“noch vil höher, und subtiler Künsten… an tag zu bringen”: Renaissance Pattern Books and Ornament Prints as Catalysts of the Design Process

In traditional art history, early modern pattern books and the closely related genre of the ornament print are rarely associated with the kind of autonomous invention encapsulated in the concept of disegno. However, by looking through the lens of several fifteenth and sixteenth century printed design resources, including Giovanni Antonio Tagliente’s Esempio di raccammi (1527) and the Kunstbüchlin (1538) of Heinrich Vogt Herr the Elder and his son, this essay aims to demonstrate that there is strong foundational overlap between these two divergent products of the Renaissance. Rather than instilling among artists a culture of slavish copying, the production and increased access to (printed) variant designs facilitated the generation of ideas that were suggested by, but lay well beyond the scope of the printed page.

Keywords: pattern books; ornament prints; printmaking; design; inspiration; emulation

In 1976, the American artist William Justema (1905–1987) expressed his frustration with the preconceptions associated with the word ‘pattern.’ He wrote: “There is seemingly no end to the confusion that the word ‘pattern’ engenders. Dictionaries are of little help…. Scholars are even less helpful…. The trouble, naturally, is that ‘design’ has come into general use for anything that’s planned, whereas ‘pattern’ – if it is to make any sense in the visual arts at all – must be confined to a limited field and its products. This means that while design, as verb and as noun, can range far and wide, embracing almost every conceivable activity and result, pattern must evolve from a single source, adding to itself as a coral reef does, with each additional shape related to the one it grew from…. Without making such assertions, Justema’s commentary touched on a fundamental problem in the perception of pattern as something that repeats, or is to be repeated, and is therefore often perceived as antithetical to anything that may be called ‘original.’ Shortly after, Ernst Gombrich also addressed the problematic associations conjured by the word ‘pattern.’ In The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of the Decorative Arts, he apologetically stated: “There remains that jack-of-all-trades, the term ‘pattern,’ which I shall use quite frequently, though not in very good conscience. For the word derives from the Latin pater (via patron), and was originally used for any example or model and then also for a matrix, mould or stencil.” Gombrich’s explanation of the etymology of the word ‘pattern’ signals an additional, very specific problem that occurs when it is reproduced through the medium of print. Linguistically, and by extension psychologically, the resulting ‘models made by way of a model’ equal double trouble. The interference of the mechanical printing process as an intermediary stage between the phase of ideation and design on the one hand, and the resulting product on the other, creates a distance that makes us lose sight of the former and diminishes the status of the latter. Together, Justema and Gombrich thus offer something in the way of an explanation...
for the stigma that has often been attached to early modern pattern books and the closely related genre of the ornament print. Rather than treated as the work of an ingenious designer, they are perceived as ‘rigid templates,’ produced as multiples in woodcut, engraving, or etching, that were readily available on the market and seemingly there to encourage a practice of slavish copying. In this sense, they appear to stand diametrically opposed to the metaphysical concept of disegno, which is generally understood to represent an innate and autonomous ability to invent and create, perhaps expressed most vibrantly in iterative sketches in the idiosyncratic hand of a celebrated artist. Both are products of the Renaissance, and both are related to the process of making art, but in traditional art history they represent mutually exclusive parallel planes, each with their own cast of constituents, codes of conduct, medium-specific associations, and – most poignantly – polar opposite normative values (high/low, active/passive, intellectual/uncultivated etc.).

Adding to the diverging perception and appreciation of the two subjects is the fact that their respective histories were written at very different moments in time. The introduction of the word disegno and the gradual theorization of its meaning date back to the Renaissance itself, and are firmly grounded in canonical artists’ treatises that have greatly influenced our general understanding of (the status of), chiefly Italian, early modern artistic practices. In contrast, the first written histories of pattern books, ornament prints and the wider context in which they were created and used, only appeared in the nineteenth century, in an artistic climate that was radically different from the period in which they had originated. As a result, their narrative became one that principally reflected the “ornamentale Zeitprobleme” of the modern day, to borrow a term from Rudolf Berliner, rather than one that investigated the ways in which these objects were perceived and functioned in their own time. A case in point is formed by Alfred Lichtwark’s Der Ornamentstich der deutschen Frührenaissance (1888), which is among the first and one of few book-length treatments dedicated to the early history of the ornament print. On the first page of his introduction, however, Lichtwark makes clear that the true focus of the book was not the genre an sich. His interests did not lie with the prints as autonomous works of art, but rather with their “sachliche Inhalt.” As examples of designs for the decorative arts that seemed to have survived in far greater numbers than their three-dimensional counterparts, and as objects that were often signed and dated – or dateable – with relative precision, Lichtwark used the ornament print to forge a foundational history of German Renaissance design that could inform both the designs of the modern craftsman and the interpretive work of the museum curator. By stating the scope of his work so clearly, Lichtwark intentionally left room for alternate approaches to the material. Yet, few followed suit. Most of the catalogues of ornament prints that were assembled during the second half of the nineteenth century, in addition to the growing number of facsimile editions of rare prints, print œuvres, and pattern books enabled by the rapid advances in the commercial print industry, focused primarily on how this material could answer an array of contemporary concerns, ranging from a lack of imagination among craftsmen and a desire for historical accuracy in objects, interiors and buildings in specific period styles, to the attribution and dating of objects and designs in museum collections. As a result, pattern books and ornament prints were increasingly treated as static sources of information. While few publications directly implied that this was also the way in which these objects had functioned in their own time, the lack of an alternate narrative meant that this was the message that was inadvertently absorbed by generations of (art) historians.
This essay makes a case for a reconsideration of the place of these objects within the artistic practice of Renaissance artists north and south of the Alps. Central to the discussion are two sixteenth century sources: the Venetian textile pattern book *Esempio di raccammi*, published in 1527 by Giovanni Antonio Tagliente (ca. 1465–1528), and the *Kunstbüchlin* of Heinrich Vogtherr the Elder (1490–1556) and his son, which first appeared a decade later in 1538. The unique combination of text and images in these pattern books enables the modern student of the Renaissance to gain an understanding of how their content spoke to and would have been perceived by their sixteenth-century audiences. By extrapolating aspects of this interaction to a broader group of contemporary objects, it highlights the generative effect that was inherent in the sequential presentation of motifs as design ideas. Consequently, it argues that, rather than eradicating all originality from art making, pattern books and ornament prints were meant to stimulate the invention and creations of new designs that were suggested by, but lay well beyond the scope of their pages.

The Alphabet of Design: “Exempli per firmar la mano” and “imparare a disegnare”

As early as 1522, Ludovico Vicentino degli Arrighi (ca. 1475–1527?) acknowledged the effect of alienation caused by the printing press. In the introduction to his *Operina*, the first printed writing book dedicated to cursive script, he noted that the translation of his calligraphy into woodcuts by way of a professional blockcutter undeniably diminished the vivacity of the writer’s hand (“...la stampa non possa in tutto ripresentarte la viva mano...”). Yet, this concern did not discourage him from publishing. To him, the positives decidedly outweighed the negatives since the print medium allowed him to provide many more people with the writing samples they desired than he could ever produce by hand (“...perche impossibile era de mia mano porger tanti esempi...”). Unsurprisingly, the fact that his writing book consisted of non-autograph woodcuts did not cause any of his contemporaries to question Arrighi’s merits as a calligrapher. On the contrary, the publication firmly established his position as an authority in his field, and many other writing masters would follow suit over the following centuries.

One of the noteworthy aspects of Arrighi’s *Operina* is the fact that the entire booklet is executed in cursive chancery hand (*cancellaresca* or *littera corsiva*). Essentially, the title page, the introduction to the reader, and the explanation of his method all function as one immersive writing sample that helped his audience to familiarize themselves with the characteristic shapes of the letters well before the actual instructions commenced. This format presupposes that, whomever took the book to hand to learn the cursive script, had an advanced level of literacy. That they would also know how to write can be gleaned from the fact that Arrighi does not address practical issues such as what manner of pen to use, how to hold it in one’s hand, or how to angle it on the page. This is a fundamental aspect of many early modern publications in the genre commonly referred to today as how-to-books or, more generally, instruction manuals. Few, if any, actually taught the fundamentals of their discipline. The prospective reader would have already learned those elsewhere. The books, instead, focused on particular aspects of a trade and offered variation, refinement, or specialization. Writing books, generally, did not teach how to write, but offered a plethora of calligraphic script variations. As such, following his introduction, Arrighi immediately begins to explain the different lines and shapes from which the individual minuscules and majuscules of his cursive script are composed, then touches on their height and spacing, before offering various “exercises to


steady the hand” (“exempli per firmar la mano”) and internalize the script. The ultimate aim, of course, is for the student to become the master, and to be able to freely compose any given text in *littera cancellaresca*.

A very similar method, though applied to a different discipline, is described by Giovanni Antonio Tagliente in the instructions he included for the readership of his textile pattern book *Esempio di raccammi* (Venice 1527). On what Tagliente described as his ‘prima tavola,’ he starts to explain how to design *groppi* (motifs and patterns in knotwork). The page combines a composite image (fig. 1) with a short description on how to build complex knotwork motifs from smaller elements: “…chiunque vuol imparar a cucir, racammar over disegnar, debba prima imparar li disegni facili, & poscia quelli non facili, et così procedendo apprenderete col pocumento, che nel fine del opera discoperta mente vi amaestra.” In a more elaborate explanation that takes up six pages at the end of the book, Tagliente includes a general section on the fundamentals of design:

…chiunque vuol dar cominciamento all’ imparar di ciascuna honesta industria, & disciplina, come sarebbe a dire, uno vuol imparar leggere, imprima ha di mestieri dar principio a cognoscer la lettera A, & dopo la lettera B, & così dal principio per insin al fine…. Simelmente quelli che vogliono imparare a disegnare una figura intiera… gli fa bisogno imparare a disegnare uno occhio, una orecchia, una mano col braccio, un piede, una testa integra, & a poco, a poco tutte le membra del corpo humano, le quali sapendo ben disegnare, potra etiamdio transportare, & lo corpo intero proportionatamente formare..

Tagliente’s description is recognized as one of the earliest reflections in print of the general use of the so-called ABC method or the ‘Alphabet of Drawing,’ which prescribed that artists would begin to learn how to draw by first focusing on the different parts of the human face, then other body parts, before ultimately being able to correctly portray full figures in any which way they pleased. As a result of the repeated practice, an artist would develop good judgment (giudizio) which, according to Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574), when afterwards expressed by the hands, was called *disegno*…. Fragmentary evidence suggests that this kind of training was already in place in certain fifteenth century workshops. A sheet from the now dispersed sketchbook attributed to Francesco di Simone Ferrucci (1437–1493) shows depictions of an eye, nose, and mouth accompanied by an inscription that encourages a certain Michele to repeat these motifs a thousand times. In the second half of the sixteenth century, the students at the Accademia di San Luca in Rome, and the Accademia degli Incamminati in Bologna followed this same regime, which ultimately inspired the creation of the specialized genre of drawing books that first emerged in the early seventeenth century. For his knotwork designs, Tagliente replaced the proverbial eye, nose, and mouth etc. with the various basic elements that make up a more intricate interlace motif. Elsewhere in the book, he took an analogous approach to the concept of creating a composition from individual figures by introducing four pages of single motifs of flowers, animals, and objects as a preamble for a spread containing a figurative scene of *Orpheus Playing to the Animals*. Another page shows how to successfully combine a figurative scene with a border of interlaced knotwork to create a uniform design that was both beautiful and could convey meaning through the depiction of an ancient fable (fig. 2). Yet, the *groppi* in the border could just as easily be replaced by a different kind of ornament (fig. 3). Or, as he addresses in his text, the knotwork ornament could be used for a variety of different purposes: “…potrete fabricare, & ordire ogni qualita de groppi in tal magistero per far frisi, tondi, quadri, & d’ong’altra sorte…” (fig. 4).
The analysis of the text and plates in Tagliente’s *Esempio di raccammi* and their didactic interrelationships shows that the function of the pattern book was more than simply to provide templates to copy. Like Arrighi’s *Operina*, it ultimately aimed to teach and stimulate its users to design motifs and compositions that could subsequently be used in different forms of needlework. In this context, Robert Brennan quoted from a 1545 comedic play, published by Gigio Artemio Giancarli (died before 1561), in which the character Stella boasts of her needlework skills. In addition to her technical command of every stitch, she also mentions that she designs her own grotesques, arabesques and Persian works, which could rival the designs of any painter. The association between pattern books and their role in the design process is further underlined in *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, written by Tommaso Garzoni (1549–1589) and published in Venice in 1585. In the description of the profession of the embroiderer he explained that the latter adorns his fabrics with a kind of disegno, applying a thousand fantasies which are taught by specialized books of the trade, of which he singled out those by Tagliente’s contemporary Alessandro Paganino (active 1511–1538). This specific citation is quite striking, since Garzoni published his work more than fifty years after the pattern books by Tagliente and Paganino were issued, suggesting that their resonance was felt well beyond the realm of the domestic ’amateur’ embroiderer, and remained significant for some time.

Voghterr’s *Kunstbüchlin*: “das die kunstler ermundert und ermanet werden”

Just over a decade after Tagliente’s *Esempio di raccammi*, Heinrich Vogtherr the Elder and Younger jointly published *Ein Frembds und wunderbars Kunstbüchlin allen Molern, Bildischnitzern, Goldischmaden, Steinmet-
zen, Schreinern, Platnern, Waffen unn Messerschmiden hochnutzlich zu gebrauchen* in 1538. As this descriptive title suggests, their publication was not aimed at practitioners of a specific discipline, but instead addressed artists of diverse professions. This makes the *Kunstbüchlin* both an extremely ambitious pattern book, and one that is difficult to categorize. Unlike Arrighi and Tagliente, it did not offer concrete instructions towards the refinement of a specific trade. Instead, according to its brief introduction, the booklet formed a response to the nationwide decline in the quality of the arts and the dwindling number of practicing artists and artisans, which were both heavily impacted by the Reformation. To remedy this problem and elevate the arts of the nation to a point where they would once again occupy a position of envy, father and son Vogtherr brought together a collection of exotic and difficult motifs (“frembden und schweresten stücken”), which consisted of male and female heads with exuberant headdresses, hands and feet engaged in various gestures and stances, *all antica* helmets, cuirasses (fig. 5), epaullets, vambrances, chausses, quivers, all manner of weaponry, shields for coats of arms, column capitals (fig. 6) and bases, and candelabra pilasters. The selection of subjects was inspired by the underlying presumption that many artists could not travel far beyond the cities in which they lived and worked to find new inspiration for their art, and was principally geared towards artworks of secular or mythological subject matter that would cater to buyers of the merchant and aristocratic classes. In this sense, Vogtherr’s booklet provided an alternative to the documentary drawings that artists such as Jan Gossaert (ca. 1478–1532) and Maarten van Heemskerk (1498–1574) made during their travels in Italy, or an album like the so-called Zichy Codex (fig. 7), whose pages were filled over a period of several decades from the late fifteenth century onwards by one or several Venetian draftsmen with countless motifs from antiquity,
The obvious main difference between Vogtherr’s *Kunstbüchlin* and these hand-drawn examples is the element of personal selection. Gossaert and Van Heemskerck recorded only those motifs and views that interested them most, or deemed useful for future work. The buyer of the *Kunstbüchlin*, instead, had to rely on Vogtherr’s judgement. However, the decision to buy Vogtherr’s commercially available prefabricated collection of motifs can also be understood as a personal choice, and it more than likely would have been supplemented by a variety of other such resources in the artist’s workshop. Shira Brisman briefly addressed the difference between the private and public use of such collections in the context of Vogtherr’s *Kunstbüchlin*, calling attention to the fact that he had opted to share *his* collection of images so freely with others, seemingly, with little hope of adequate remuneration given the lack of copyright. This was exactly the point of the book, however, and in this respect, it falls directly in line with the efforts of Arrighi and Tagliente. Like Arrighi, moreover, in publishing a book of this kind, Vogtherr sought to occupy a position of authority by professing himself capable of selecting (giudizio) and supplying other artists with examples to better their work. The inclusion of his son’s portrait on the frontispiece undoubtedly aimed to extend that same reputation to his son, despite the fact that the authorial voice of the remainder of the text is decidedly singular. In the exhibition catalogue *Punkt, Komma, Strich: Zeichenbücher in Europa, ca. 1525–1925*, Ulrich Pfisterer emphasized that in
subsequent centuries, self-promotion formed an important motivation for the publication of drawing books. Unsurprisingly, the same catalogue positions Vogtherr’s Kunstdibliuin as one of the most significant precursors of this genre.

While the Kunstdibliuin offered a collection of “parts for use,” as Brisman signalled, unlike Arrighi and Tagliente, the book did not offer direct instructions or suggestions regarding the “how to” of their use. The motifs certainly did not fit together as prefabricated puzzle pieces that could be assembled into a variety of ready-made figures and compositions. Yet, this is often the way in which the book is understood. Perhaps this is due to Vogtherr’s own claim that the dimwitted (“die blöde heupter”) would be greatly helped by using his book. Yet, to any self-respecting artist this statement ought to have functioned as an outright discouragement from taking the Kunstdibliuin to hand. Immediately after this duplicitous encouragement, therefore, Vogtherr directed his attention to a different demographic, which he identified as intelligent visual artists (“hoch verstendigen fisierlichen Künstler”), whom he hoped would be encouraged and urged (“ermundert und emanet”) by the content of the book to produce even greater and more subtle works of art (“noch vil höher und subtiler künsten… an tag zu bringen”). The use of the comparative form in this text passage implies that Vogtherr aimed to inspire his peers to think and strive beyond what was presented on the pages of his book. Not unlike the Greek proverb “from the claws a lion” as used by Vasari in his discussion of giudizio and disegno, Vogtherr’s motifs were meant to spur
the imagination by an artistic infilling of all the things that were not represented. This process could take many forms, either by engaging with an individual fragment or by considering the implications of several similar motifs. With regards to the former, Matteo Burioni has aptly described the effect conjured by the presentation of fragments as *Phantomschmerzen* (phantom pains). In this process, a single motif might be taken as the impetus to imagine an entire figure or composition around it. Alternatively, in leafing through the consecutive pages of neatly arranged motifs and considering the variations on offer, an artist might begin to conjure additional iterations of the same subject matter. In this sense, the *Kunstbüchlin* goes a step beyond the drawing book which, as Tobias Teutenberg has emphasized, was primarily meant to train manual dexterity, but not necessarily the ability to create. Instead, through its encouragement of interaction, it inspires a process that is closer to what Philipp Zitzlsperger describes as haptic thinking ("eine wissenschaftliche Methode der Weltaneignung mittels der denkenden Hand").

Ernst Gombrich addressed the psychological effect of fragmentation and sequencing several times in *The Sense of Order*. In an introductory paragraph dedicated to "Monotony and Variety," he raised awareness of the fact that our attention is grabbed by the introduction of vari- ances within sequences and patterns that we understand on a subliminal level. Elsewhere, he emphasized that such discontinuities in our patterns of expectation "may arouse us and give us a jolt"; an effect that is summed up in the ancient proverb *variatio delectat* (variety delights). A similar sentiment was echoed by Giovanni Andrea Vavassore (fl. 1518–1572) in his textile pattern book *Esemplario di Lavori* (Venice 1532). In the introduction, he encouraged his readership to try a pattern first in one type of stitch and then in another because “truly the variety of things is very amusing and pleasing to human nature....” In the artist’s mind, however, such visual disturbances could lead to more than delight alone. Gombrich went on to explain that the breaks in visual expectation patterns “may also cause us to fill in from our imagination”; a process that is inherently personal and informed by “instinct and training, inborn and acquired abilities”. Vogtherr’s grid-like arrangement of the pages with rows and columns of repetitive fragments simultaneously suggests the above-described effects of sequence and disruption. What is at first glance just a page with nine female heads (fig. 8), at closer inspection becomes an animated progression of options as the women change directions, expressions, and garb. Within each row of three, they appear to be interacting with one another, glancing at and sizing up their neighbour(s), while suspensefully awaiting their version of the Judgment of Paris, as they each hope to become the onlooking artist’s muse.

In the 1988 exhibition catalogue *Creative Copies*, Egbert Havercamp-Begemann and Carolyn Logan extensively discussed the artistic merits of this kind of interaction with models. In their introductory essay, they described the preliminary process of selecting models as “the meeting of kindred spirits,” inspired by the discovery of one artist of something they sought to achieve in the works of another. The subsequent interaction with this model then takes the form of a dialogue: “Once enticed to react, the artist wished to take up a challenge. He sought to transform his model by expressing his own preferences and goals.” This transformation constitutes the fundamental difference between what should be understood as a ‘copy’ and the concept of a ‘creative copy.’ This same distinction already formed a fundamental aspect of the artistic process as described in the treatise written by the artist Vincenzo Danti (1530–1576). In *Il primo libro del Trattato delle proporzioni*, he introduced the juxtaposition of the concepts of *ritrarre* (to depict or copy what you see) and *imitare* (to imitate the inherent nature of the model or to improve upon what is not yet perfect). The book formed the first
installment of what was to be a 15-part treatise, of which the last volume was meant to argue that “imitare” represented a continual pursuit for the artist only to be achieved by constant exercise (essercitio). The progressive hierarchy of Western art history is built on iconic, most often diachronic examples of this practice (Haverkamp-Begemann and Logan mention such instances as Michelangelo endowing Massaccio’s figures with motion and volume, or Rubens developing further the contorted and foreshortened figures of Michelangelo’s *Brazen Serpent*), but the same process took place in the microclimate of countless artists’ workshops on a day-to-day basis as the stakes were raised with each new variation to a design. Seen in this light, Vogtherr’s *Kunstbüchlin* can ultimately be understood as a nationwide call to engage in aemulatio.

**Sheets of Leaves and Goblets: “una invenzione copiosa di tutte le cose”**

At the time of its publication, Vogtherr’s *Kunstbüchlin* was one of relatively few series of prints created specifically to serve as a source of artistic inspiration that were produced in woodcut and sold in book form. This choice of medium was determined by the means he had at his direct disposal as a lifelong book illustrator and publisher. In its ambitions and generative qualities, however, it should be placed in a larger tradition of graphic works that dates back to the middle of the previous century. The production of intaglio prints containing non-narrative subject matter that catered to artists working across various disciplines grew incrementally from the middle of the fifteenth century onward. Among the earliest manifestations of such ornament prints are engravings containing designs for leaves and other vegetal elements. Within this group, two general types can be distinguished. The first consists of prints that depict a single motif in the form of a leaf or branch. The second category contains by prints with so-called all-over patterns in which a network of sinuous leaves and branches fills the majority of the picture plane, often interspersed by a cast of playful figures, animals, fruits and flowers. Even when only focusing on the first category, it is quite astounding to note the number of iterations of such designs within the oeuvres of early printmakers such as the Master ES (fl. ca. 1450–1467), the Master BxG (fl. ca. 1470–1490), and Martin Schongauer (ca. 1445/50–1491). Their sheer number led James Wehn to draw a comparison between these prints and physical gardens: “Each work involving ornate vegetation was, in a sense, a different garden, cultivated following a basic formula within which artists might generate an infinite number of similar yet varied compositions.” Little is known about whether these prints might have been sold together, or might even have been created as a cohesive series, but the frequency with which such prints containing (sometimes minute) variations of leaf motifs were produced attests to a high demand for such subjects by an audience with an appreciation for the inventive (if minute) distinctions the engravers introduced. Later, in the sixteenth century, the exact same phenomenon can be noted in the endless variations of small prints with candelabra grotesques created by artists such as Heinrich Aldegrever (1501/1502–1555/61), the brothers Sebald (1500–1550) and Bartel Beham (1502–1540), and various other of their contemporaries. Evidence that such prints were indeed acquired in multiples can be found in the inventory of the (now lost or dispersed) print collection of Ferdinand Columbus (1488–1539) in Seville, in which foliate designs form a distinct category. Due to the close semblance of these prints, and the lack of identification of makers in the entries, it is impossible to ascertain with certainty which specific prints he owned, but from the descriptions it is clear that he collected sheets with both single motifs, and all-over patterns. That con-
temporary owners indeed placed such designs in conversation with one another can further be observed in the late-fifteenth-century lodge book of Wolfgang Rixner (ca. 1445–1515) who pasted two separate prints showing single thistle leaf motifs together on the same page. Acknowledging the value of such pairings, towards the end of the fifteenth century, the entrepreneurial goldsmith-printmaker Israel von Meckenem (ca. 1445–1503) began to produce prints in which two separate foliate designs taken from the single sheet prints of Martin Schongauer were presented together on one sheet (fig. 9). In a conservative reading of ornament prints as so-called Vorlageblätter (templates), in these prints Von Meckenem offered his clients two models from which to choose. However, when taking into account the generative effect of sequencing, as described above, the two models might inspire any number of variations, or various kinds of applications within larger compositions. An early example of this practice survives in the so-called Laubhauermusterbuch of the master mason Hans Böblinger the Elder (1410/1412–1482), which dates to 1435. The manuscript consists of 20 pages, each showing one or multiple variations of late-Gothic leaf motifs and their application in larger architectural elements, such as capitals and/or pediments. Such applications were not prescribed by the ornament print, but would be conjured in the mind of the professional artist by applying to it a personal and trade-specific body of knowledge acquired through training, study, and workshop practice. In her discussion of early ‘object engravings’ Alison Stielau bemoaned the absence of inscriptions that could clarify the use of these prints. For contrast, she referred to an engraving of a lidded cup made in 1530 by Sebald Beham. He added the inscription: “Hi oben magst auch ein fuus machen,” which indicated that the lid could be replaced by a foot to create a double cup (fig. 10). The inscription, however, counts as somewhat of an anomaly among Beham’s prints. It is very likely that this was the first engraving he created for the small series of goblets, which was meant to function as a title plate avant la lettre. Rather than provid-
ing exacting instructions for this particular cup, the inscription introduced the notion of variation, effectively serving as a user guide on how to interact with the other designs he presented in his series. In a similar vein, he added the word “AUF” on the same print to indicate where the separation between the body and lid of the vessel was located. In the other wordless prints, a simple line then sufficed.

The lack of prescription in other prints by no means rendered them useless to the early-modern artist. Instead, it gave them carte blanche to interpret and adapt the model(s) in any way he or she saw fit. At the beginning of the seventeenth
In the sixteenth century, the German artist Christoph Jamnitzer (1563–1618) alluded to this aspect on the title pages of his print series with phrases like “Wems nicht geliebet, der laß es stehn” and “Nem jeder drauß was ihm geliebet.” This kind of license in what to ‘take’ and what to ‘leave’ emphasizes that even within a single image, multiple design ideas could be contained. In this light, Norbert Gramaccini’s assessment that Israel von Meckenem’s print of an elaborate foliate design spelling his name was purely self-indulgent and therefore useless to the practice of other artists, is fundamentally wrong. Rather than presenting a fixed design, the sheet propagates an idea that could be admired for its intrinsic ingenuity, but could also be altered to serve a variety of uses.

Self-indulgence, or rather self-expression, does play an important role in the ever-increasing number of ornament prints and print series that would be produced over the course of the sixteenth century. They quickly became a potent vehicle to showcase designs before or fully aside from the moment of making, with a potential audience that far outnumbered the aggregate of people that would ever see a drawing or a commissioned work of art by the same artist. This motivation persuaded Arrighi to publish his Operina, and encouraged artists of varying backgrounds to hone their skills in engraving and etching or to collaborate with professional printmakers to make their designs available to others. In this respect, they were equal to, or arguably even more powerful than drawings in their function as material manifestations of an original idea. The numerous vessel designs, published in print by the multitalented artist Albrecht Altdorfer (1480–1538) somewhere between ca. 1515 and 1525, show the fecundity of the medium. He created over twenty etchings, most containing the design for a single vessel, presented against a dark ground. At first glance, many of these lidded goblets and double drinking cups seem virtually interchangeable (figs. 11, 12). However, when viewed sequentially, Altdorfer’s etchings demonstrate a highly sophisticated approach to modular design and a detailed attention to the morphology of forms. From one object to the next, there are subtle shifts in the silhouettes and proportions of the vessels, and the distinctive vocabulary of decorative elements is applied and re-applied in different configurations. The length of stems is stretched or condensed, cups can be tall or wide, and surface decorations vary from curved to ribbed gadroons, and from three-dimensional acanthus leaves to convex flutes. The morphological possibilities seem endless, and in this respect, they echo a note left by Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) on a drawing of six goblets: “Morgen will ich ir mehr Machen.” However, between the act of drawing six goblets on a sheet of paper and the process of etching multiple plates and harvesting their impressions, there is a decided difference in the time invested. The cumulative, systematic effort of Altdorfer’s etchings attests to his commitment to making the concept of variation legible in a visual language that is as sophisticated and eloquent as Arrighi’s and Tagliente’s written instructions. Altdorfer’s variety and visual rigor thus make inscriptions like the one Beham added to his lidded cup fully redundant.

Recognizing the value of Altdorfer’s efforts, several years later Hieronymus Hopfer (fl. 1528–1563) synthesized the elaborately crafted etchings into single sheets containing neatly organized rows of ideas that would not be out of place in Vogtherr’s Kunstbüchlin (fig. 13). Hopfer’s reorganization of Altdorfer’s designs resonates strongly with the growing Renaissance interest in collecting and organizing images (either drawings or prints) in categories. This phenomenon has been studied quite extensively in the context of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century artistic and scholarly interest in the remnants of Classical Antiquity, but can also be observed with regards to modern sources of design inspiration. The previously mentioned Zichy Codex in Budapest, for example, bears witness to both practices.
In addition to the hundreds of drawings reproducing (details of) Roman reliefs, sculpture and architecture and modern interpretations thereof, the album contains an unprecedented number of moresque and interlace motifs that, based on the extraneous material now kept in the Museum of Fine Arts, must have related closely to the working practice of at least one of the album’s late fifteenth- or sixteenth-century Venetian owners (fig. 14). The neat organization of alike motifs within the album is particularly striking and suggests an almost encyclopedic approach to the collecting of design variants taken from different sources. This approach is echoed in several of the print albums compiled for the Kunstкамmer of Archduke Ferdinand II of Tyrol at Innsbruck. There, not only are the pages filled with prints of similar subject matter, but entire albums are dedicated to thematic groups of imagery, identified by such inscriptions on the covers and/or spines as “Allerlaj Goldschmidt Sachen” (KK6625) or “Architectura / Gepew Sachen” (KK5337). Another album (KK6633), wholly dedicated to gold- and silversmith’s vessels by Matthias Zundt (ca. 1498–1572), Virgil Solis (1514–1562), Balthasar van den Bos (1518–1580) and Erasmus Hornick (1524–1583), demonstrates an active practice of comparison between individual designs and the work of distinct designers. The compilation of such thematic collections was greatly facilitated by innovations in the ever-expanding world of print publishing. This pertains,
in particular, to the introduction of a new format that brought the worlds of intaglio printmaking and book production closer together. Peter Fuhring has emphasized the entrepreneurial role played by the Antwerp publisher Hieronymus Cock (1517/1518–1570) in the commissioning and publishing of bound series of prints of specific subject matter in a standardized format introduced by a comprehensive title or title page. Such bound collections of prints were referred to with terms like “boexcken” or “livre,” which, as Fuhring rightly underlined, evoke a practice of reading or browsing. He stated: “Close reading of a print enables the user to discover visual details, while browsing entails the absorption and comparison of a variety of subjects... sequential viewing of similar design ideas stimulates the imagination of viewers looking for ideas or elements to incorporate in their own designs.”

As referenced above, the same type of use was suggested by Tomasso Garzoni in 1588 when he wrote that the art of the embroider included “mille fantasie, che insegnano i libri appropriati a questo mestiero.” In a similar vein, Fuhring referred to the Dutch artist Willem Goeree (1635–1711), who wrote in his architecture book D’Algemeene Bouwkunde of 1681: “There are many splendid examples and models of chimneys published as prints, which afford sufficient occasion to all with a critical opinion to newly invent a thousand other ones.”

Both Garzoni and Goeree used the number one thousand to emphasize the endless variables an artist of good judgment could discern within,
or extract from a finite number of examples. It is exactly this quality, to be able to introduce variety, that Vasari singles out as one of the main distinguishing features between the artists of the second and third generation of Italian art. Writing about the second generation, he explained:

Mancandoci ancora nella regola, una licenzia, che non essendo di regola, fosse ordinata nella regola e potesse stare senza fare confusione o guastare l’ordine, il quale aveva bisogno d’una invenzione copiosa di tutte le cose e d’una certa bellezza continua in ogni minima cosa, che mostrasse tutto quell’ordine con più ornamento…. Vi mancavano ancora la copia de’ belli abiti, la varietà di tante bizzarrie, la vaghezza de’ colori, la universalità ne’ casiamenti, e lontananza e la varietà ne’ paesi.66

Broadly translated, Vasari pointed out that this generation of artists lacked the ability to introduce within the rules of art a freedom of invention and embellishment that touched and improved every detail of their designs. In his brief characterization of Raphael (1483–1520) in the Proemio to the third book, he reveals that this ability was the product of extensive study and the ‘collecting’ of models of all kinds: “Ma più di tutti il graziosissimo Raffaello da Urbino, il quale studiando le fatiche de’ maestri vecchi e quelle de’ moderni, prese da tutti il meglio, e fattone raccolta….” Raphael’s collecting practice instilled within him an ease of design (“l’invenzione era in lui si facile”) and informed his ability to outpaint Zeuxis and Apelles.67 The main argument presented in this essay is that the printed design resources of the Renaissance, whether pattern books or ornament prints, functioned in exactly the same manner. They offered models that informed the practice of artists, but by no means functioned in a prescriptive manner. Rather than simply presenting “dimmitted” artists (Vogtherr’s “blöde heupter”) with models to copy as an easy way out, they relied on the creative intelligence of artists to generate new designs through a process that more closely resembled factorial multiplication than the addition of single digits. In this sense, the examples discussed in this text have more in common with the foundations of giudizio and disegno as formulated in early modern Italian treatises on art than is generally acknowledged. Goeree’s remark on chimney designs underlines that pattern books and ornament prints embodied both the expression of, and commitment to the dissemination of these principles. They were understood to do so for many centuries, until the moment when they themselves became the subject of antiquarian pursuits and were used to ‘demonstrate’ and adhere to a rule, rather than seeking out the license that could be found by reading between the lines. These were the exact considerations that led Owen Jones (1809–1874) to create his famous 1856 Grammar of Ornament (fig. 15) amid the turmoil of historicism with which this essay began: “I have ventured to hope that, in thus bringing into juxtaposition the many forms of beauty which every style of ornament presents, I might aid in arresting that unfortunate tendency of our time to be content with copying…. If the student will but endeavor to search out the thoughts which have been expressed in so many different languages, he may assuredly hope to find an ever-gushing fountain in place of a half-filled stagnant reservoir.”68

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As a matter of course, pattern books are generally included in such publications. 


The page occupies a different place in the copy of this textile pattern book held at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (acc. no. 35.753.1–55). This could be the result of a later rebinding of the booklet, or a reshuffling of the pages in a later edition of the publication, which is known in five or possibly six editions. The rarity of these publications prevents us from gaining a clear understanding about the ‘proper’ composition of many surviving textile pattern books. See Arthur Lotz, *Bibliographie der Modellbücher*, 2nd ed., Stuttgart 1963, 4, 5, 112–116, cat. no. 64a–c; William M. Ivins, Jr., Schoenperger’s Lace Book of 1524, in: *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 24, 1929, no. 8, 205–208, here 206.

Giovanni Antonio Tagliente, *Esempio di raccammi*, 2nd ed., Venice 1530, page 31 (“…whoever wants to learn how to sew, embroider or draw/design, must first learn the easy designs, and then ones that are not so easy, and continuing in this manner you will learn bit by bit that by the end of this work you will master them all.” Free translation by the author.

Ibid., page 266v–271: “…whoever wants to begin to learn in any industry or discipline, for example, one wants to learn how to read, first has to learn the letter A, and then the letter B, and so on from beginning until the end…. Similarly, those who want to learn how to draw/design an entire figure… need to learn how to draw an eye, an ear, a hand with an arm, a foot, an entire head, and little by little all the members of the human body, which once you know how to draw them well, you can transport them, and give proper shape to an entire body.” Translation by the author.

In an unpublished treatise composed over several decades (Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence) Alessandro Allori (1535–1607) stated that “judgement beyond the rules” (“giudizio fuori delle regole”) can only be achieved by the most excellent artists through “long practice and observance” (“lunga practica”). See Matthijs Jonker, The Academization of Art: A Practice Approach to the Early Histories of the Accademia del Disegno and the Accademia di San Luca, Rome 2022, 114–115.

Ibid., 106–107.

Formerly known as the Verrocchio Sketchbook; now London, British Museum, 1875,0612.16. For a discussion of the sheet in relation to drawing education, see Nanobashvili 2018 (as in note 15), 36, 38.


“…with this method you can make and arrange any kind of kind of knotwork to create friezes, tondos, rectangular frames, and any other kind.…” Translation by the author; quoted from Tagliente 1530 (as in note 14), 277–v.


Brennan 2023 (as in note 15), 21–22. The ambition to compete with or outperform painters became a topos in the genre of textile pattern books. For example, in a poem in his Giardineto novo di 1554, the publisher Matteo Pagano (1515–1588) described needle work as “dipingendo con l’ago, come Apelle.” Matteo Pagano, Alle Belle et Virtudiose Donne, in: Giardineto novo di Punti Tagliati et Gropposi, Venice 1554, n.p.


Vogtherr 1538 (as in note 24), Aiiv.

Ibid.


The content of the Zichy Codex is now divided between the collections of the Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library, Budapest (special collections, without a shelf mark) and the drawings and print collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest (69 drawings and 27 prints, acc. nos. 1915: 1–96). An English description of the album, which includes some notes on its previous owners, was written by Alice Horváth of the Institute of History and Theory of Architecture of the Technical University of Budapest in 1985 and is available online at URL: https://pp.bme.hu/ar/article/download/2302/1407 (last accessed 20 November 2023).


Heilmann 2014 (as in note 28), 193.


Brisman 2018 (as in note 30), 139.

Vogtherr 1538 (as in note 24), Aiiv.

Ibid.

Jonker 2022 (as in note 16), 106–107.

Burioni 2014 (as in note 32), 85–87.


Zitzlsperger 2021 (as in note 2), 138. See also ibid., 142.


DOI: https://doi.org/10.1086/691600 (last accessed 5 November 2023).
The term "Kunstbüchlein" itself found broad adaptation in the sixteenth century for publications (and handwritten books) of varying content related to the arts. Most often, these pertained to practical aspects of art making and science, such as Christian Egenolf's Kunstbüchlin, gerechten gründlichen Gebrauchs aller kunstbaren Werckleut, Frankfurt 1535, and Sebald Beham's Kunst und Lere Büchlin, Frankfurt 1552, which was essentially an abbreviated and largely visual version of the lessons found in Albrecht Dürer's Underweysung der Messung, Nuremberg 1525. For a handwritten example, see Kunstbüchlein allerley Abformen und Gieß-Khühnsten (1575), Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Sammlung von Handschriften und alten Drucken, Cod. 11024. See also Jaap Bolten, Kunstbüchlein, in: Lexikon des gesamten Buchwesens Online, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1165/9789004337862__COM_111095 (last accessed 3 March 2023).

A few (near) contemporary examples are Francesco Pellegrino, La Fleur de la science de Pourtraicture, Paris 1530 (followed by copies by Cornelis Bos and Hiérosme de Gormont published in the 1540s in Antwerp and Paris respectively); Hans Brosamer, Ein new kunstbuchlein von mancherley schönen Trinckgeschichten, Nuremberg ca. 1538; and Hugues Sambin, Œuvre de la diversite des termes, Lyon 1572. While the survival rate is low, several sixteenth-century examples indicate that a tradition of single sheet woodcuts existed alongside such bound publications. See, for example, in Vogtherr's own oeuvre a sheet with two columns (Muller 1997 [as in note 24], 279, cat. no. 216). Several designs from Brosamer's Kunstbüchlein were also published separately in the form of a single sheet woodcut; see Max Geisberg, The German Single-Leaf Woodcut, 1500–1550, 4 vols., New York 1974, vol. 1, 397. Other examples are Hans Burgkmair's Nine Sword Pommels, printed by Jost de Negker in Augsburg (Vienna, Albertina, inv. no. DG1934/130), and various works by Albrecht Altdorfer, Peter Flötner, the Master HG, and the Master HS.


There is a particularly strong connection between prints with single leaf motifs and the profession of Laubhauer within the Gothic masons' lodges. Several of the prints produced by the Master ES relate closely to the motifs found in Böblinger's Laubhauer musterbuch (Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, inv. no. 3604). The relationship between the prints by the Master ES and Böblinger's Musterbuch was already pointed out by Wolfgang Boerner in his dissertation on the Master W with the Key. See Wolfgang Boerner, Der Meister W.A., Leipzig 1927, 38.


There is a strong link between the motifs found in Böblinger's Musterbuch with those found in the prints produced by the Master ES. Several of the prints produced by the Master ES were created with a similar audience in mind. See Zitzlsperger 2021 (as in note 2), 137.


Vogtherr's book and Hopfer's print were created around the same time and were undoubtedly produced with a similar audience in mind.


64 Garzoni 1588 (as in note 23), 490.

65 Willem Goeree, D’algemeene Bouwkunde, volgens d’antyke en hedendaagse Manier, Amsterdam 1681, 157, quoted after Fuhring 2013 (as in note 64), 40.


67 Ibid., 555.