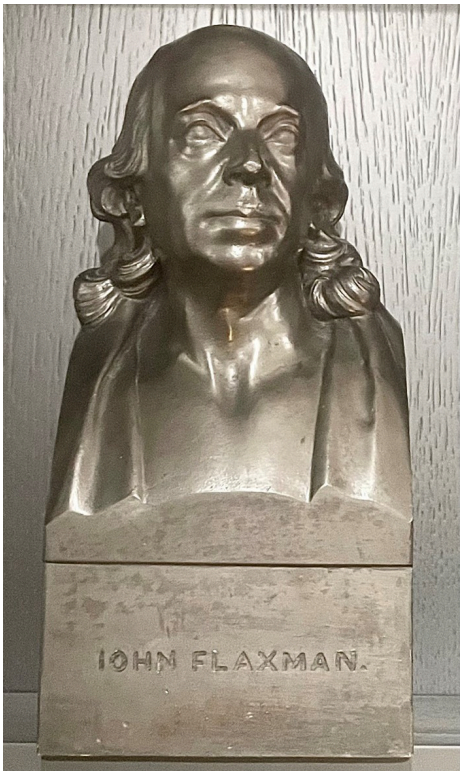
Koopman Rare Art

The Koopman Rare Art Directory of Gold and Silver
Timo Koopman
Design 17th - 19th Century

Part 1



John Flaxman RA (6 July 1755 – 7 December 1826) by Samuel Joseph
Published as the Act Directs Feb III MDCCCXXX
S. Parker Fecit – XII Argyll Place – Koopman Rare Art Collection

The title ‘Design’ looks to the genius behind the hallmark of our celebrated goldsmiths. Too often overlooked, this brief paper, glorifies and studies in more detail some of those draughtsmen, artists, sculptors, modellers and architects that conceived these splendid designs which in turn, were executed to perfection by the goldsmith to create the finished masterpiece. The 18th and 19th century designs were often inspired by the ancient world. The author’s drawings stimulated the taste for academically inspired ornament in Greek, Roman, and Egyptian styles and drew inspiration from those that had been on the Grand Tour.

However, these skilled artisans were not the only influence behind these designs. The Royal court, power of the aristocracy, Parliament and gentry together with the economic growth through foreign trade and social changes, all had their part to play on the silver trade and consequently its design. It was these groups of landowners, together with the merchants and tradesman that made up most of the demanding clientele.

One has only to think of the ‘Golden Age’ of the Dutch and The East Indies Company to

clearly see how trade helped influence designs such as Chinoiserie silver (“Japan” or “Japonian”). The sources for the various figures and backgrounds in chinoiserie chasing are many and include illustrated travel books, Chinese porcelain, Indian cottons and Oriental lacquer work.

By 1670, these visual elements were embedded in London artisans’ designs fuelled by the collectors’ appetite for the eastern decorative arts. Extremely characteristic of the chinoiserie style of the late 1600s is the eccentric treatment of perspective, in which figures float on small clumps of grass or rocky outcrops, disposed with no relationship to any baseline or horizon.

The genius of goldsmiths such as Paul De Lamerie and Paul Storr is well documented, but the complete picture from start to finish is so important. An idealised conception of the ‘artist-craftsman’ image has unfortunately hindered general understanding of the ways in which silver was designed, distributed and eventually used. As such, the complex network of highly skilled workers to whom the silver trade was reliant upon throughout the 17th and 18th centuries has been mostly obscured.

Authorship has often been misconstrued with the ‘maker’s-mark’ stuck on pieces and has created an idea that it signifies the work of a single individual. However, rather than acting as a signature of sorts, the ‘maker’s mark’ should instead be considered in the wider terms of identifying particular sponsorship from a member of the Goldsmiths’ Company. This sponsor would submit the completed work to the assay office before it eventually was offered for sale. Indeed, it is likely this work may have been the toil of a large number of individuals who remain unrecognised.

The Baron Guernsey Monteith Bowl 1702, by Isaac Dighton
Koopman Rare Art Collection

At the end of the 17th century, one could argue that there were a number of main styles that prevailed. The first of these being the traditional patriotic English design, which can clearly be found on wholly English objects such as the Monteith bowl.

There was a large influx of emigrée journeymen arriving in London. They brought a new style of fashion and as they were not permitted to legally strike their hallmark on a piece of plate, they would use other London goldsmiths to have a touch mark stuck. The main influx was from Netherlandish, German and Walloon regions of Europe. However, other factors prevailed. The Edict of Nantes, signed by King Henry IV in 1598 granted the minority Calvinist Protestants of France, the Huguenots, substantial rights in the nation, which was predominantly Catholic. However, the revocation signed by Louis XV in 1685 immediately saw the protestant (Huguenots) flee France and Wallonia (southern Belgium).

After the Reformation, England was seen as a safe place for refugees. Although on occasion the Huguenots were in need of economic and governmental support. Importantly, they also brought their skills and expertise as silk-weavers, silversmiths, merchants, vine-growers, wig makers, and hat-makers to England, helping England to expand its global horizons.

The Auricular Style

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Another style was of German-Netherlandish influence and the characteristics are auricular or cartilaginous in form with brilliant technical ability and superb castings. This influence was 'Mannerist' and represented by artificiality, elegance and sensuous distortion of the human figure. The Dutch Van Vianen family are certainly the most famous when considering this period and brought this style to the height of fashion in England in the 17th century.

From 1588-1674, the Netherlands saw great economic and cultural expansion due to significant developments in overseas trade and commerce. Firmly establishing itself as a global financial superpower, the country cultivated a unique and flourishing environment in which art, music and science could thrive.

One such innovation during this time was the creation of the auricular style, which is often viewed as a precursor to baroque and rococo ornament. Abstract in nature with highly

stylised figurative elements, the name derives from its use of the ear's distinctive visual form. The free-flowing swirls and intermingling shapes create a harmony of design that became popular on a range of different objects. Works in this style were created by hammering the designs into a single pure silver sheet using hammers and chasing tools.

Ewer, silver-gilt, Utrect 1614, Adam Van Vianen – Rijksmuseum Amsterdam ©

The Van Vianen Family

True champions of the auricular style were Adam (1568-1627) and Paul (1570-1614) Van Vianen; Dutch brothers who became synonymous with its whimsical and organic forms. Born in Utrecht, they joined their local guild in 1590. Adam's son Christiaen Van Vianen (1598-1671) trained under his father and eventually continued his work. His was the largest alien workshop in London at a time with a 200-person workshop of silversmiths, jewellers and draughtsmen.

The Van Vianens transformed decorative design through their imaginative and highly skilled approach to their work, creating pieces that held a unity between fantastical inchoate imagery, and technically complex methods of production.

Thomas de Keyser, Portrait of a Young Silversmith, possibly Christiaen van Vianen, 1630.

The above engraving although at first glance may seem totally fanciful was the model for probably the most famous piece ever produced by the Van Vianen family. The lidded ewer is not only original and sculptural, with zoomorphic and human contours but has its foot as a crouching monkey which carries the whole like an Atlas, the handle a woman's hair, the pouring spout a monster's head with a long neck. Adam van Vianen fashioned this piece in 1614 on commission from the Amsterdam goldsmiths' guild to commemorate the death of his brother Paul who died the previous year in Prague where he held the rank of favourite goldsmith at the court of Rudolf II (1552-1612).

Even with the limited commissions that Christian produced for the court in England. His designs published under the name of Adam Van Vianen inspired English modellers for the next century to come. In the 1640s he employed the engraver Theodor van Kessel to make a book about his father's designs, called Modelli Artificiosi di Vasi Diversi D'argento et Altre Opere Capricioz.

Four George II Sauceboats London, 1730 by Paul De Lamerie
Formerly in the Koopman Rare Art Collection and now in the Cahn Collection and exhibited at the Sant Louis Art Museum

These magnificent sauceboats, which are so very different from other works by Paul De Lamerie, show strong influences of the auricular style, inspired by designs of the 17th century they would have paved the way in the movement towards the rococo period.

The German-Netherlandish school would have welcomed the influx of Huguenot craftsmen to execute their modelling and superior casting techniques and the works of Jacob

Bodendick, one of the few German goldsmiths entitled to enter his mark at the Goldsmith's Hall are a testament to this and show this strong influence. Jacob Bodendick was responsible for some of the most glamorous secular plate to be found in England in the 1660's and 1670s. While the floral and foliate decoration on late 17th century sleeve cups of this type was probably inspired by any number of prints then in circulation, the exotic bird on one side of this present cup and the peacock on the other can be confidently traced to details in two prints, numbered 1 and 3, published as part of an album about 1610 by Paul Göttich (1596-1622) of Augsburg.

A 17th Century Parcel-Gilt Cage-Work Cup & Cover Circa, 1670
Attributed to Jacob Bodendick – Koopman Rare Art Collection

The cup with a cylindrical silver gilt body on three ball feet. The pierced and chased cage-work with birds and foliate scroll decoration, the scroll handles terminating in mythical beast heads, the pull off cover with a rope work border, pierced cage-work and a foliate finial mounted with a silver gilt bee.

This type of cage-work was popular in England during the 1670's and 1680's and was influenced by the work of German silversmiths earlier in the 17th century. Interestingly, the bee and blossom of these cups' finials may well reflect their original function; it is well known that such vessels were used for braggot (a mixture of honey and malt), caudle or some other fortifying beverage commonly given to expectant or new mothers.

Charles II Royal Presentation Ewer
c. 1667 Maker's mark 'HW', an escallop below, probably for Henry Welch

The maker's mark on this ewer has been attributed by the silver historian Christopher Hartop to Henry Welch, an immigrant craftsman who evidently worked for the royal household. The mark appears on a pair of candlesticks in Lambeth Palace Chapel, and on another in the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University.

The introduction of the highly fashionable and skilled Cut-Card Decoration, as seen on the ewer by Henry Welsh was introduced as early as the 1660's and ever so slowly the French influence of design crept into the world of the British Elite. It evolved to form a wholly new style of design and by the 1730's English rococo was born.

The third style and certainly to be the most influential from the 17th century through to the 18th, was that of the French school. From across Europe, England saw the influx of Huguenots and with the arrival of a protestant King, William of Orange from the Low Countries, this accelerated the arrival of the skilled artisan on our shores.

Indeed, our most famous Huguenot goldsmith Paul De Lamerie, born in s'Hertogenbosch in Holland arrived in Britain as 'Paul Souchay de la Merie' before assimilating into British society.

One of the first of these goldsmiths to enter his mark at the Goldsmith's Hall was Pierre Harache in 1682 after Parliament passed a bill licensing these 'Protestant Strangers'. This saw new techniques, skill, and knowledge in all aspects of individual commissions.

Lord Trevor’s Tureen, London 1736 by Christian Hillan
Koopman Rare Art Collection

Since sterling silver was the “coinage of the realm,” a silver dinner service was, most literally, worth its weight. But the display and use of silver meant more than riches. Silver was an expression of a patron’s taste and education, designed to celebrate his achievements and complement the architecture of his house. Parliament recognized the importance of the silversmiths’ trade to the economy and worked to encourage an environment conducive to vigorous commerce. Innovation—stylistic, technical, and commercial—was highly valued too, and the silversmiths who succeeded in business had to be responsive to fashion and opportunity.

In England, as in Continental Europe, a rich display of silver was essential to the expression of power. Government officials and emissaries dispatched to foreign courts were expected to entertain in a style that reflected the dignity of the English crown. To ensure that they could set an impressive table, an ambassador or other official was issued a silver service from the Jewel Office, the division of the royal household responsible for precious metals and jewels.

The illustrated Christian Hillan tureen exemplifies the need to entertain in style perfectly. Robert Hampden-Trevor, 1st Viscount Hampden (17 February 1706 – 22 August 1783) who was a British diplomat at The Hague and then joint Postmaster General.
He was the eldest son of the second marriage of Thomas Trevor and studied at Queens College, Oxford, graduating in 1725 and then becoming a fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. In 1729, he was appointed as a clerk in the Secretary of State's office.

In 1734 he went to the United Provinces as secretary to the embassy under Horatio Walpole. He succeeded as head of the embassy in 1739, initially as Envoy-Extraordinary, and from 1741 as Minister-Plenipotentiary. During this time, he maintained a regular correspondence with Horace Walpole. In 1750 he was appointed a commissioner of the Revenue in Ireland.

Although the court was an important source of orders for silversmiths, it did not support workshops of its own, and makers broadened their market by serving the growing professional and merchant classes as Britain’s international trade grew in the 18th century.

The Rococo

Philip Dormer 4th, Earl of Chesterfield part of the allowance of plates given on his appointment as ambassador to the Hague in 1727.

The rococo style has often been viewed as the extravagant outlier that stood between the elegant simplicity of the early 18th Century and the refined order of the Regency period. Springing from the French courts, the rococo built upon the rhythm and symmetry of the previous baroque style, heightening its capabilities of opulent extravagance to an extreme. Visually it is bold, arresting and speaks of a time of exuberant wealth. However, there is a greater historical complexity to this period of design that sets it apart from being mere frivolous decoration.

The intense movement, intricate detailing and curved forms of the rococo style make it highly distinctive from other decorative movements. Deeply expressive and wide reaching in its forms, it became a style synonymous with the immense wealth of the French aristocracy. It permeated all forms of decorative art, creating even greater artistic possibilities across Europe. Indeed, the development of this style in Britain offers a fascinating insight into the complex socio-economic environment of the 18th Century.

One of Paul De Lamerie's most famous creations
The Lequesne Coffee Pot London, 1738
Formerly in the Koopman Rare Art Collection

Through a rejection of the symmetry popularised through the baroque, the French Huguenots established a key element of rococo silver and as such, they have often been solely credited with the adoption of the style in Britain. However, this view disregards the nuances of cultural exchange which, of course, effects both parties involved.

The introduction of the rococo style in Britain was contingent on a number of factors. The exact date in which this style was adopted in English silverware is unknown, yet it has been argued that the influence of Paul de Lamerie in 1721, alongside the availability of Juste Aurele Meissonnier's engravings, place the origins of its influence in the 1730s. The Huguenots also played a significant role in the spread of this style, yet it would be an oversimplification to attribute its origin to them entirely.

A Magnificent George II Cup & Cover by Paul De Lamerie
Formerly in the Koopman Rare Art Collection
London, 1745

Hugh Tait and Christopher Hartop demonstrated the origin of particular objects from 18th Century London believed to be of Huguenot invention, were in fact of a much earlier English design. In particular, the development of the two handled cup provides an interesting insight into the nature of this relationship. The two handled cup was produced and used in Britain from as early as the mid-17th Century, and by 1688, the distinctive pear-shaped form had been remodelled by silversmiths to instead feature almost vertical sides. Through the Huguenot influence, the cup then developed to consist of a narrower body with 'harp-shaped' handles rather than the typical 's-shaped' handles associated with British design. As evidenced, preexisting styles were both adopted and adapted by various groups to suit their tastes. Moreover, it is clear that varying styles and forms existing concurrently, often borrowing elements from each other to suit wider public interests.

During the 1730s, the influence of the Huguenots coincided with progressive diversification in Britain, as an ever-expanding bourgeois class brought with them new tastes and a greater expression within art. This subsequent freedom manifested through the introduction of the rococo style, evidenced within silver initially through chased or engraved boarders on trays before eventually being utilised as the key decorative feature. During this

time, we see a sharp intensification within decoration featuring auricular waves, and asymmetrical cartouches imbued with a romantic playfulness.

Other significant factors also greatly influenced the development of the rococo style in Britain. The ascension of King George I, following the Act of Settlement in 1701, brought with it the prospect of stronger unions with France against Spain in 1718. Despite the later economic hardship, including the dissolution of the international trading 'South Sea Company', the treaty following the War of Spanish Succession granted significantly beneficial trade agreements with the Spanish Colonies, South America and the West Indies. As such, the British economy flourished, entering a period of prosperity that further facilitated the popularity of the rococo style.

By the 1800s, Britain was firmly established as a powerhouse of international trade and commerce, providing the perfect environment to facilitate greater manufacturing opportunities. Thus, the Huguenot silversmiths found themselves in a fantastic position, where they could offer their skills at a reduced cost to their English counterparts through a vast number of willing labourers.

Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier & his design for a candlestick 1734

This last century has seen significant reconsideration of what we consider the 'rococo' style. In Fiske Kimball's 'The Creation of the Rococo', it is often referred to as the most attractive movement between Renaissance and Impressionism. With its heightened self-awareness and balance, the style embodies and appeals more openly to our senses, making it highly sophisticated and not as superficial, degenerate and illogical as once believed.

The birth of Rococo in France and the genius of *Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier* and Thomas Germain are intrinsically linked. Juste Aurele Meissonnier is known for his brilliance, ingenuity, and skilful hand. The sheer virtuosity and technical control involved in his rococo has led scholars to speak of him as one of the inventors of the style itself. Now, what is often defined by historians as the legitimacy of Meissonnier's artistic imagination was, in fact, guaranteed by two primary sources of inspiration. The first - and much more obvious - authority traditionally venerated by artists is that of nature.

An artistic imagination empowered by nature can be illustrated by introducing naturalistic elements into compositions and by the fluidity of movement. The second, element is recognisable in the Neapolitan school of the 17th century and in the decadent reinterpretation of ancient Rome and the Arcadian descriptions of Pliny the Younger. One of his contemporaries described Meissonnier as "a rebellious genius and, moreover, spoiled by Italy".

Portrait of Thomas Germain and His Wife
Nicolas de Largillierre - Calouste Gulbenkian Museum ©

Associated with Thomas Germain, these exceptional candelabra were originally inspired by a Juste-Aurèle Meissonier candlestick. Exquisitely sculptural in form, the candelabra drew upon the initial design from Meissonier published in Deuxième Livre de L'Oeuvre de J.A. Meissonnier, Chandeliers de Sculpture en Argent in 1734. This featured playful cherubs entwined around a twisted stem yet was not suited to the tastes in France during this time. Recognising the zeitgeist of France in the 1730s, Germain replaced the cherubs with mythologically inspired satyrs more in keeping with the rococo style. He also altered the arms to reflect rich blossoming foliage that overflowed with a sense of exuberant abundance.

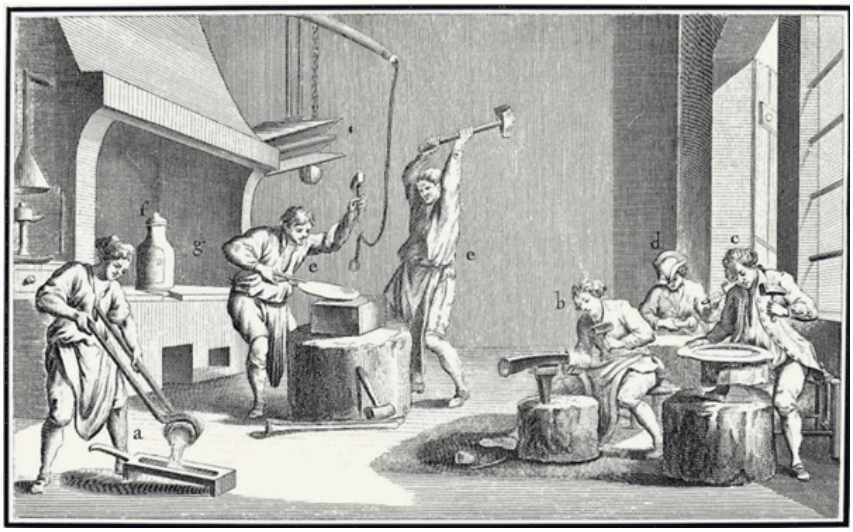
The Earl of Kildare Candelabra
A Highly Important Pair of George II Figural Three-Light Candelabra
London, 1744 Maker's mark of the royal goldsmith George Wickes
Koopman Rare Art Collection

What makes this design so significant is the sheer vibrancy and fluidity of the rendering. Within every component, the visual effect of this work speaks to the skilful extravagance of rococo production. In France, this was known as 'Genre Pittoresque' and was of particular interest to Thomas Germain who initially practiced pictorial studies despite his family consisting of silversmiths. Through the using the classically inspired figures of satyrs, Germain showcased both the intellectual and visual capabilities of the style, with an emphasis on the harmonious conjuncture between proportions and movement.

Plate depicting a design for a candelabrum. The base and stem are decorated with flowers and scrollwork.
Dousieme livre des Oeuvres de J. A. Messonnier [sic] Livre de Chandeliers de Sculpture en Argent – Victoria & Alberty Museum ©

The way commissions were conceived and came to fruition was to change too. The workshops of the early 18th century goldsmith were relatively small and would have employed a system in which they organised a complex network of outside suppliers of wares and services as well as that of other workshops. Some such as Paul De Lamerie would presumably have had a retail premises as well as a workshop. However, this would have taken a large amount of capital to achieve and more often the silversmith worked for the retailer or shop keeper and employed his own apprentices and journeymen. This of course would have been less profitable. What is certain is that the retailer had to be adept at credit management to carry a large stock and be able to ride the credit expected by clients.

The skill required for this management is evident by the number of recorded failed businesses. The smooth success of the London goldsmiths' trade relied on the close association of social, familial and business ties as well as effective use of capital, premises and skills.



From a customer's point of view, it would have been easier to visit one goldsmith and make him responsible for the whole project rather than visit all the individuals potentially involved.

By the 1760s, many silversmiths began to turn to architects for designs that were intended to be part of a comprehensive interior scheme. There was a need for balance and the rococo became regarded as excessive, and without rules. The transition from the rococo to the neoclassical style marked a significant shift in aesthetic values and design principles, particularly in silverware. Rococo, characterized by its ornate, playful, and asymmetrical designs, often featured intricate details, curvilinear forms, and a sense of whimsy. Silver pieces from this period typically included elaborate motifs, such as shells, foliage, and figures, reflecting a celebration of lightness and elegance.

Drawing of a view of the Gallery, or Library, Syon House, Robert Adam, 1763-73 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London
Demonstrating the comprehensive interior scheme.

For more information on the availability and price of any treasures we mention, please visit our website, email or call us.

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All works shown, unless otherwise indicated, are available to view and purchase in our gallery located in 12 Dover Street, London, W1S 4LL

For all enquiries please do not hesitate to call or email on:
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