

Introduction

Over the past three decades Theodoor Christiaan Adriaan Colenbrander¹ has been the subject of four books, five exhibitions, and a number of scholarly articles and other publications.² As his artistic output consists primarily of designs for ceramics and carpets, the focus of the exhibitions and publications was on these two subjects.

Colenbrander's ceramics have received most of the attention paid to his oeuvre. In large part this is due to the sheer quantity of surviving designs and objects. He created hundreds of ceramic designs, and thousands of objects were produced by the various ceramic factories with which he was affiliated.

Colenbrander spent at least as much of his career designing carpets as he did ceramics, but he was not as prolific in this branch of work. While the entire extent of his work as a carpet designer will never be known, it must have been much smaller than his output as a ceramics designer. Some of his ceramic designs are little more than pencil sketches and must have been created quickly. In contrast, his carpet designs took significantly longer. Because Colenbrander laid out his carpet motifs with great care and meticulously painted every knot in his carpet designs, a single design could take many days or even weeks to finish. Fewer than one hundred of his carpet designs are documented, and many fewer of those still exist; an unknown number of designs were destroyed in Rotterdam's bombardment during World War II.

Most writings about Colenbrander's work as a carpet designer have documented the surviving designs, the history of his career, the factories at which he worked, and possible influences on his work. Less attention has been paid to the techniques he developed to aid in the creation of his designs. Two of this author's writings on Colenbrander have examined these techniques, and the present publication includes further analyses of them.

Almost all of the surviving original carpet designs have been documented. There is, however, little published information about the surviving carpets or the designs documented only in publications. These carpets, often in poor condition, are scattered among public and private collections and are largely inaccessible. The information about other designs and carpets, detailed only in contemporaneous publications, is difficult to obtain. As a result, some of his designs found on surviving carpets have gone unrecognized. This is demonstrated by the fact that a number of his carpets have appeared in galleries and auctions in recent years, but they were not recognized as such.

The present publication intends to remedy this deficiency by presenting detailed information about all surviving Colenbrander carpets as well as those designs and carpets that are documented but no longer exist. Whenever possible, surviving or documented carpets are illustrated; other carpets are described as fully as possible. A number of carpets that can be attributed to Colenbrander are also included.

The inventory of carpets is intended to be comprehensive, but undoubtedly there are omissions. The author would be grateful to receive information about other Colenbrander designs and carpets. (He can be contacted at info@colenbrandercarpets.com.)

All errors are solely the responsibility of the author. Corrections and further information from readers are welcome.

1. Although Colenbrander's first and middle names are in the order of T. C. A., during his lifetime he was usually referred to as T. A. C. Colenbrander. Since his death, this order has generally been retained, as it is in this book.

2. See the chapter "Colenbrander Resources" for details.