

Collage as Design Technique

In an article published in 1996 the author wrote:

In a few cases, however, Colenbrander took a different approach to surface decoration, one that was highly unusual for this time in carpets and ceramics. Judging by the results, he was apparently inspired by cutouts of patterned paper.¹

A ceramic tile and two carpet designs were discussed as examples of this approach. Since the article's publication more evidence of it have come to light; this chapter is devoted to a closer examination of the topic.

One of the most traditional types of carpet designs consists of two elements: a central field and a border that surrounds it. Figure 47 shows an example of this type. It is a KDT design, and is attributed to Mechtildus Diederik Renssen. The design is roughly contemporaneous with Colenbrander's own designs.²

1. Richard Mills, "Motif and Variations: A Study of Dutch Art Nouveau Ceramic and Carpet Designs by T. A. C. Colenbrander," *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 4, no. 1 (Fall-Winter 1996-1997): 113.

2. This design is inventory number 10883 at the TextielMuseum, Tilburg.



Figure 47. 724 carpet design, TextielMuseum, Tilburg.

Both elements are clearly visible in this KDT design. The central field consists of a single circular motif that is placed at regular intervals on a light-colored field. The border is composed with a variety of motifs and consists of two parts. The first part, which forms the outer portion of the complete border, consists of two small motifs, in which five instances of a smaller



Figure 48. C. F. A. Voysey, *The Donnemara Donegal* design, Vigo Galleries.

motif alternate with one instance of a slightly larger motif. The second part, which comprises the inner portion of the complete border, consists of larger and more complexly composed motifs. Its innermost portion in turn defines the border of the central field. Due to the fact that the central field is sparsely populated with the circular motif, the differentiation between the border and the central field is quite apparent.

Arts and Crafts carpets were produced in England at the same time Colenbrander was designing carpets in the Netherlands, and many of Arts and Crafts carpets also consist of borders and central fields. One example is C. F. A. Voysey's *The Donnemara* carpet, shown in Figure 48.³ But in contrast to the KDT example, the motifs in the central field in this case extend to its borders. In *The Donnemara*, the borders enclosing the central field consist of several rectangular bands and lines, the widest band being filled with vegetal motifs. The central field consists of flower and vegetal motifs that are mirrored across the central axis of the field along its length. The motifs in the central field are not entirely contained within the rectangular border that defines the field's extent. The floral and vegetal motifs on all four sides of the central field are "cut off" by the border. The end effect, therefore, is that of a two-dimensional design (i.e., the central field) that has been placed inside a frame, with the design's borders serving as the frame. It should be noted that along the longer sides of the central field, the repeats of the floral and vegetal motifs intersect with the innermost portion of the border at the same relative places. That is to say, the border truncates the smaller red flower motif in the central field at the same relative position for all four instances of the motif. This is important because it indicates that Voysey intended for the central field motifs to be truncated at exactly the same positions throughout the extent of the carpet. This was also inevitable, because *The Donnemara's* central field is bilaterally symmetrical, and the axis of reflection is placed at the carpet's center. The same observation holds true for other examples of *The Donnemara* design, even though the widths of the central fields differ from the example shown in Figure 48.⁴

Some of Colenbrander's carpet designs are composed in the same way. In the central field of the untitled design shown in Figure 49, it connects to the outer border at precisely the same places along both the width and breadth of the field.⁵ The design demonstrates that Colenbrander used this type of composition in his designs.

Figure 50 shows another example of a conventional design in which the intersections of the border and the central field are always the same. It was designed by W. Kuit, one of Colenbrander's colleagues at the KDT.⁶

The central field of Kuit's design consists of two circular motifs that alternate with each other. Examination of the central field shows that along both the length and width of the design, portions of the first few rows of the circular motifs are "overlaid" with small motifs in brown that are the terminal points of the border enclosing the central field. In other words, the border acts as a frame placed over a two-dimensional pattern. And to an even larger extent than in Voysey's *The Donnemara* design, the border "frame" intersects the center field at the same positions relative to the central field's motifs.

These designs are examples of a traditional way of relating the border to the central field

3. Malcolm Haslam, *Arts and Crafts Carpets*, New York (Rizzoli), 1991: 123.

4. See Figures 58 and 77 in: Haslam, *Arts and Crafts Carpets*, 92-3 and 122.

5. The full design and further information about it can be found on page 147.

6. In 1906 Kuit won a silver medal in Milan for this design.