The seventeenth century saw a remarkable flourishing of printed designs, which served both to promote the designers’ work and disseminate tastes to various audiences. With the expansion and success of the Dutch economy in this period, buyers of art and luxury included newly rich traders and others involved in commerce. They sought means to announce their success and newly acquired status in the same way that the church, royalty, and the nobility had shown power and wealth: through lavish architecture, furniture, clothing, jewelry, and other items. The designs shown in this exhibition were used by artisans to build ornamental furniture, create fine jewelry, and add flourish to leather and other materials.

This focus exhibition features designs from two artists. Paul Vredeman de Vries was part of a family of designers; his 1630 catalogue included his own original designs and those of his father, Hans. Christian Engelbrecht’s engraved designs, after work by jeweler Friedrich Jacob Morisson, were used by artisans to make jewelry as well as to ornament woodwork, fabrics, armor, leather, or other materials.

Paul Vredeman de Vries’ father, Hans Vredeman de Vries, was one of the most influential designers of the period. He was also considered an architect and architectural themes influenced his designs. His son also created architectural paintings. The Museum has in its collection a painting by Peeter Neeffs the Elder, entitled Interior of a Gothic Church, inspired by such architectural themes as designed by de Vries.

It was during this period that jewelry design took advantage of new techniques in gemstone cutting that resulted in increasing a stone’s brilliance. These new types of cuts were circulated in books of designs, such as this one by Christian Engelbrecht. Friedrich Jacob Morisson was a popular jeweler who worked in Vienna at the end of the seventeenth century and whose engravings were widely circulated.

Linda Endersby
Museum Registrar