikosthenic neck amphora; although its handles are a nineteenth-century concoction of various decorative elements. The rich selection of ornamental motifs, including palmettes; the Greek key and wave patterns; acanthus scrolls incorporating grotesque imagery; applied masks under the handles; and suspended lotus flowers which are Egyptian in inspiration, is typical of late nineteenth-century eclectic taste. The vase was purchased from the Villeroy and Boch stand at the 1880–81 Melbourne International Exhibition which contained ‘some very substantial vases and jugs, and crockery of the most useful kind’.

Italy, Apulia manufacturer
Workshop of The White Saccos Painter
(attributed to)

Oenochoe (Apulian red-figure ware)

320–310 BCE
earthenware

Felton Bequest, 1979

D28-1979

This slender wine jug is decorated with the head of Aphrodite, Greek goddess of love, flanked by winged *putti*, representing Eros, who grasp the red veil over Aphrodite's head. The scene is framed by a riot of scrolling tendrils from which flowers bloom, including the flower from which Aphrodite's face emerges. The scrolling vegetation occupies both sides of the vase and directly meets the more formal yet complex palmette design on the back of the vase whose motifs are also framed by shorter, more contained scrolling ornament.

Lawrence Alma-Tadema designer

the Netherlands/England 1836–1912, worked in Belgium
1857–70

Johnstone, Norman & Co., London

manufacturer

England active 1880s

Armchair

1884–87

cedar, ebony, ivory, shell, brass, Boxwood, silk, silk
(thread), cotton, gilt-brass, jute, hessian, other materials

Purchased, 1981

D96-1981

This imposing armchair was part of a suite of furniture designed for the Grecian-inspired music room of Henry G. Marquand's mansion in Madison Avenue, New York. Although its unusual design references ancient stone thrones, the chair's main visual interest lies in its elaborately decorated curved back. The exquisitely carved vegetal ornament undoubtedly references ancient vases – as much in the colour palette as in the ornament – and is a veritable celebration of the scroll motif. Lawrence Alma-Tadema continues the scroll theme through his treatment of the luscious palmette motif on the back legs, surrounded by scrolling acanthus leaves and tendrils.

Italy, possibly Naples manufacturer

Cameo shell

c. 1850

Queen Helmet (*Cassis madagascariensis*)

Bequest of Miss Mary Turner Shaw, 1990

D23-1990

This Queen Helmet shell is a virtuosic example of nineteenth-century shell cameo carving. The engraver, using chisels, drills and abrasives, worked inwards from the surface, retaining or removing material until the decoration slowly emerged. Layers of contrasting colours occurring naturally within the shell were skilfully used to create illusive depth in the ornament. The art of gemstone carving was known in ancient Greece and Rome, and revived in Renaissance Italy when connoisseurs began to form rich collections of engraved stones. Shell cameos, which were cheaper and more easily worked, became fashionable in the nineteenth century and were acquired as Grand Tour souvenirs.

Strapwork

Strapwork is a type of ornament composed of curved, flat bands that appear to have been cut from leather or sheet metal, then twisted and rolled into fantastic shapes. The origins of strapwork may derive from the rolled scroll motif of Classical Antiquity, but a version of the motif appears in the medieval period through the use of intertwining ribbons. Such imagery may well have been influenced by the interlacing arabesque designs of Islamic or Moresque ornament introduced to Venice around 1500, particularly via damascened (inlaid) metalwork.

By the early sixteenth century, strapwork ornament had become prevalent in Italian art. It occurred in all areas of the decorative arts, from objects to ceiling decoration, bookbinding, textiles and tapestries; however, one of the most virtuoso uses of the motif was in the flat chased strapwork on metalwork of the sixteenth century. During the seventeenth century, strapwork was often used as a framing device for grotesque ornament, and in the early eighteenth century its combination with grotesque ornament formed the basis for much Rococo design. With the renewed interest in historical styles in the early nineteenth century, strapwork underwent a complete revival, but by the end of the century the motif had fallen out of use.

Persia manufacturer

Shield

Separ

18th century

steel, silver, gold, cotton, wool

Felton Bequest, 1936

3630.1-D3

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Iranian shields were circular with decorative bosses covering their handle ring attachments and inscriptions running around the outer borders. In addition to its meaning, the text was specifically employed as an ornamental device. This shield is beautifully decorated with gold and silver arabesque and textual ornament applied in the manner of damascened (inlaid) metalwork.

Philippe-Joseph Brocard decorator

France 1831–96

Jug

c. 1880

glass (gilt, enamel)

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria
by Sir Thomas and Lady Travers, Governors, 1982

D61-1982

Islamic art has been influential on European artists for centuries and was revived again during the second half of the nineteenth century due to European colonial interests in North Africa and the Near East. Having developed a fascination for Mameluk mosque lamps of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, Philippe-Joseph Brocard was among the first to revive the Islamic technique of enamelling on glass. One of his source books for Islamic art would undoubtedly have been the *Receuil de dessins pour l'art et l'industrie* (1859). The decoration on this otherwise standard European form includes several Islamic-inspired motifs, including scrolls, arabesques and interlaced strapwork.

Thomas Webb & Sons, Stourbridge

manufacturer

England 1837–1990

William Fritsche carver

England 1854–1924

Jules Barbe decorator

France/England active 1871–1907

Vase

1888

glass (cameo carved, gilt and silvered)

The Dr Robert Wilson Collection

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria

by Dr Robert Wilson, Fellow, 1997

1997.236

This extraordinary vase imitates a Persian bottle form in damascened (inlaid) metalwork. Despite being made entirely of glass, the opaque, creamy white body references carved ivory, while the damascened metalwork was created through the use of gold and platinum leaf fired onto the carved, raised surface. The platinum bands with their simple, formal scrolls surrounding the decorative fields reference strapwork as a framing device. These bands are also carved as if imitating engraved designs in the metal bands.

England manufacturer

Goblet

c. 1745

glass (wheel-engraved)

William and Margaret Morgan Endowment, 1968

1768-D5

Minton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire

manufacturer

England est. 1793

Charles Toft senior designer

England c. 1828–90

Covered bowl

1879

earthenware

Purchased, 1886

66.a-b-D1M

This work by Minton is a very close copy of a covered bowl in the Louvre, Paris, that dates to the sixteenth century and is decorated in imitation of 'Saint Porchaire' ware. These wares are some of the most mysterious ceramics ever produced: little is known about why, for whom or by whom they were made, where they were manufactured or what the inspiration for them was. Their decoration reflects many influences, including Renaissance metalworking techniques, architectural elements and bookbinding irons. The strapwork designs of this piece were possibly inspired by Spanish metalwork of the mid sixteenth century.

Thomas Webb & Sons, Stourbridge

manufacturer
England 1837–1990

Champagne glass

c. 1880

glass (wheel-engraved)

Presented by Thomas Webb & Sons, 1881

709-D1M

Thomas Webb & Sons was one of the leading luxury glass manufacturers of the late nineteenth century. The company had a stand at Melbourne's 1880–81 International Exhibition and subsequently gifted a group of finely engraved table glass to the NGV, to which this champagne glass belongs. The glasses feature a range of historical revival-style designs that were fashionable at the time. The bowl of this glass is engraved with Celtic knotwork motifs, interspersed with scrolling elements that reference formal strapwork designs.

Backdrop

Nicolas illuminator

France active late 13th century–early 14th century

The Aspremont-Kievraing Hours (detail)

c. 1300

volume II of a Psalter-Hours

black and red ink, tempera and gold leaf on parchment;
16th century binding

Felton Bequest, 1922

1254-3

This work is part of a two-volume prayer book made in the Lorraine district of northern France in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. The first volume is in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Both volumes are richly embellished with heraldic insignia, abundant illumination and Gothic borders that are further ornamented with lively animals, figures and amusing grotesque decoration; strapwork-like motifs are incorporated throughout the border bars and leafy fronds.

The flower

The natural world has served as inspiration for ornament in nearly every culture, and plant forms, especially the flower, have been employed in Western ornamental design since Antiquity. Many flowers have symbolic associations in the Western tradition with particular emotions or divine personages, and these meanings remained constant over time, communicating to the viewer despite changing outward forms of floral decorations.

Ancient uses tended to formalise and geometricise the flower. Although the Gothic style of the medieval period used naturalistic flowers as architectural ornament and in manuscript illumination, it was in the seventeenth century that naturalistic flowers and foliage started to be used profusely as decoration. The tendency to employ naturalistic renderings of floral subjects continued into the eighteenth century, informed by botanical drawings and the growing scientific investigation and classification of the plant world. Flowers often form the basis of other forms of decorative motif, being incorporated into swags and festoons, blooming from vases and urns, or filling the interlace forms of grotesque ornament.

Sally Marsland

Australia 1969–

Flat colour

2013

epoxy resin, powdered pigment, nickel silver

Purchased NGV Foundation, 2013

2013.29.18

Chelsea Porcelain Factory, London

manufacturer
England c. 1744–69

Dish

1755–60
porcelain (soft-paste)

Felton Bequest, 1939

4501A-D3

This porcelain dish executed at the London Chelsea Porcelain Factory is a close copy of an imported late seventeenth-century Japanese model. The use of underglaze blue, iron red enamel and gilding imitates so-called Imari wares. The stylised flower decoration of chrysanthemums is closely related to contemporary Japanese brocaded textile designs, and the scalloped outline of the dish is itself inspired by a floral form.

Bow Porcelain Works, London

manufacturer

England c. 1748–76

Plate

c. 1756–60

porcelain (soft-paste)

The Colin Templeton Collection.
Gift of Mrs Colin Templeton, 1942

298-D4

The floral imagery on this porcelain plate derives from botanical illustrations. The use of scientific botanical sources as a basis for ceramic decoration in England was pioneered at the Chelsea Porcelain Factory which exploited its proximity to the Society of Apothecaries' Physic Garden at Chelsea in London to obtain subject matter for its decorators. Such botanical imagery reflects the heightened interest in scientific study of the natural world that characterised the age of the Enlightenment.

Bow Porcelain Works, London

manufacturer

England c. 1748–1776

Shepherd

c. 1760

porcelain (soft paste)

The Colin Templeton Collection
Gift of Mrs Colin Templeton, 1942

397.1-D4

The eighteenth-century Rococo employed pastoral imagery to conjure up an ideal world where a carefree humanity lived a life of simple pleasures in harmony with nature and with one another. Images of shepherds and shepherdesses evoked this realm of rustic bliss and were a common subject for porcelain sculptures produced in both England and on the Continent. The individually modelled applied floral decorations, known as bocage work, on this image of a shepherd musician by the English Bow factory are a characteristically English form of decoration and serve to heighten the pastoral associations of the image.

Gustavsberg, Gustavsberg

manufacturer

Sweden est. 1825

Stig Lindberg designer

Sweden 1916–82

Covered bowl

c. 1950

earthenware

Felton Bequest, 1952

1186.a-b-D4

Stig Lindberg's covered bowl is directly modelled on the shape of a gourd or fruit, including a stem and sculpturally modelled leaves. The surface of the vessel is decorated with graphic images of flowers and foliage executed in a subdued colour palette. The form and the surface decoration display a continuity in the use of flora-inspired ornament; the application of floral decoration to the bowl's surface is whimsical if unrealistic.

England, Staffordshire

Fruit dish

c. 1760

earthenware

Felton Bequest, 1938

3793-D3

Holmegaard Glassworks, Holmegaard manufacturer

Denmark est. 1825

Per Lütken designer

Denmark 1916–98

Rose of Africa, bowl

c. 1982

glass

Gift of H M Queen Margarethe II of Denmark, 1987

D18-1987

Per Lütken was a leading Danish glass designer who worked with the Holmegaard glassworks. This bowl is from the *Rose of Africa* series created for the *Living Arts* exhibition in South Africa in 1982, and is inspired by the Protea – the country's national wildflower. The bowl is blown in clear glass, with coloured glass chips placed on the partially shaped mass of molten glass. The chips fuse with the clear glass form, creating organically shaped coloured fields in the body of the glass – the petals of the flower.

Doulton & Co., Burslem, Staffordshire

manufacturer

England est. 1882

Edward Raby decorator

England 1863–c. 1919

Vase

c. 1910

porcelain

Bequest of William Pulteney Mein, 1962

388-D5

The lush, romantic floral painting of this vase was executed by Edward Raby, a flower painter who specialised in roses and who was one of the Doulton factory's most talented decorators. Raby made detailed studies of floral specimens to be translated into porcelain painting; however, his finished decorations are less interested in botanical accuracy than in soft and muted effects, often influenced by Japanese art.

Backdrop

Josef Frank designer

Austria 1885–Sweden 1967, emigrated to Sweden 1933

Svenskt Tenn, Stockholm manufacturer

Sweden est. 1924

Vegetable tree

1947 designed, 2016 manufactured
cotton

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Josef Frank was a Viennese architect who fled the rise of Nazism and settled in Sweden in 1933. He joined Estrid Ericson's interior design company Svenskt Tenn in Stockholm and worked there until his death. Frank described his design ethos with the term 'accidentism'. He believed in interior design that grew organically, mixing objects of various dates and styles, all unified by their owner's love for them. He designed furniture and textiles that reflected this humane eclecticism, featuring patterns that are architectural in their generous scale, show an affection for handcraft and reconcile seemingly disparate historical traditions with modern invention.

For kids

Flowers and insects from the garden decorate all the objects in this case. You can find many different types of flowers here. One of the objects has large roses painted on it. Can you find your favourite flower? There are colourful flower-shaped brooches pinned around the walls of the case. How many can you count?

The shell

The shell has been a favoured ornamental device for millennia, prized for its exotic, decorative and talismanic qualities. The most common ornamental shell motif is the rounded, ribbed form of the scallop or cockleshell. This shell was commonly used in Classical Antiquity as an architectural element in apses and niches, and also appeared decoratively in floor mosaics and wall frescoes. It was associated with Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, and her Roman counterpart Venus, who were often depicted as emerging from shells in birth.

During the Renaissance, Classical ornament formed the basis of ornamental principles of which the shell was a central element, particularly in architectural contexts. It remained so in the succeeding period where, along with strapwork, grotesque figures and masks and marine imagery, the shell was a key element of Mannerist design. With the expansion of world exploration from the sixteenth century onwards, and the discovery of new cultures, the natural world, including shells, became a major source of inspiration for artists. Collected for their range of forms, patterned surfaces and use in decorative inlay, shells have remained a constant source of inspiration for artists until the present day.

Wedgwood, Staffordshire manufacturer
England est. 1759

Dessert dish

1770–90

earthenware (creamware)

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria
by Mr Keith M. Deutscher, Founder Benefactor, 1993

D11-1993

Meissen Porcelain Factory, Meissen manufacturer

Germany est. 1710

Johann Joachim Kändler modeller

Germany 1706–75

Johann Friedrich Eberlein modeller

Germany 1695–1749

Salt, from the Podewils service

c. 1743

porcelain (hard-paste)

Collection of Kenneth Reed AM, Sydney

England, Staffordshire manufacturer

Teapot

c. 1740

stoneware (salt-glaze)

Gift of Mrs W. Andrews, 1925

2724.a-b-D3

Chelsea Porcelain Factory, London
manufacturer
England c. 1744–69

Salt cellar
c. 1745
porcelain (soft-paste)

The Colin Templeton Collection
Gift of Mrs Colin Templeton, 1942

401-D4

Dale Chihuly

United States 1941–

Untitled group, from the *Macchia* series

1982

glass

Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria
with the assistance of Australian Consolidated
Industries Limited, Governor, 1983

D22.a-e-1983

These silky organic forms from Dale Chihuly's *Macchia* (Italian for 'marked' or 'spotted') series derive from the artist's *Seaforms* series, begun in the 1980s, which explores the abstract, diaphanous qualities of glass and the nesting, rippling quality of shells. Chihuly is feted in the contemporary glass world for his bravura and technical ambition. In his workshop in Seattle he engages teams of skilled glassblowers and assistants to meet the prolific demand for his work, including spectacular, site-specific installations.

Worcester Royal Porcelain Co.,
Worcester manufacturer
England est. 1862

Vase

1876–91

porcelain (soft-paste)

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria
by Sir Thomas and Lady Travers, Governors, 1982

D52-1982

Janet Beckhouse

Australia 1955–

Crustacean ginger pot

1999

stoneware

Kenneth Hood Bequest Fund, 2005

2005.3.a-b

This Chinese-inspired lidded vase is barely discernable beneath an encrusted surface of barnacles, shells and coral. Much of Janet Beckhouse's work is inspired by the sixteenth-century wares of Bernard Palissy which are based on forms from the natural world. The relationship between man-made objects and the relentless force of nature is a recurring theme in Beckhouse's oeuvre. Next to the nineteenth-century Worcester vase it makes an intriguing dialogue, both vases celebrating nature; the Worcester vase literally displaying it on a pedestal (of nature's own making), and Beckhouse's illustrating the futility of any thought that man might conquer nature.

For kids

You can find lots of different types of shells at the beach. All the objects here are made to look like shells, and three of them have coral on them as well. Some are made from glass and some are made from clay. There is a real seashell hiding somewhere else in the exhibition. Can you find it?

Putto

The *putto* is a naked male child, often shown with wings. The image has its origins in the art of the ancient world where the Classical Greek gods of love and sex, the Erotes, were depicted as naked winged youths. The Erotes were sometimes considered to be manifestations of Eros, the god of love, whom the Romans deemed an equivalent of the god of desire, Cupid, also depicted as a naked winged child.

The winged child motif was used infrequently during the Middle Ages, but was enthusiastically revived during the Renaissance in Italy. Known as a *putto*, an *amoretto*, or a *spiritello*, the Renaissance version of the motif sometimes retained its associations with love, both sacred and secular, but more generally came to represent the idea of human emotions or impulses ungoverned by intellect.

The sixteenth century saw the *putto* develop an allegorical dimension. The so-called *putto moderno*, pioneered by the painter Titian, employed images of infants clearly too young to undertake the tasks they are engaged in, but who, because of their age, move the viewer to tender-heartedness and compassion. These allegorical *putti* continued to be employed by artists throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Italy, Apulia manufacturer
The Konnakis Group (attributed to)

Squat lekythos
(Apulian Gnathian ware)

350 BCE

earthenware

Felton Bequest, 1972

D17-1972

A lekythos is a vessel used for storing oil. This example is decorated in the Gnathia technique which involves applying colours – usually red, white, yellow or orange – directly onto the black glaze. The decoration depicts an elegantly robed flute player being gifted a red patterned box by the naked and winged figure of the god of love, Eros. Such images of Eros, along with other youthful winged gods and spirits, are the origins of the later *putto* figure.

Michael Powolny designer

Austria 1871–1954

Wiener Keramik, Vienna manufacturer

Austria est. 1906–12

Spring, from The four seasons

1906–08

earthenware

Purchased with the assistance of the
National Gallery Women's Association, 1988

D46-1988

The allegorical *putto* is here seen in twentieth-century guise. The scale of these ceramic sculptures representing the four seasons suggests architectural ornament, although they are clearly intended for domestic display. The stylised, geometrically inflected forms and bright, modern palette of the figures reflect the aesthetic concerns of the Secession movement in Vienna in the first decades of the twentieth century. A traditional image is given a new, self-consciously modern appearance, in a strategy typical of early Viennese modernism.

For kids

Throughout time the four seasons have been shown in art. These four large, colourful figures were made by the same artist and represent summer, autumn, winter and spring. Each one is different: flowers for spring, fruits for summer and a wreath for winter. What is the cherub, or *putto*, holding to represent autumn?

Mennecy Porcelain Factory, Mennecy manufacturer France 1734–1812

The four seasons

c. 1770

porcelain (soft-paste)

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria
by Mr Peter Wynne Morris, Governor, 1992

D24.1-4-1992

The *putto*'s function as allegorical figure developed in the sixteenth century and continued to be used in this way in the eighteenth century. This group of four *putti* executed in soft-paste porcelain are allegories of the four seasons. Each figure is accompanied by attributes – symbolically charged objects – that identify their allegorical meaning. Spring is accompanied by blooming flowers; summer by ripened wheat; autumn by the grape harvest; and winter by a brazier, a source of warmth.

Michael Powolny designer

Austria 1871–1954

Wiener Keramik, Vienna manufacturer

Austria est. 1906–12

Summer, from The four seasons

1906–08

earthenware

Purchased with the assistance of the
National Gallery Women's Association, 1997

1997.327

Michael Powolny designer

Austria 1871–1954

Wiener Keramik, Vienna manufacturer

Austria est. 1906–12

Autumn, from The four seasons

1906–08

earthenware

Purchased with the assistance of the
National Gallery Women's Association, 1989

D28-1989

Michael Powolny designer

Austria 1871–1954

Wiener Keramik, Vienna manufacturer

Austria est. 1906–12

Winter, from The four seasons

1906–08

earthenware

Purchased with the assistance of the
National Gallery Women's Association, 1994

D1-1994

Rose O'Neill designer

Unites States 1874–1944

Blue Box International, Kowloon

manufacturer

Hong Kong est. 1952

Kewpie

2016

plastic

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

The Kewpie was created by artist and writer Rose O'Neill in around 1909 as a comic-strip character. It appears as a baby with vestigial wings on its back, and is derived from Cupid, the Roman god of erotic love. The comic strip, first published in the *Ladies Home Journal*, became extremely popular and in 1912 the German firm J. D. Kestner, in Waltershausen, began to produce bisque dolls based on the character. The dolls became an international success and Kewpies began to appear extensively in advertising.

The grotesque

The grotesque is an ornamental idiom whose origins lie in ancient Roman art. Its name derives from the grottoes of Nero's palace complex, the Golden House – buried rooms in which painted wall decorations were rediscovered in the late fifteenth century. Grotesque ornament consists of symmetrical arrangements of scrolling plant forms and garlands combined with architectural elements and animal and human figures. Often the vegetal elements morph into human or animal forms.

The use of the grotesque was revived by artists such as Pinturicchio and Raphael, who in around 1519 decorated the loggias at the Vatican in this whimsical style. Printed engravings saw the grotesque translated into a range of media and rapidly spread across all of Europe. Although criticised as absurd by many, especially at the height of the Counter-Reformation, the grotesque enjoyed popularity throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, boosted by the discovery and publication of further original Roman wall frescoes at Herculaneum and Pompeii. Its playfulness, combined with its origins in the ancient world, meant that the style was embraced by both Rococo and Neoclassical artists. The nineteenth-century revival of interest in the art of the Italian Renaissance saw the grotesque enjoy another wave of popularity.

Clérissy Factory, Moustiers

manufacturer

France 1679–1783

Dish

c. 1730

earthenware

Felton Bequest, 1939

4659-D3

Although produced in the early eighteenth century, the grotesque decoration on this large earthenware dish by the Clérissy factory reflects the style of Baroque decoration pioneered by the seventeenth-century artist Jean Berain and associated with the end of the reign of Louis XIV and the regency of Phillippe d'Orléans. The grotesque ornament, inhabited by *putti*, hybrid animals and Classical gods, is lighter in feeling and more open in structure than the Renaissance examples, a sense enhanced by the blue-and-white palette that evokes imported Asian porcelain. A rigorous architectural symmetry contrasts with the tightly structured scrolling grotesque of the nearby Faenza plate.

Italy, Faenza manufacturer

Plate

1519

earthenware (maiolica)

Felton Bequest, 1940

4672-D3

The grotesque decoration of this maiolica plate is a classic example of sixteenth-century Italian adaptation of the ancient Roman decorative style. The grotesque is made up of tightly interlaced vegetal scrolls, some of which transform into dolphins' heads. Books and masks are interspersed throughout the ornament, some of the latter with the date 1519, others bearing the SPQR cipher of the Roman commune. The density of the grotesque ornament is more exaggerated than the airy, open ornament of the Roman period, and the colour palette of the ceramic glazes is richer and heavier.

Manifattura Figli Di Giuseppe Cantagalli, Florence manufacturer

Italy 1878–1954

Vase

c. 1897

earthenware (maiolica)

Purchased, 1897

386-D2

In 1878 Ulisse Cantagalli assumed management of the family ceramics factory in Florence and began producing highly decorative wares closely imitating the style of the Italian Renaissance, especially those produced at the great Italian sixteenth-century centres of Gubbio, Deruta and Urbino. White-ground grotesque decorations adorn the body of this monumental vase inspired by products of the sixteenth-century Patanazzi workshop in Urbino. Of very high quality, the carefully modelled figures and delicate scrolls of the painted ornament display a precision and studied sense of detail which is nineteenth-century in spirit – quite different to the freer, more painterly decoration of sixteenth-century originals.

Backdrop

Daniel Hopper

Germany c. 1470–1536

Ornament with grotesques (detail)

early 16th century

etching on iron

17th century edition, 2nd of 2 states

Presented by Dr Cunningham Dax, 1957

3718-4

Drapery, swags and festoons

Drapery, swags and festoons are decorative devices that have their origins in Classical Antiquity. They are often used in conjunction with architectural elements and in this context garlands of fruits, berries, flowers and leaves may be read as decorative substitutes for harvest offerings at temples, which humankind has been making since time immemorial. They are decorative motifs imbued with festive celebration.

In the Classical world, such motifs appeared in a range of contexts, including decorations on ancient Greek and South Italian vases, ancient Roman frescoes and in the carved relief of Roman stone sarcophagi. By their very nature these motifs were often used as framing devices, providing the decorative border to a scene; however, on many Roman sarcophagi they were also employed as the main decorative element, in the form of large floral or fruit garlands that give the illusion of real garlands draped around a sarcophagus, in a festive manner. These elements reappear in the Renaissance period, when the rational secularism of Classical motifs formed the basis of ornament, and have remained a constant ornamental device in Western design throughout the succeeding centuries.

Wedgwood, Staffordshire manufacturer

England est. 1759

Lady Diana Beauclerk designer

England 1734–1808

Bacchanalian boys, plaque

c. 1790

stoneware (blue jasper)

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by
Mrs Norma Deutscher, Governor, 1994
D38-1994

The drapery that forms the upper border of this plaque is playfully looped between trees and vases set on columns, its ends decoratively interpreted as if representing the skins of panthers, the panther being traditionally associated with Bacchus, the Roman god of wine. The plaque is full of Classical imagery, including the columns topped with covered vases and the young boys and satyrs engaged in Bacchic revelry; to the right a young Bacchus holding his *thyrsus* (fennel staff) is being held aloft. Wedgwood's 1787 Catalogue, lists a 'Bacchanalian tablet' of boys 'under arbours, with panthers' skins in festoons'.

Italy, Campania manufacturer The Libation Painter (attributed to)

Bell krater (Campanian red-figure ware)

350–325 BCE
earthenware

Felton Bequest, 1973

D14-1973

This vase is decorated with a scene from a farcical comedy known as a *phlyax* play that was particular to Southern Italy. No *phlyax* plays survive in the literature, the only evidence of them being these lively examples of South Italian vase-painting of the fourth century BCE. The vases are particularly interesting for their representations of the stage. Pictorial evidence suggests that the stages utilised for the plays were impromptu in nature, making use of temporary sets and backdrops that might indicate a typical temple, house or street. This vase shows a more elaborate version with textiles draped between the posts of the stage base and a small flight of steps added.

Thomas Pitts, London manufacturer

England active 1744–93

Epergne

1762–63

silver

Felton Bequest, 1932

3304.a-w-D3

This epergne, or centrepiece for the dessert table, is a marvellous mid-eighteenth century confection of Chinoiserie, Rococo and Classical design elements. The form is loosely imitative of a Chinese pagoda, while the splayed legs and scrolling feet are Rococo in inspiration. It is the festoons of flowers draped elegantly around the top of the pagoda that make reference to Classical imagery.

For kids

How do you make your guests feel welcome? This silver epergne has a pineapple on top. Pineapples were an old way of saying 'welcome'. They were very rare in England more than 250 years ago, and a real treat. Palm tree columns hold up the roof with chains of flowers hung between. Baskets hang from the branches. The epergne, filled with treats for guests, was placed on the table. What treats would you fill the baskets with?

Pattern books: dissemination and consumption of design

With the development of printing in the early sixteenth century, ornamental prints became the primary means of circulating designs throughout Europe. Much of this distribution took the form of pattern books, or sets of lightly bound prints, disseminated by printmakers from leading manufacturing centres. By the early nineteenth century the production of ornamental prints was replaced by trade catalogues, design manuals and encyclopedias of ornament which became the new mode of design distribution. Such shifts reflected the increase in mechanised production. The Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century was critical in transforming manufacturing across all areas of design, but particularly in the production and consumption of textiles.

Within a few decades, textile manufacturing was revolutionised by new technologies, including steam-powered looms, roller printing and synthetic dyes that enabled a vastly increased range of colours and patterns to be produced at much cheaper prices. These innovations created the means to produce more goods than existing markets demanded, and new markets were sought and consumers seduced into greater acquisition through advertising and trade catalogues. Conspicuous consumption, no longer the province of the upper classes, was becoming the prerogative of the rapidly rising middle classes, and personal dress became an affordable means of individual expression.

J. Claude Frères & Co., Paris

manufacturer

France active 1840s–1950s

Textile sample book

1891

paper, wool, silk, cotton, velvet, other materials

Presented by the Australian Wool Corporation, 1982

CT7-19

These volumes are sample books from the archives of the Parisian textile firm J. Claude Frères & Co. Each volume represents the patterns and range of colourways of one year's production, offering an excellent insight into the extraordinary range of designs and colourways produced by the firm. They are also important documents of taste: while the 1856 volume demonstrates prevailing mid Victorian taste for the repeat small floral print and dense, complex designs, the 1891 volume reveals a strong Japanese influence evidenced by increased blank space around motifs and a more naturalistic design aesthetic.

England or France manufacturer

Stand for Nautilus

c. 1906

marble, gilt-bronze, porcelain

Gift of Mrs M. E. Cutten, 1982

A10-1982

England manufacturer

Dress (Round gown)

c. 1802

printed cotton

The Schofield Collection.

Purchased with the assistance of a special
grant from the Government of Victoria, 1974

D111.a-b-1974

J. Claude Frères & Co., Paris

manufacturer

France active 1840s – 1950s

Textile sample book

1856

paper, wool, silk, cotton, velvet, other materials

Presented by the Australian Wool Corporation, 1982

CT6-1982

Wedgwood and Antique sources

When Josiah Wedgwood and Thomas Bentley commenced their partnership in 1769 they named their new factory Etruria after the Italian region where many ancient vases had been found. To commemorate the first day of the partnership, Wedgwood threw six vases in 'Etruscan' style, each inscribed *Artes Etruriae Renascuntur* (The arts of Etruria are reborn). The factory's Neoclassical program was explicit from the outset.

Eighteenth-century interest in the Antique was highly fashionable due to numerous archaeological excavations and explorations, the most famous being at Pompeii and Herculaneum. Wedgwood and Bentley had access to all the major archaeological publications of the day and owned many of them personally. These included Pierre-François Hugues d'Hancarville's volumes of Sir William Hamilton's vases; Bernard de Montfaucon's five-volume *L'Antiquité expliquée*; James 'Athenian' Stuart's work on Greek architecture; and the vast compilations of antiquities by the Comte de Caylus. D'Hancarville's sumptuous volumes of the Hamilton collection, with their technical illustrations of hundreds of vases and their decoration, were undoubtedly one of Wedgwood's main sources of both form and ornamental design for his famous jasperware productions.

Wedgwood, Staffordshire manufacturer

England est. 1759

John Flaxman designer

England 1755–1826

Hercules in the garden of the Hesperides, plaque

c. 1785–1800

stoneware (blue jasper)

Purchased, 1877

231-D1M

In 1775 Wedgwood engaged the services of the young sculptor John Flaxman who was to become the leading Neoclassical sculptor of his age. The plaque was listed in Wedgwood's 1787 catalogue as, 'From a beautiful Etruscan vase in the collection of Sir William Hamilton, now in the British Museum'. The design, which appears on a Greek red-figure vase of the late fifth century BCE by the Meidias Painter, had been published by Pierre-François Hugues d'Hancarville. The published design was adjusted to a rectangular format and surrounded by an ornamental border which was freely adapted from ancient vase painting.

Reproduction

François Anne David engraver

France 1741–1824

Hercules in the garden of the Hesperides

1766

plate 74 in *Antiquités étrusques, grecques et romaines: tirées du cabinet du M. William Hamilton, envoyé extraordinaire de. S.M. Britanique en cour de Naples* (*Collection of Etruscan, Greek, and Roman antiquities from the cabinet of the Honble Wm. Hamilton*) Vol. 2 by Pierre d' Hancarville, published by F. Morelli, Naples

State Library of Victoria, Melbourne

Wedgwood, Staffordshire manufacturer

England est. 1759

Giuseppe Angelini designer

Italy 1742–1811

Wine cooler

c. 1790

stoneware (green and yellow jasper)

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by
Mr Keith M. Deutsher, Founder Benefactor, 1993

D13-1993

This barrel-shaped wine cooler is decorated with a frieze of male and female banqueters reclining in the ancient manner of a symposium or drinking party. The figures are set in a central band between areas of dice pattern with cane yellow quatrefoils in the white squares. The 'Banqueters' design was prepared for Wedgwood by Giuseppe Angelini in Rome in 1789. It was modelled after the Sarcophagus of the Muses, formerly in the Albani collection and the Capitoline Museum, now in the Louvre, Paris.

Reproduction

Unknown, France

The Muses

Les Muses

1719

plate LIX in *L'antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures*
(*Antiquity explained and represented in diagrams*) Vol. 1,
Part 1, 2nd edition by Bernard de Montfaucon, published
by Florentin Delaulne, Paris, 1722

State Library of Victoria, Melbourne

Wedgwood, Staffordshire manufacturer
England est. 1759

Canopic vase

c. 1810

stoneware (green jasper)

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria
by Mrs Norma Deutsher, Fellow, 1993

D25.a-b-1993

Examples of Egyptian-inspired wares first appear in Wedgwood's *First Ornamental Ware Catalogue* of 1773. The inspiration for the shape and decoration of this vase was Bernard de Montfaucon's five-volume publication of Mediterranean antiquities published in 1722. The random selection of hieroglyphs were taken from the *Tabula Isiaca*, or Isis tablet. The upper section of one of the candle stand emblems is also taken from a candle stand in the Isis tablet, and the other candle stand motif is taken from another vase illustrated in Montfaucon's *L'Antiquité expliquée*, the 'Isis and Osiris' vase, and is a combination of two emblems.

Reproduction

Unknown, France

Isis table

Table Isiaque

1719

plate CXXXVIII in *L'antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures (Antiquity explained and represented in diagrams)*

Vol. 2, Part 2, 2nd edition by Bernard de Montfaucon,
published by Florentin Delaulne, Paris, 1722

State Library of Victoria, Melbourne

Wedgwood, Staffordshire manufacturer

England est. 1759

John Flaxman designer

England 1755–1826

Homer vase

c. 1800

stoneware (blue jasper)

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria
by Mr Keith M. Deutscher, Founder Benefactor, 1993

D14.a-c-1993

Wedgwood's vase shows the elevation of Homer to a divine status. It was modelled after a Greek red-figured bell krater illustrated in the third of Pierre-François Hugues d'Hancarville's volumes of Sir William Hamilton's vases (1766). John Flaxman interpreted the red and black of d'Hancarville's illustration to make a low-relief design of great elegance. Ancient Greek vase painting emphasised the silhouette, and this aspect was newly prized by the rising generation of Neoclassical artists seeking purity and simplicity. The drum-shaped pedestal, decorated with festoons and trophies, is based on the form of a Classical urn, published in volume five of Bernard de Montfaucon's *L'Antiquité expliquée*.

Reproduction

François Anne David engraver

France 1741–1824

The apotheosis of Homer

1766

plate 26 in *Antiquités étrusques, grecques et romaines: tirées du cabinet du M. William Hamilton, envoyé extraordinaire de. S.M. Britanique en cour de Naples* (Collection of Etruscan, Greek, and Roman antiquities from the cabinet of the Honble Wm. Hamilton) Vol. 3 by Pierre d' Hancarville, published by F. Morelli, Naples

State Library of Victoria, Melbourne