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**Interpretations of Scandinavian 17<sup>th</sup> century  
decorative metalwork**

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## **Abstract**

In this thesis I analyse and discuss a number of issues relevant for working with interpretations of 17<sup>th</sup> century Scandinavian decorative ironwork in relation to a historical building or site.

I describe the knowledge both craft wise and (art) historical one needs to possess in order to undertake such work. Furthermore I outline the current approach to such work within the field of restoration architecture and in addition to this I describe what could be the artistic challenge and possible work methods within this field. Finally I present my own physical interpretations to this by showing and analysing the grilles I have made as part my exam work.

## **Sammanfatning**

I denna rapport analyserar och diskuterar jag ett antal relevanta frågeställningar i relation till att arbeta med konstnärliga tolkningar av skandinaviskt dekorativt smide från 1600 talet i relation till historiska byggnaden eller platser.

Jag beskriver den kännedom inom båda smideshantverk, historia och konsthistoria som behövs för att arbeta med dessa frågor. Dessutom beskriver jag hur sådant arbete skulle kunna passa in inom restaurerings arkitektur i dag, definierar den konstnärliga utmaningen och beskriver muliga arbetsprocessor. Slutligen visar och beskriver jag mitt eget fysiska arbete inför detta examensarbete.

## **Background**

I have been drawing my entire life and initially thought I would become a painter or illustrator, however I discovered blacksmithing in the early 90ies and was hooked for life. I trained as an artist blacksmith in England 95-97 and set up my own business in the year 2000. There have always been two major interests for me in relation to my work: to understand the craft and refine my skills within it, and to express myself artistically within these parameters. These past 4 years at Stenebyskolan completing my BA and MA has been a fantastic journey, which has given me the courage to attempt to undertake the task I present in this thesis.

## **Aim**

With this paper I attempt to examine and analyze a possible work process for making an artistic contemporary<sup>1</sup> interpretation of decorative forged ironwork based on Scandinavian sources from the first part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. By exploring this venue, which to the best of my knowledge no blacksmiths or metal artists in Scandinavia at the present day focuses on, I hope to open up new possibilities not just for me, but also for a new generation of artist blacksmiths who wish to work seriously within the tradition. Furthermore I hope to put more emphasis on the blacksmithing tradition, and the possibilities presented by the craft today, to elevate the craft and reinvigorate its potential.

In order to do this I need to obtain an extensive knowledge of traditional<sup>2</sup> decorative ironwork and all aspects relating to this field. This implies a broad general historical base, a specialised knowledge of historical decorative ironwork, its history techniques, development, inspirations, architectural implications and so on, and for this specific work an in dept knowledge of Scandinavian decorative ironwork from the first 2/3 of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to this one need to be familiar with the antiquarian principles, dogmas and work-methods both past and present, and to understand the reasons and underlying concepts of these.

In this process I aim to develop a set of skills artistically, craft-wise, academic and historical that will enable me to work in dialogue with other professionals within the fields of building restoration in the Scandinavian countries, mainly architects but also historians, administrators or researchers in order to initiate a future professional network. In order to do this I need to become acquainted with the current debates and currents especially within the practice of restoration architecture, but also current architectural philosophies, and to develop a vocabulary and knowledge of academic language concerning this field in Danish, Swedish and English.

## **Goal**

My main goal is to create a set of artistic/design tools to work with in relation to interpretations of traditional decorative forged ironwork of the first part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but which should be generally applicable in the work with any period providing one has the in depth historical knowledge. Furthermore I want to develop a process within which I can put up some guidelines for myself in the artistic work. And on the basis of these to create a series of physical pieces of personal interpretations of historical forged decorative ironwork to use as examples for my arguments and for promotional purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> By contemporary I mean modern, made in the present day

<sup>2</sup> By traditional I mean basically all metalwork made before the dying out of the craft by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.)



## **Problem formulation**

Is it possible within the current practice of restoration of historical buildings and sites to introduce contemporary interpretations of decorative metalwork? Is anyone else doing it? And if yes, can I learn anything from them?

How can I define the artistic challenge within the described areas? And how do I create a balance between my artistic ego and the integrity of the given historic building/site?

How do I develop a set of methods for working as an artist within a historical reference frame and setting?

## **General current attitude to historical decorative ironwork in Scandinavia**

Sweden has been a major producer of iron from the middle ages, and this intensifies during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and partly finances Sweden's participation in the 30 years war, and following wars on the continent, and even if Denmark has iron manufacturing in Norway during at least the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, it was no way near the production overturn that Sweden managed.<sup>3</sup>

To this day the availability and knowledge of iron, and the presence of an ironworking industry reflects a clear difference in the common knowledge of and interest in decorative blacksmithing in Denmark and Sweden, Where the craft of blacksmithing, both industrial and artistic, almost completely died out during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Denmark, and I think it is fair to say that it has not really had a renaissance as most of the rest Europe has, It has at least to a certain extent survived both within the industry and as a decorative craft in Sweden. Today in Sweden there is a growing interest for the craft and its products, and even several educations in traditional blacksmithing techniques and design.

Newer the less one could say that within the present day restoration architecture practice, architectural practice, art historical practice and even general public the attitude towards both historical and contemporary decorative ironwork is to a large extent one of ignorance and indifference. Very little literature on the topic is available, and the discussion of this within the professional trades or academic

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<sup>3</sup> Hellner, Brynolf (1948) *Järnsmidet I vasatidens dekorative konst*. Stockholm: Nordiska museets Handlingar:30. Englund, Peter (1992) *Ofredsår*. Stockholm: Atlantis. Englund, Peter(2000) *Den oövevinnelige*. Stockholm:Atlantis.Byggforskningsrådet (1998) *Järn, stål och smide I hus och miljö*. Stockholm:Byggforskningsrådet.

professions is non-existing, for instance the recognised and extensive publication on historical decorative art and architecture "Signums svenska konsthistoria" which has a thorough description of practically all other crafts and decorative arts in all historical eras does not once mention Decorative wrought ironwork. I am unaware of the reason for this, one could speculate that there is a connection between the philosophies concerning Scandinavian design and its minimalist, modernist approach and the devaluation of decorative art in general, but this still does not explain the particularly severe negligence of decorative ironwork.

The apparent ignorance and indifference within the trades and professions that could be interested in this topic of course leads a minimum of development within the field of contemporary artistic decorative blacksmithing, and restoration of existing decorative ironwork within Scandinavia, which again is reflected in an absence of truly professional and capable craft persons. This in effect is a vicious circle, and the physical outcome of it is that more often than not situations where decorative ironwork in relation to historical buildings could have been restored, reproduced, or even an qualified interpretation could have been made, or in relation to new buildings where contemporary artistic decorative ironwork could have been applied, it is either completely left out or the applied metalwork is made by a form follows function, principal. Often this sort of metalwork completely lack decoration and consists of two horizontal bars with upright bars welded in between.

Something else that one has to be aware of is the current predominant approach, or resistance even, towards decoration or decorative art in the Scandinavian countries today, especially within the cultural elite. The spirit of modernism, international style and functionalism still lingers, and to a certain extent I find that decoration is still considered inferior taste. I will not engage in a debate of why and how this is here, only acknowledge that it can be problematic in relation to this project.

In relation to what I am trying to do this is important to be aware of, as what I offer will always be considered "decorative" in comparison to the minimalist solutions utilised within the restoration practice during the modernist era. Bearing this in mind, it is even more crucial to be able to have an extensive knowledge of the traditional decorative idiom in order to relate and contextualise it to my work.

## **Current restoration practice and debate, and how it would be possible to work within it**

In its Book: Fem pelare, en vägledning för god byggnadsvård. (2002) Riksantikvarieämbetet gives a very thorough introduction into what they consider the current practice of restoration and conservation of historical buildings. The 5 pillars referred to in the title are the ones that defines all good "byggnadsvård" or building care, and can be summarised like this:

Pillar no. 1 is knowledge about the underlying processes and cultural implications of the work-process and of how to investigate describe and motivate proposed restoration/conservation.

No. 2 is caution. To always make sure in any dealing with the building that what characterize and defines it is preserved.

No. 3 is administer. To employ care, knowledge and long-term perspective in all use and maintenance of any building.

No. 4 is to relate to history, and the importance of striving for authenticity within the building and surrounding environment in all dealings concerning he building.

No. 5 is an in dept knowledge of material and techniques and their use and tradition.

The book is meant as a guide, and as such it does not debate, but rather defines what I find could be considered the current, maybe slightly conservative, common denominator or consensus within the field. The guiding principle in this approach seems to be that every restoration is unique and that it's specific conditions must decide the methods implemented in the restoration as long as it is carried out in respect of the above-mentioned guidelines.

Reading Frederic Bedoire's book "Restaureringskonstens Historia, 2013" it becomes clear however that there might is more of a debate, or at least multiple options, in Sweden today, at least he claims that the ideologies have died, and that the post modernistic<sup>4</sup> influence is to be seen here as in the rest of Europe. This means a new way of thinking where the rules of the modernism and Charta Venezia<sup>5</sup> falls away to enable a new approach where narration and appearance is equally or even more important than the immediate recognition of and distinction between the original and the restored or added. In other words consensus of the conception of the responsibility of the care of the historical building has shifted from a more "modernist" conservation orientated approach to a more "post modern" approach where the use, historical development and future development is valued and integrated into the restoration process and not seen as undermining the historic validity.

As an example Fredric Bedoire, among others, mentions the restoration of the prison museum in Tavastehus, Finland, which is situated in the old prison buildings, by Sari Schulman, where the whole spectrum of methods from

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<sup>4</sup> Postmodern here is to be understood in a restoration sense as a progression of development after modernism, not in the architectural sense as a challenge of the modernist architecture.

<sup>5</sup> *The Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites* is a code of professional standards that gives an international framework for the preservation and restoration of ancient and historical buildings, monuments and sites. Created in Venice 1964 it has been a cornerstone within all dealings with historical buildings and sites ever since, and is still applicable as a minimum guideline today.

conservation, restoration over reproduction and implementation of both hidden and visible new parts is applied in order to lift the history of the building, take care of the new needs as a museum building and tie it all together as an overall whole with a strong architectural artistic presence.

This “post modernistic” influence within the restoration field, opens for a number of possibilities that were considered impossible only 20 years ago, Like complete rebuildings and reproductions using original techniques and crafts, as in the case of St Georges Hall at Windsor castle, or Eketorps fornborg on Öland. Hopefully it also widens the role of the decorative artist/craftsperson and opens for the possibility to start discussing how they could be included in defining the needs and possibilities within a specific restoration site, and how these could be implemented. Maybe here are new possibilities for the qualified artist/craftsperson to offer his or hers specialised knowledge and thus contribute to an even more vibrant and complex overall impression, while at the same time connecting the past and present via craft, knowledge of techniques and decorative art history.

From the discussions and talks I have had with people from Realdania byg<sup>6</sup>, co-workers in Kulturstyrelsen<sup>7</sup> and HOS architects in Stockholm<sup>8</sup> it is evident to me that there is a big interest for new solutions and that most architects are, or are becoming, fascinated with the crafts again. Birthe Skov at Kulturstyrelsen told me that she had been one of the driving forces in making a contemporary interpretation of a stucco ceiling in Odd Fellow Palæet, a prominent Rococo mansion in Copenhagen, after the old ceiling had been destroyed in a fire, which to me indicates that there has been a change in practice, and that working with artistic interpretations in relation to historical buildings is not impossible and could even be a valuable and effective implementation.

In order to work within this field I find it crucial as an artist and artisan to realize that when working with a historical site one will always add and contribute to this site and thus be part of its transformation and dynamic development. However I find that this should not be done carelessly or from a wish to solely promote ones individual artistic expression but with respect for, and knowledge of the historically complex construction every historical building or site is. It is therefore paramount that one is not only a good craftsperson, but in addition to this someone who is thoroughly grounded in, and has obtained a substantial knowledge of the history of the craft in question, its preconditions, stylistic idioms, inspirations and architectural applications as well as the historic development and application of craft techniques, all resting firmly within the setting of an in-depth overall general knowledge of the historical period, its ideas

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<sup>6</sup> Realdania byg is a major architectural company in Denmark, working both with restoration and new architecture

<sup>7</sup> Kulturstyrelsen is the Danish governmental board for culture, which is also in charge of all listed buildings in Denmark

<sup>8</sup> HOS architects are, among other things, in charge of Stockholm and Gripsholm Castles.

of aesthetics and beauty, the major artistic, social and philosophical movements of the given time period. Furthermore One will have to take into consideration a great number of aspects like: the buildings history, its original style, its possible rebuilding's/ restorations, its current use, its relation to the public/private sphere, its situation within the city/landscape etc.

Having established this I do however find that within the mentioned framework there is a possibility or even obligation to challenge or contribute to the building artistically, educationally, aesthetically or even provocatively.

## **Working with historical Metalwork**

In order to work within the European tradition of decorative forged ironwork, which goes back at least a 1000 years, one needs to have an extensive knowledge of this tradition. Not only does one need an in dept knowledge of the craft tradition and the development and travel routes of stylistic idioms, of the later categorization of these in to periods and of all the special little features that defines regional and cultural differences, one does also need to have at least some kind of general knowledge of European history, of politics, wars, migrations, religions and cultural exchange.

This is of course an immense and overwhelming task, which would easily take a lifetime to explore. I have therefore chosen to focus on the period 1550-1670, which is the beginning of the roughly 3 and a half centuries where decorative metalwork had its biggest exposure and implementation ever. Furthermore I have chosen to work with the Geographic area in which I will be physically working; Scandinavia, (primarily Denmark and Sweden) and the country from which almost all our artistic influence and decorative references came during this period, namely the areas we know as Germany today, but what would then be a multitude of German speaking states in central Europe.

Something I have come to realize when researching for this work is the importance of pattern books and ornament prints. These were made by a number of artists throughout Europe from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century and onwards, and were collections of etchings defining the present high fashion styles as well as the artists personal preferences. The pattern books were made primarily for masters in the various crafts as references and models for their three dimensional work and their influence is obvious in all ornamental work throughout Europe, and among the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century blacksmiths their work I clearly influential. At the same time they were also very popular among collectors, for their artistic values. Some artists even developed a style that became an art form in it self and was clearly not meant for reproduction in other materials. The complexity and inventiveness intensifies through the centuries, and by the 18<sup>th</sup> century they are not just patterns or decoration details, objects, or furniture but even whole rooms and interiors. The Design elements within these books all originally sprung from classical Greek and Roman sources and even though there is a development through the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century the core elements to a large extent remain the same. The design elements used by the blacksmiths can be

roughly categorized into 3 origins that however are mixed freely by the blacksmiths, which I will elaborate on further down. According to Thorbjörn Fulton<sup>9</sup> the present day craftsmen and decorative artists working from the pattern books did not just copy from one book, they used the books in their position as a “database” from which they mixed various elements according to personal taste, or the taste of the costumer. This is very obvious when studying the decorative work of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Blacksmiths.

Another very important issue when working with the tradition as I intent to do here is to recognize and understand the historical conjunctures within the stylistic idioms, and the interpretation and implementation of the stylistic idioms by the artisans then. For instance the acanthus detail that I have worked with in some of my sketches (Ill. No. 22) is widely used as an ornamental element by Heinrich Aldegrever<sup>10</sup> (Ill. No. 1) as early as the second quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and developed further by Lucas Killian in many of his grotesque etchings from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, (Ill. No. 3) but very rarely implemented into the decorative metalwork of the time<sup>11</sup>, it hardly ever occur in decorative metalwork until after the stylistic change from renaissance to baroque in Scandinavia has happened, which again means that it is always seen in relation to square bar, a predominant feature of baroque work, and never in relation to the round bar of which practically all renaissance work is made. The reason for this could be that the technical development of the repoussé<sup>12</sup> technique has its epicentre in France and starts to evolve into am major stylistic design element during the last half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century probably as a result of advancements in the sheet iron production technique. As the focus of art and style shifts from the German countries to France in Scandinavia during last half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the French style decorative metalwork is introduced and with this also the detail described begins to occur in Scandinavian metalwork. Knowing this I could have chosen to make a piece of metalwork with this in-built near anachronism, which would then be historically problematic, but reference the work of the etchers and pattern book makers of the period I am working with. In the end I chose not to carry on with this, not because of this, but because I found the sketches I came up with very far from the stylistic idiom of Casper Fincke who’s work I wanted to connect to. So to work with historical craft one needs to be able to identify the specific forms that could only have occurred in a specific place at a specific historical conjunction of stylistic influence, technical ability and cultural taste. In

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<sup>9</sup> “ Ornamentiken” in Signums Svenska Konsthistoria, (Renässansens konst)

<sup>10</sup> Heinrich Aldegrever or Aldegraf (1502–1555 or 1561) was a German painter and engraver. He was one of the "Little Masters", the group of German artists making small Prints in the generation after Dürer.

<sup>11</sup> I have only been able to find one picture reference to this from the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>12</sup> In relation to decorative metalwork repoussé is a technique where pieces of thin sheet is hammered over stakes or on a plate of pitch, using a multitude of different chisels, to produce 3 dimensional shapes.

other words to understand why it looks like it does, where the craft persons found their inspiration, what the regional and individual differences were and how the technical development of the craft evolved and travelled.

An example of the interpretation and implementation of techniques which requires a craft background and experience to recognize and understand could be why the acanthus scrolls in the renaissance metalwork, unlike the etchings they derive from, always have offshoots and “stems” penetrating the spirals. Without these penetrating pieces the metalwork becomes unstable and loses its practical function at protective grilles, gates etc. So in effect what is a practical implementation becomes a stylistic trademark, a trademark that I have found so significant that I have made it the main design element in my first grille (ill. No 2, 6 and 18).

## **Developing methods for working with interpretations of historical decorative metalwork**

These methods I developed mainly while working with the sketches, and then subsequently analysing and describing what seemed to work, and made sense. In addition to the previous mentioned definitions I also found these issues essential:

That there is a clear craft reference, which for instance could be that there is a substantial body of forged elements within the design, as the forged elements to most people signal tradition, history and craft, which will aide the spectator to connect the piece with the tradition.

That there is a clear reference to the stylistic idiom of the historical period in question, in this case the German/northern renaissance.

That there is a clear contemporary feel to the piece, as opposed to if it was a reproduction, where one would strive to be so close as possible to the original.

In relation to the situation of the finished piece I also find it relevant to consider what the objectives of the specific piece of work are, for instance:

To be part of an illusion, that however contemporary made will bring the spectator back in time to a very specific time period.

To highlight certain elements of that specific historic setting in a way that underlines the existing architecture or ironwork.

Or to make a transitional piece that will guide the spectator from present times into the historic setting

I have categorized the different methods I then developed in my sketch process as follows, even if I try to describe them here as distinctly different, they can of course overlap to a certain extent, intentionally or unintentionally.

One method I have used is what could be called a sampling technique; using an exact drawing of a piece of original metalwork design, or parts of one I try to define small parts of the original piece that I find has an own artistic validity in the composition. I then frame these areas in the way I find expose the essence best, be it tension, harmony, flow of lines or meeting of lines. In other words I move the attention from the characteristics of the original piece to the characteristics of the sampled piece and build a new piece of metalwork with these. This is the method I have used in the finished piece no. 1 which is part of the acanthus spiral side of the window grill made by Caspar Fincke for the "kings" church window at Frederiksborg Castle (Ill. No. 16, 17 and 18)

Another method I have used is again to sample parts of existing metalwork, but down to very specific details for example a certain design element, a technique or an interesting meeting of parts. I then apply these parts or elements to another piece of characteristic metalwork design from the period, like part of a latticework or acanthus spiral, to build a new design with various sampled elements that are not necessarily from the same piece of original metalwork, or even maker, country or style. This method I have used for making the sketches (Ill. No. 22)

I have also used a method where I allow myself to use more overall original design elements, like the latticework, to create completely new forms, often distorted or broken, the sketches (Ill.No.23 and 24) are good examples of these.

And then I finally have used a method where I use design elements from the original designs, but interpret them completely free and try to incorporate some of my personal artistic preferences, for instance certain distinct techniques that I favour, my personal style of forging, my preference for weight, compactness or flow of line. (Ill. No. 28)

Working like this may sound rather undefined and random for instance when I describe how I use one element from one piece of existing metalwork and one from another and just put them together. However it is important here to point out that I do not do this randomly, every decision is carefully scrutinized using my knowledge of the traditional craft, its techniques and history, as well as my knowledge of the stylistic history and its development. As I describe in the chapter about working with historical metalwork there are a great number of historical conjunctures to take into account in every decision. And as I will elaborate on further on in the chapter about defining an artistic challenge my visual education allows me to understand and interpret the shapes and design elements I work with in relation to each other and the craft.

Obviously the methods described are very specific for this particular task, and refer to a very exact time and geographical location. Nevertheless I believe that by changing these parameters the methods could be applied to any period,



historical site and geographical location as long as the person doing it has the relevant insight into the work process.

## Historical overview

No matter how one defines the Renaissance in Italy, and subsequently the rest of Europe, the decades in the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> meant a change in the decorative styles spreading initially from Italy, but also adjusting and altering as they went along. In the terms of decorative metalwork in Italy the changing fashion meant a set back, as the new styles looked for inspiration in antiquity, and the Romans did not have any decorative ironwork to copy. However as the decorative ideas and idioms of the Renaissance spread to the countries north of the alps the stylistic idioms now presented by the etchers and pattern book makers was embraced by the blacksmiths and introduced into the already existing tradition of decorative ironwork, and maybe more importantly the architects and patrons did not follow the Italian fashion of neglecting decorative ironwork, on a contrary they encouraged it, thus initiating an increase of decorative forged ironwork from the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. For example the concept of the forged decorative gate or grill did not exist in Scandinavia<sup>13</sup> before 1550, here the decorative ironwork would have been restricted to hinges, locks and other smaller details.

From around 1550 decorative forged ironwork in the form of gates, railings and grilles spreads from the continent into Scandinavia. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries first Denmark and later Sweden experiences being major powers in northern Europe, and even if Scandinavia is not the epicentre of decorative art, it is following the fashion of the continent closely. This means that even if Scandinavia might not have the abundance of decorative ironwork found in, say, Germany, France or England, the royals and the nobility try their best to mimic the fashion of the continent also in regard to decorative ironwork<sup>14</sup>.

The actual design elements of the 17<sup>th</sup> century decorative wrought ironwork in Scandinavia are all what one could call Germanic or northern deviations of the Italian Renaissance. This specific style of wrought decorative ironwork, which functionally continues and develops on the existing gothic style, but in its decorative idioms and inspirations is completely new, and draws on the German

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<sup>13</sup> I need to point out that when I refer to Scandinavia I generally mean Denmark and Sweden, as my knowledge of decorative ironwork in Norway, Iceland and the Faroe islands is limited, and I try to keep my focus on the area in which I will hopefully be working i.e. (eastern) Denmark and (southern) Sweden.

<sup>14</sup> Hellner, Brynolf (1948) *Järnsmidet I vasatidens dekorative konst*. Stockholm: Nordiska museets Handlingar:30.

or Northern Renaissance. It is thought to first develop in and around Tirol<sup>15</sup> in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. From here it spreads to the rest of northern Europe mainly due to the fact that most of the German speaking countries in central Europe had very strong guilds of blacksmiths dating back to the middle ages. These had defined and clear rules for most things concerning the trade. One, which is interesting in this relation, is the apprentice duty to travel for 3 years and a day after they had finished their apprenticeship. In both Denmark and Sweden there are numerous accounts of local blacksmith masters having journeymen working with them. The journeymen would thus be the connection between the more stationary masters, and would bring along design ideas and pattern books as well as new tricks and techniques. In this way it is possible to see a distinct similarity of design elements in what is now Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Holland, Denmark (and Norway which was then Danish), Sweden (and Finland which was then Swedish) and to a certain extent Poland, Belgium and the Check Republic.

By the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which sees the end of the 30 years war, and the shift of focus as a major power within Europe both politically and culturally from German speaking countries to France, the artistic influence in Scandinavia also changes from late Renaissance or Mannerism in the fashion of German speaking countries and the Nederlands, to Baroque and France. This shift not only brings a change in the architectural fashion, but also in the architectural practice. Where in renaissance Scandinavia the architect would order grills, gates and railings with the master blacksmith, and let the blacksmith in charge of the design, he would now make drawings of the decorative ironwork design for the blacksmith to follow. This of course meant that from being an almost independent artist craftsman, the blacksmith became "just" a craftsman. Because of this the period between ca 1550 and ca 1660 in Scandinavia and the countries inspired by the German countries shows a much bigger variation within the given stylistic idioms, and the emerging of individual master blacksmiths with their own individual styles, Like Casper Fincke in Denmark or Jöran Möller in Stockholm, whereas the period after shows a much bigger uniformity, and a stylistic idiom much closer to the one in France.

## **Decoration elements**

In his books Brynolf Hellner defines 3 major design features that in conjunction with the more general stylistic idioms of the renaissance like for instance contrast or symmetry, mainly defines the German or Nordic renaissance decorative metalwork.

The Acanthus. (The spiral)

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<sup>15</sup> Hellner, Brynolf (1948) *Järnsmidet I vasatidens dekorative konst*. Stockholm: Nordiska museets Handlingar:30.

During the Italian Renaissance it was reintroduced and re-naturalised by Italian artists. In 16<sup>th</sup> century Germany the acanthus is mainly known from Durer and the Kleinmeisters, especially Heinrich Aldegrever (ill. No. 1 and 2). With these artists the floral ornament consists of long spiralling stalks with big 3 dimensional leaves. In the ironwork the leaves are often completely missing or have become flat and stylized, however the spiralling stalks remain and form one of the most potent design elements, well the one that could be said if any, to define decorative ironwork even today, and one, which has a tremendous variety and consistency throughout the whole period, namely the spiral and the scroll (Ill No. 7).

### The Grottesque.

From the Latin word “grotto” meaning small cave or hollow. The term is used to describe the frescos depicting half human and mythical beings and obscure faces amongst stylized design elements, like scrolls and leafs covered the walls of Emperor Nero’s unfinished palace complex Domus Aurea, which was rediscovered in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The frescos were copied and developed and quickly became a major design element of the growing renaissance style, not least due to Rafael using them to decorate the Vatican palace.

Via Rafael’s workshop, which had a many international apprentices<sup>16</sup>, the grotesque spread to the rest of Europe and especially through artists like Cornelis Bos (ill. No. 4) and Lucas Killian (Ill. No. 3)it became a staple part of the stylistic idiom of the Northern European renaissance. The grotesque was incorporated into the spiral patterns, in the beginning mainly as faces in profile, but later into full humanlike and mythical figures where legs, beards and hair would grow into scrollwork, or even into completely abstract zoomorphic forms (Ill. No.8).

### The latticework

Based on Leonardo da Vinci’s six knots (Ill. No. 5), which were widely distributed and copied by, amongst others, Durer, a widespread use of crossing bars going through punched holes in each other, and doing so in various angles became a staple feature of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century grills, gates and railings (Ill. No. 9).

The Moresque, which is otherwise a rather influential design element in other ornamental art at the time, and which should lend itself rather well to decorative

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<sup>16</sup> Hellner, Brynolf (1948) *Järnsmidet I vasatidens dekorative konst*. Stockholm: Nordiska museets Handlingar:30.

ironwork is for some reason largely inexistent in the decorative ironwork within this period. Also the scrollwork or scroll-frame and the strapwork which plays a significant role in architectural decoration in the 17<sup>th</sup> century is very hard to trace in the decorative ironwork, the scrollframe can be seen in some details, in particular in the works of Caspar Fincke, but it is never allowed to dominate or develop into its own ironwork style.

Other design elements worth mentioning are the almost extensive use of round bar in all ornamental work, and often set in a frame of flat bar lying down, as the frame of a painting. The square bar is used in the gothic period in south and central Europe, and re-emerges in the baroque style, but in the renaissance almost all decorative ironwork is done in round bar.

## **Defining an artistic challenge working with historical interpretations**

As a crafts person I have spend a very long time learning, refining and practicing my knowledge and skills within the given traditions of blacksmithing, always striving for perfection and understanding of the tradition. As such my visual and tactile education rests so firmly within the craft and its aesthetics that my personal artistic preferences and aesthetic choices are inevitably shaped by this. Therefore I do not see my artistic practice or myself solemnly as an individual development within a defined contemporary scene. I see myself as part of a tradition of artists and artisans from before the, to me, illogical distinction was made, or at least when being an artist was impossible without also being a craftsperson. I find the words of Peter Dormer applicable even if he writes about design and architecture: *The separation of craft from architecture and design is one of the phenomena of late-twentieth-century Western culture. The consequences of this split have been quite startling. It has led to the separation of 'having ideas' from 'making objects'. It has also led to the idea that there exists some sort of mental attribute known as 'creativity' that precedes or can be divorced from a knowledge of how to make things. This has led to design without craft.*

However I am also brought up and schooled within the modernist conception of art as a unique and individual personal expression. The idea of the artist as an individual creating artwork that is valued solely by the uniqueness of the individual expression is in many ways ingrained in my concept of art. I therefore also am used to work within an artistic practice where the search for new expressions and solutions is central, and where experimentation and challenging of the existing understanding or values is applied in order to come up with "new" artistic solutions. As such I find it very important to challenge the unwritten rules that exist within my craft in order for it to not stagnate and loose its interaction with the surrounding society and thus its justification. The material (steel) is the key element in my artistic research. Especially when hot forged and manipulated it reveals its amazing potential. The contrast between the hard,

rigid material most think of as steel, and the malleable, plastic, organic, full forms that emerge in the forging process, is a constant awe inspiring challenge and inspiration. My personal artistic interests spring from this fascination with the material, and is merged with a fascination of flow of lines and intensity within a context of mass, weight and composition. In most of my work I try to expose the plastic qualities within the material often in a way that breaks with the “defined” rules within the craft, and the traditional way of working with the material in as such as my work would be considered “wrong” or faulty by the traditionalists within the trade, Newer the less I often find that it is exactly these “flaws” that emphasize and underline the essence of the materials properties.

For me the merging of the craft and the artistic practise is therefore the key element, only in the meeting of these, fulfilment and presence is found. Without the craft element art to me is mostly shallow and intellectually alienated, and without artistic considerations, or the striving to create something that speaks about more than perfect execution, the craft is mostly reduced to a display of techniques within a stylistic idiom dictated by unwritten rules made up within the secluded framed of this specific craft tradition.

Another important parameter to take in to account here is site specificity. In the work presented here I have strived to make my pieces primarily integrative in as such as they strive to be part of the site for which they are made, and only fully makes sense in that environment. I see them as objects that attempt to harmonize or at least build a relationship with the site via the parameters described earlier. This relationship runs deeper than the modernist conception of artistic autonomy, and could more or less fit into the descriptions of what Miwon Kwon<sup>17</sup> call the art-as-public-space model, which is the desire to render public art more accessible and relevant to the public at the same time as all aspects of the site is taken into consideration.

The artistic challenge within work such as this project I therefore define as to make the meeting between ones personal artistic ideas and intentions, the materials properties, the demands and sensations of the sites, and the possible function of the piece as optimal, interesting and aesthetically pleasing and/or challenging as possible. In the case of working within a historical site or with a historical building the challenge consists of applying just a few more (but very important and large) parameters than I would normally do when working with site specific public art, these parameters be the in dept historical knowledge of all aspects of the given periods artistic, architectural and craft-technical elements, and a basic knowledge of the current practices and debate within restoration architecture and architecture in general.

Furthermore Function is often an issue to consider within this kind of work. Generally I find it very important that the function does not overrule the design on behalf of the aesthetical consideration. Here the function of the grilles are to

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<sup>17</sup> Kwon Miwon (2002) *One place after another, site-specific art and locational identity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT press.

screen of the radiators from the public. As such it is mostly a decorative function, as the radiators do not pose any real danger. Because of this, and because these grilles will never be installed, I have not been concerned with meeting safety regulations for grilles as I of course would in a “real life” situation

In relation to this work I have been trying to find artist or blacksmiths working within this field in Scandinavia today. I have found no blacksmiths specialising within this, or with knowledge and artistic practice that could justify working with historical sites as described here. I have found two Danish fine artists, and there are probably more in both countries, that occasionally works with what one could call contemporary artistic implementation in a historical setting, mostly they work with churches, and often they design new altarpieces, gates, kneelers etc. They however are not craftspersons, and do not actually make their designs themselves, but get them made by various craftsperson’s according to the material in question. Furthermore they do not possess the knowledge of craft and techniques, in my opinion, to design anything that is remotely interesting from a craft point of view, or the historical knowledge of decorative art that enables them to connect their art to a larger perspective. Instead they produce work is strongly personal and recognizable, but unfortunately mainly validated by the fact that it is made by presently famous artists (Ill. No. 15)

## **Approach**

To give myself a starting point for the design process I began with 2 grills in the Cathedral in Århus (Ill. No.10). These grilles are interesting in themselves as they are made in the 1930ies to cover the radiators installed when central heating was introduced to the cathedral. They are brilliant examples of craftsmanship from a time where there was still a craft tradition and people mastering this tradition in Denmark, and at the same time they might well be some of the last pieces of decorative ironwork made within that unbroken tradition, as the call for functionalism and modernism makes the decorative metalwork obsolete during the 1940ies and 50ies. They are made in a retro renaissance style, clearly inspired by the works of Caspar Fincke, but at the same time with clear references to the stylistic idiom of their time, like the wrapped collars and the slightly stiff symmetry of the centre flower very clearly made with post industrialism fabrication techniques, materials and aesthetics. In all these respects they are interesting to me as they are examples of a solution and process similar to the one I am undertaking in this project.

I have used these grilles only as a starting point in order to have a site specific reference, a given stylistic and architectural period and in this case even a connection to existing decorative metalwork, all things that will be present in any given future work situation. However as there is no real possibility of installing my finished products in the cathedral, I have, for convenience, chosen to work in a scale slightly smaller than the one of the actual grilles.

Within the cathedral there are 5 big wrought iron gates, all ascribed to Casper Fincke<sup>18</sup> though one is believed to have been made by his son Morten under his supervision, and one I find too primitive and not following the usual “recipe” of Finckes work, so I am doubtful that it is actually his work. The remaining 3 are made in Casper Finckes easily recognisable personal interpretation of the German/northern renaissance style, which is characterized by symmetrical frames in flat bar filled with very complex, intricate, detailed and technically difficult lattice and spiral work, often with abstract zoomorphic forms in the corners or at the splitting of bars and a multitude of small decorative elements like hammers or flowers spread generously all over. What sets his work apart from practically all his contemporaries is that even if the framework is symmetric, the panels are never alike; every panel has its own unique design within the given stylistic idiom. Compared to some of the more refined and subtle contemporary work of the continent it can seem a little crowded and crude, He is, for instance, not always particularly interested in the flow of lines, but its overall appearance is bombastic and stunning and as such he is a master in his own right and his works are prime examples of Scandinavian decorative forged ironwork from the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Ill. No. 11) The Cathedral itself is a Typical Scandinavian Cathedral, Its made of bricks, and the initially building began around the year 1200. Today the cathedral is primarily gothic in architecture (“brought back to its original Gothic Look” in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century) and with a mixture of interior from ca 1400 and forward (Ill.No.12 and 13).

In order to get myself practically acquainted with and thoroughly understand this particular stylistic idiom I began the design process with drawing copies of existing 17<sup>th</sup> century decorative ironwork, Both that of Casper Fincke and of others within Scandinavia and Germany. I then continued by applying and developing the methods described earlier.

There are of course many other ways to approach this. For instance I have thoroughly considered how to use the various pattern books for inspiration, I have made a few sketches, but found that my interpretations of the design elements in these were so far from the characteristics of the original metalwork that it was difficult to see any connection between them. I therefore decided to not go into this at present, but maybe come back to it when I have more knowledge of the various etchers, and above all more graphical material to work with and more time. Another possible design path I did not follow up on either was to work more in-dept with the human and semi-human figures of the grotesques. These could lend themselves to so many different ways of interpretation, from working with them as graphical forms to applying them on present day mainstream celebrities or politicians. Again I found the possibilities

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<sup>18</sup> Casper Fincke. 1584-1655. Was a German born blacksmith who immigrated to Denmark and settled in Helsingør (Elsinore). He was extremely influential for the development of decorative metalwork in Denmark, worked for the king (Christian the 4<sup>th</sup>) and made an amazing amount of decorative work that is still intact to this day.

too open to come up with something applicable within the given time, and also I found that I would like to research the various social and aesthetic aspects of the grotesque in 17<sup>th</sup> century art more before I worked more with this.

## **Practical Sketch process**

My main sketching tools are pencil and paper, for me they make most sense as I am able to quickly outline an idea, and then later come back to work with it in more dept. Being a reasonable skilled drawer I am also able to illustrate my ideas in a way that makes them understandable for others and for myself at a later point. I occasionally use other sketch methods, like cardboard models, model clay or wire structures, but for this work I have been extensively using pencil and paper. As mentioned I began the sketch process with redrawing original 16 and 17<sup>th</sup> century decorative ironwork, to get a sensation of he shapes and techniques. I began with Caspar Fincke, as he is the main influence for this exercise, but also allowed myself to stray and be inspired by other pieces of metalwork, especially one very late Renaissance style chapel grille from Roskilde cathedral dated around 1700 (ill. No. 14 and 21) and some works by “ The unknown Stockholm Master” (Ill. No. 8, 19 and 20) from the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Having done this I then started to apply the methods described earlier. When I work with these methods, and with design process in general I always try to bear in mind what it is I really want to show, I.e. what do I find to be the essential design element and how do I isolate, underline, and strengthen it, so that it is easily understood has a strong simplicity but does not become overexposed and bland?

One way is to keep refining, removing and zooming in to enlarge the areas of interest, which is pretty much what I have done in most of my initial sketches, and which is clearly visible in the first grille I have made. Another is to apply some kind of contrast in style, material, technique or even colour, to highlight the main design element, for instance to frame a detail with a forged surface with non-forged material, which will for most people lead the direction onto the forged detail.

For the first grille I long had my eyes set on one of the drawings inspired by an ornament detail used by Lucas Killian, fused with a spiral pattern developed on the basis of some of the work by “the unknown Stockholm Master” (Ill. No.22). In the end I decided to not make these, as I found the overall expression, with its graceful, slender almost art nouveau like shapes and minimalist sensation, very far from that of Caspar Fincke. In stead I decided to redraw some early sample sketches of the “kings” window grille from Frederiksborg castle by Casper Fincke (Ill. No. 16 and 17). I zoomed in and enlarged even more than I had done, and found a section where I with a bit of redrawing could get six profiled collars to frame 3 bars running through punched holes in each other (Ill. No. 18) I found



this to be an extremely strong design feature, speaking of tension, direction of line and concise interaction, and at the same time highlighting the Renaissance metalwork feature of the interlacing spirals, and the techniques of the profiled collar and the punched holes, which are prominent on the original. Something else I found interesting was the how the spiral that was in the design was secondary, as opposed to how they are always primary design elements in the original pieces. In other words I moved the focal point of the piece from the original one to one I chose for its inbuilt narrative qualities and strong design, Thus making the grille evidently contemporary yet at the same time having a clear reference to Casper Fincke's work. To even further underline the idea of it being a sample I, after discussing it with my internal tutor, decided to turn the flat bar frame to be upright, instead of lying down.

For the second grille I wanted to make something which was further removed from the direct stylistic idioms of the Renaissance and Casper Fincke, I wanted to have a clearer reference to contemporary artist blacksmith work, which is why I chose the rather rough and textured look. I also wanted to introduce depth, or 3<sup>rd</sup> dimension, into the grille, something that is hardly ever present in the originals, (or present day decorative ironwork for that matter) and it is something that I find personally fascinating, partly because when working with designs that are traditionally "flat" or 2 dimensional, it is something that instantly defines both gates, grilles, railings and other 2 dimensional metalwork as modern or contemporary if it is introduced, and partly because it often gives the object more life as it engages a bigger range of perspectives to view the object than just the one normally emphasized, which is from straight in front of the object. Furthermore I wanted to work with the criss-crossing latticework, as I had not done it before and am fascinated by its possibilities.

To begin with I worked only with the latticework, and came up with the idea to make it in flat bar on the upright to give it depth, and use the technique in an untraditional way (I have never seen anyone making latticework in upright flat bar, neither historical nor present) I soon decided to introduce the spiral in round bar as a contrast, and worked extensively with the combination of these two elements, trying to minimise yet clarify my ideas, and, at least to a certain extent, keep the references to the traditional source. (Ill. No.23 and 24) In the end I came up with more than 30 different ideas within the same framework, which is 3 or more flat bars on the upright going through each other and parts of a spiral or circle around or in relation to them. In my discussions with my internal tutor he pointed out the similarity between my work technique here and that of some modernist painters, as in the removal of persons within the classical canvas in order to leave only the underlying geometrical composition, which in effect is what I do when I remove the spiral partially and use the central meeting point of the latticework to describe the centre of it, thus obtaining a dominant reference to the underlying geometrical structure of the chosen original design. In relation to this I discovered that I possible use the classical idea of a painting as a reference and at least to some extent in this particular sketch process have

subconsciously strived to define a horizontal line,<sup>19</sup> and in parts even foreground and background images within the frame of the grille.

For the 3<sup>rd</sup> grille I decided to approach it from the complete opposite direction. In stead of a long sketch process on paper and with a starting point in the original decorative ironwork, I started with a piece of sculptural work I had already made, and which is the result of another long and ongoing sketch and making process about finding, working with and defining shapes and techniques that to me embody the meeting of the properties of the material and the essence of certain craft techniques. The main design element here are the collars which hold the pieces together, these are square as the bar they hold is square, and as such not directly related to the round collars of the renaissance metalwork, however the collar as a technique and a design detail is very much a prominent feature of the renaissance metalwork, and even more so in the works of Casper Fincke. In the following process I worked directly with chalk and cardboard on the workshop floor in a sketch process that was relatively fast, and allowed myself to relay completely on my instantaneous intuition and make decisions there and then in the process (Ill. No. 26 and 27) Working like this in effect combines the sketch and making process, something I usually try to avoid as I find it has a tendency to produce work that is more shallow, and not thoroughly worked through, As one usually gets obsessed with the initial idea, and in regard to my own design process I have found that my initial idea is often not the strongest, or most interesting. However here I decided to try as an experiment. I introduced a piece of sheet metal, partly as a contrast to highlight the craftwork of the forged parts, and partly as a functional solution to cover space and make the grille actually work as a grille. I also made a secondary forged shape, more simple than the main piece, to underline some of the existing lines in the piece the combination of the existing piece and the original build a square in the lower left corner of the piece, which is intended to work as an alternative centre of attention, and then I made the frame in flat bar on the upright to support the plate, provide depth and give a substantial frame to hold the piece, and give opposition in the places where I let the forged parts exceed the frame. I chose not to close the frame completely in order to emphasize the lines created by the centrepiece and the fold in the sheet metal, to allow them excess of the frame so to speak. Finally I introduced colour, only ever so understated, but powerful. I did this both as a reference to the original Renaissance metalwork, which was always painted in bright colours, to highlight the contemporary detail of the nut fixing the forged piece to the plate, and to challenge the contemporary notion that decorative metalwork should always be black.

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<sup>19</sup> The original renaissance latticework is almost always on the diagonal in relation to the frame. But here I found it fitted my ideas about the horizontal line to turn it to be vertical/horizontal.

## **Making Process**

Making the first grille was relatively straight forward, and I only made minor adjustments from the original sketch. I used square bar forged round, as opposed to pre fabricated round bar, to get a textured bar that spoke of the craft and the tradition, and prefabricated flat bar for the frame, to underline its modern context. Within the making there were two techniques, which incidentally were also the main design features, which I had never made before, the punched hole in round bar, and the profiled collar. Both these are relatively common techniques both in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and within artist blacksmithing today, however it was difficult to find precise descriptions of how to make them, but thinking out the tooling and then making tests worked fine, and with a bit of discussion with various people in the workshop it all worked out beautifully. There were a fair amount of tool making and material tryouts in this (Ill. No. 29) process and this grille was by far the most time consuming, taking almost twice as long to make as the other 2. I chose to not cover up the ground down spots and edges where I welded the frame together, and the grille to the frame, but keep the change in colour as evidence of process. Finally I waxed the grille with beeswax, which maintain the “straight from the forge” look best I think, so no coloured wax or paint, just as close to the surfaces left in the work process as possible.

I wanted the second grille to have a more rough and contemporary forged texture, leaving clear hammer marks from the power hammer and expose the plasticity of the material very clearly in a way that was never done intentionally in the original metalwork. The punching of the holes in the flat bars and the subsequent sideways spreading of material proved to be the most difficult part of this grille, I had to make a few tests and tool to get it all working (Ill. No. 30). To refer to the original 17<sup>th</sup> century work and to make a contrast to the upright flat bars I here decided to make the frame of flat bar lying down, In order to get a uniform appearance I chose to cover the ground down welded corners and made the entire grille mat black using a stove wax.

The third grille was, as described earlier, created in the workshop from an existing piece of sculptural work that I found fitting within this process. For this grille I made no new tools, and very few tryouts as all the technical aspects fitted within my usual mode of work.

## **Reflection**

As I started to define this project I tried to come up with various categories for the different stages of abstraction or removal from the original metalwork, so from conservation over restoration, reproduction to various degrees of artistic interpretation, now the more I read and study the conservation/restoration history the craft history and the original metalwork, these divisions become increasingly blurry. It is obvious for me that the conservation/restoration practice is under constant debate within the trade, and amongst people who

deals with it, and how exactly to deal with existing metalwork seems to be very much up to the judgement of the case and the people working with it. But also within the production of reproduction metalwork, or artistic interpretation, there seems to be so many solutions and answers, and it is becoming more and more difficult to put up any strict rules for this as well. It is in other words not a progression from reproduction in one end to completely free art in the other, but more constant debate within any number of solutions where one need to take all parameters into account.

## **Conclusion**

As it should be clear from this thesis the possibilities of working with interpretations of traditional decorative metalwork are absolutely present within Scandinavia today. Never the less I find it absolutely paramount, as I have shown, that there is a big presence of engaged appreciation and knowledge of the historical values from the artist or artisan working within this field in order for them to channel the spirit and the manner of production of the period in question.

My claim is that in order for this to happen it takes someone who can push and promote these ideas, someone who has the knowledge and abilities to bring it all together. At present I believe that someone could be me.

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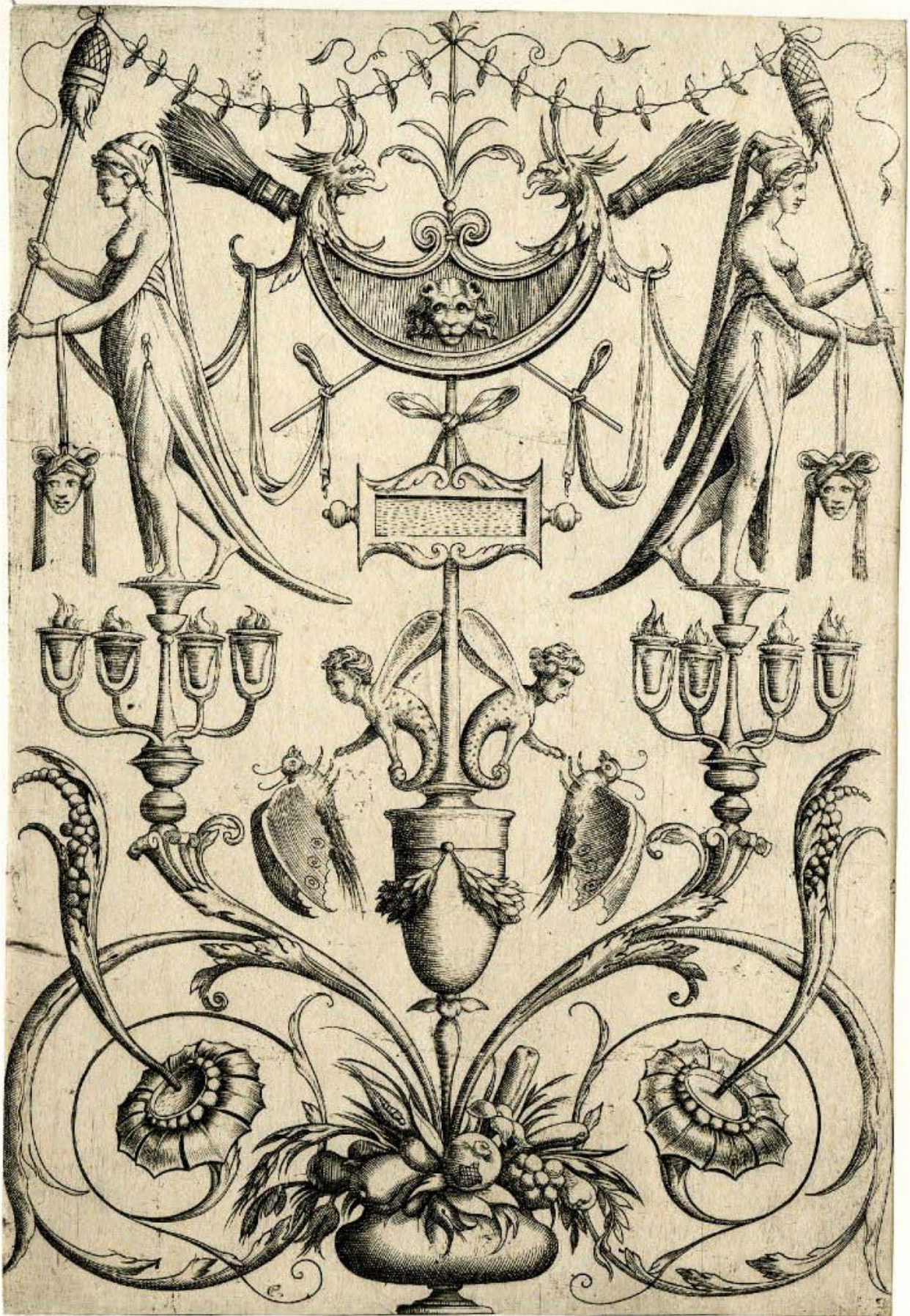


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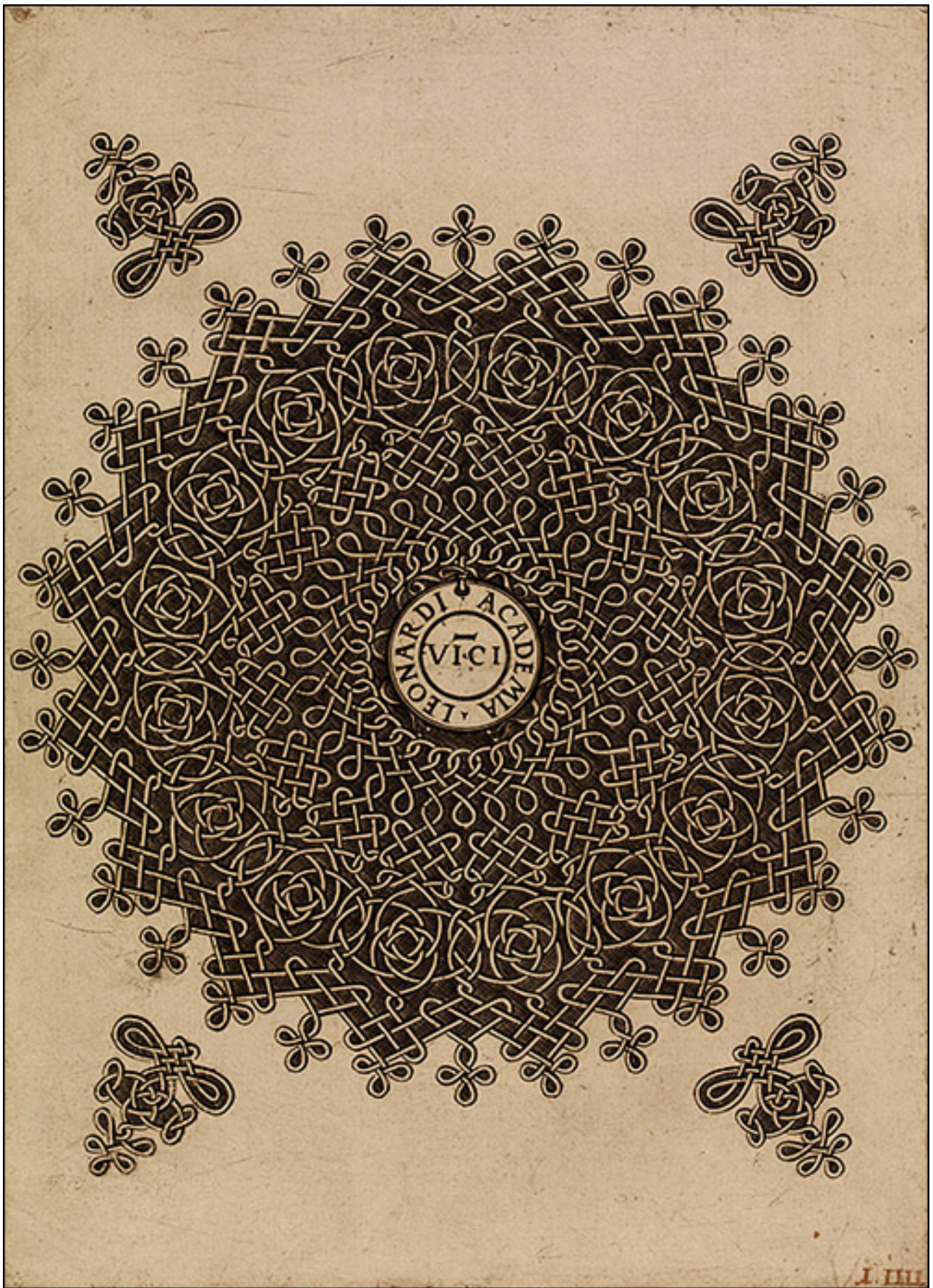
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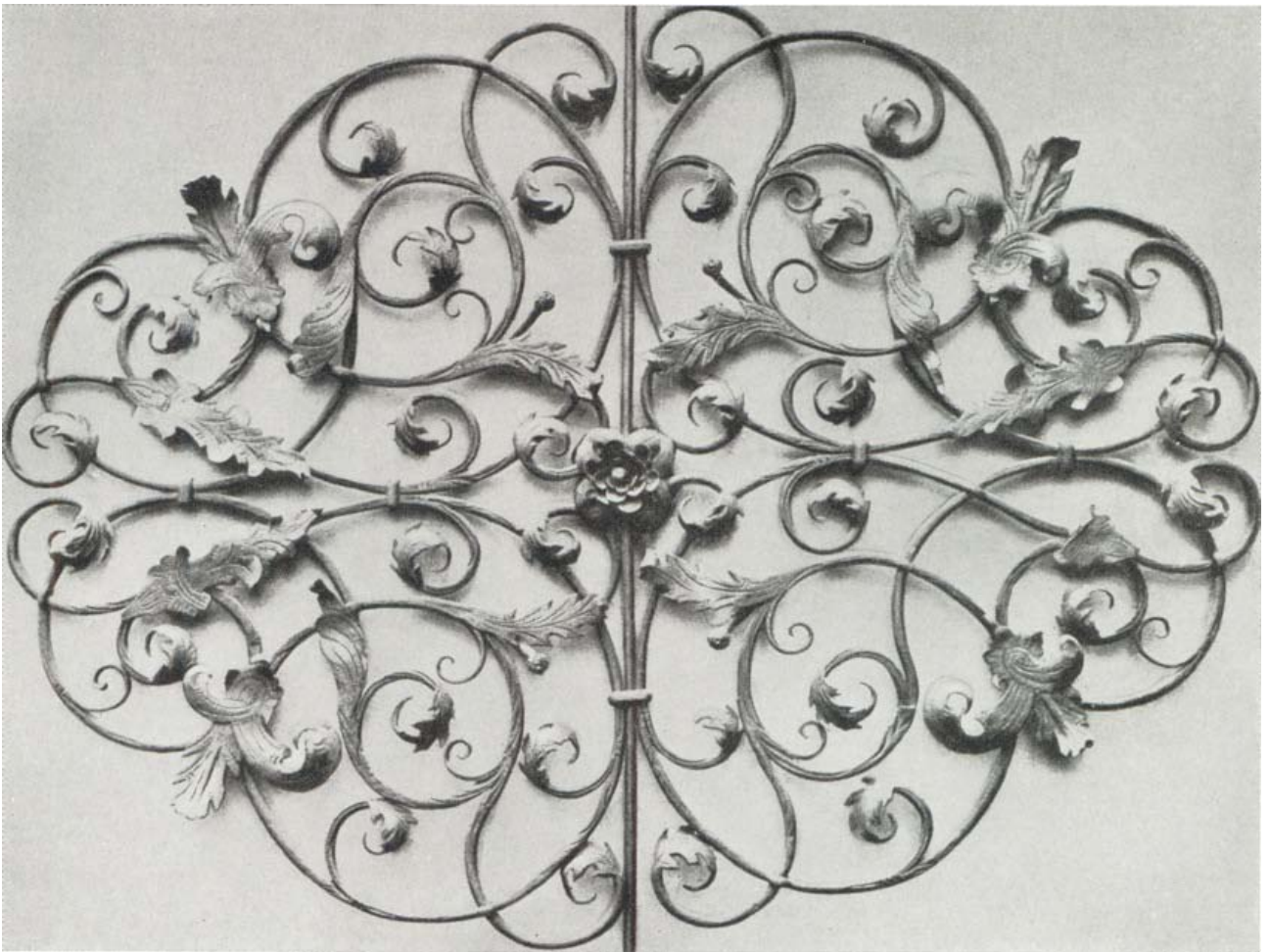
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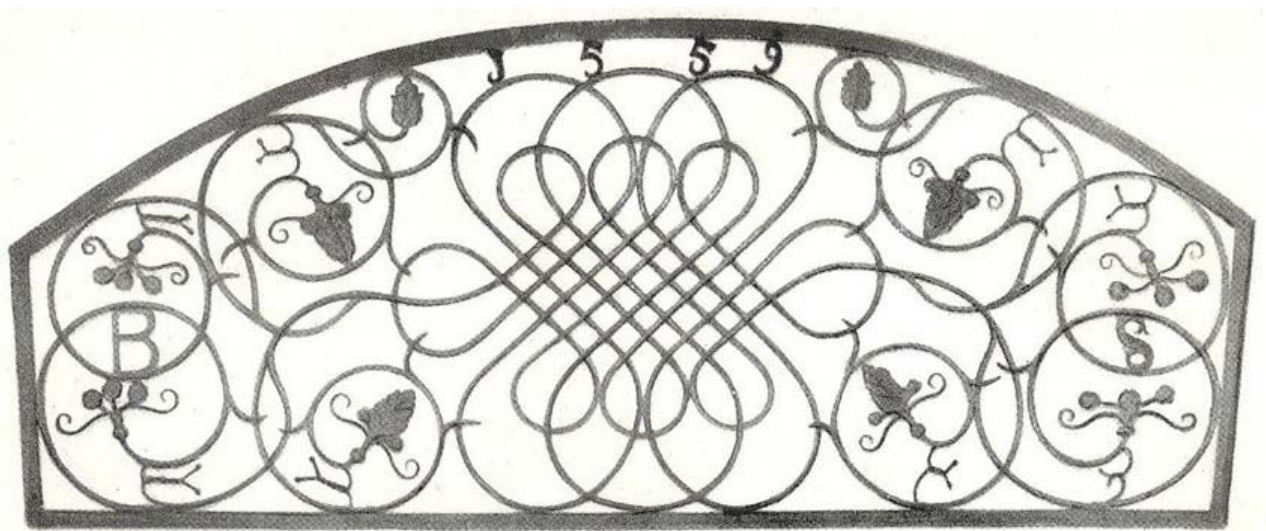
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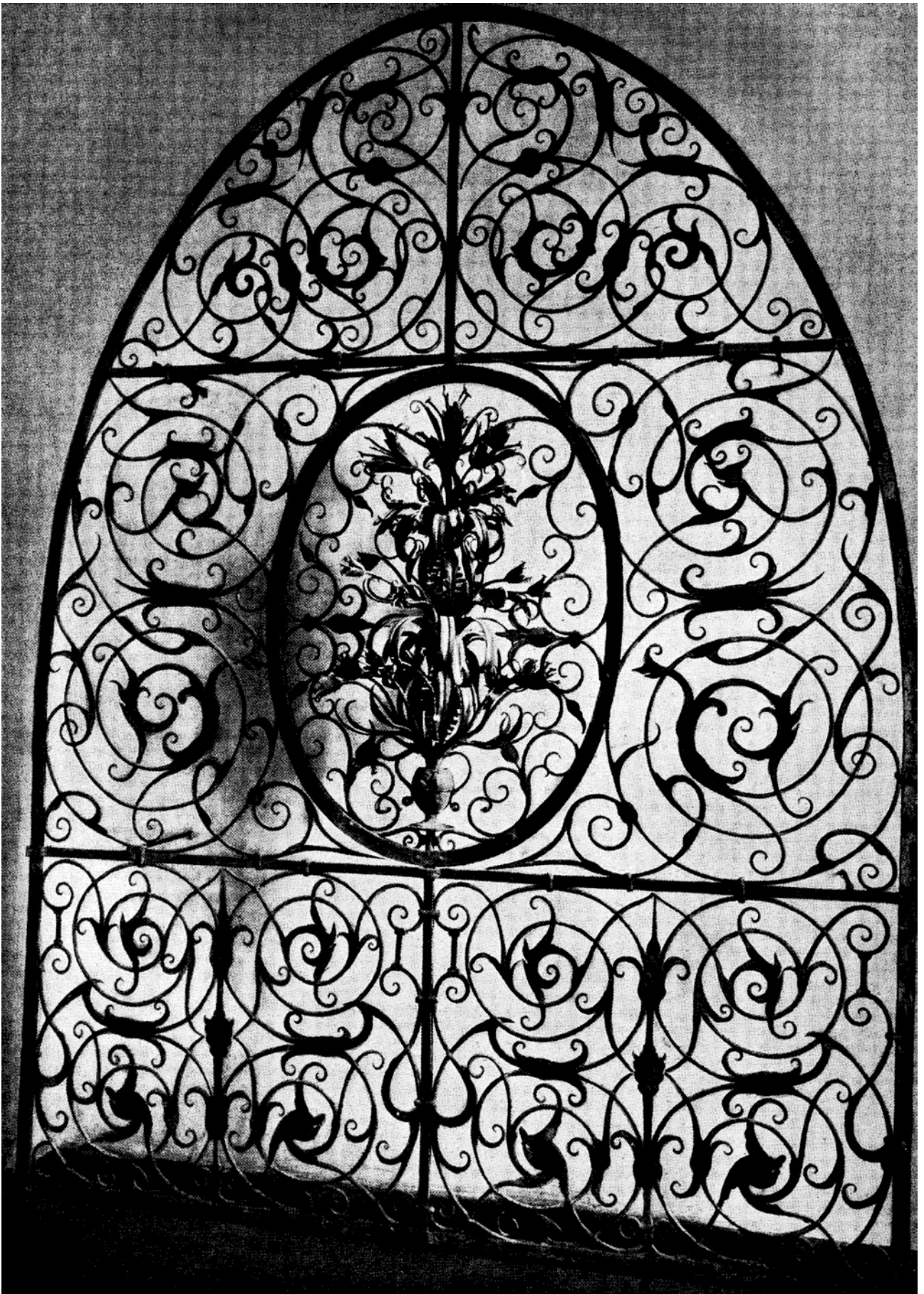


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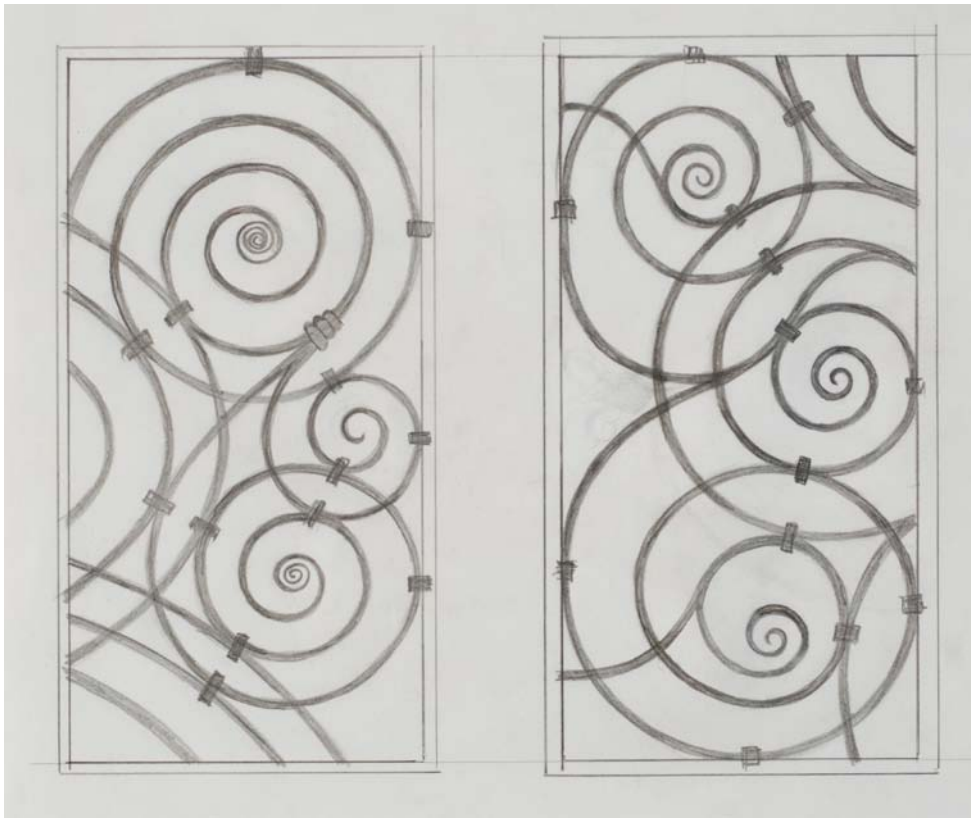




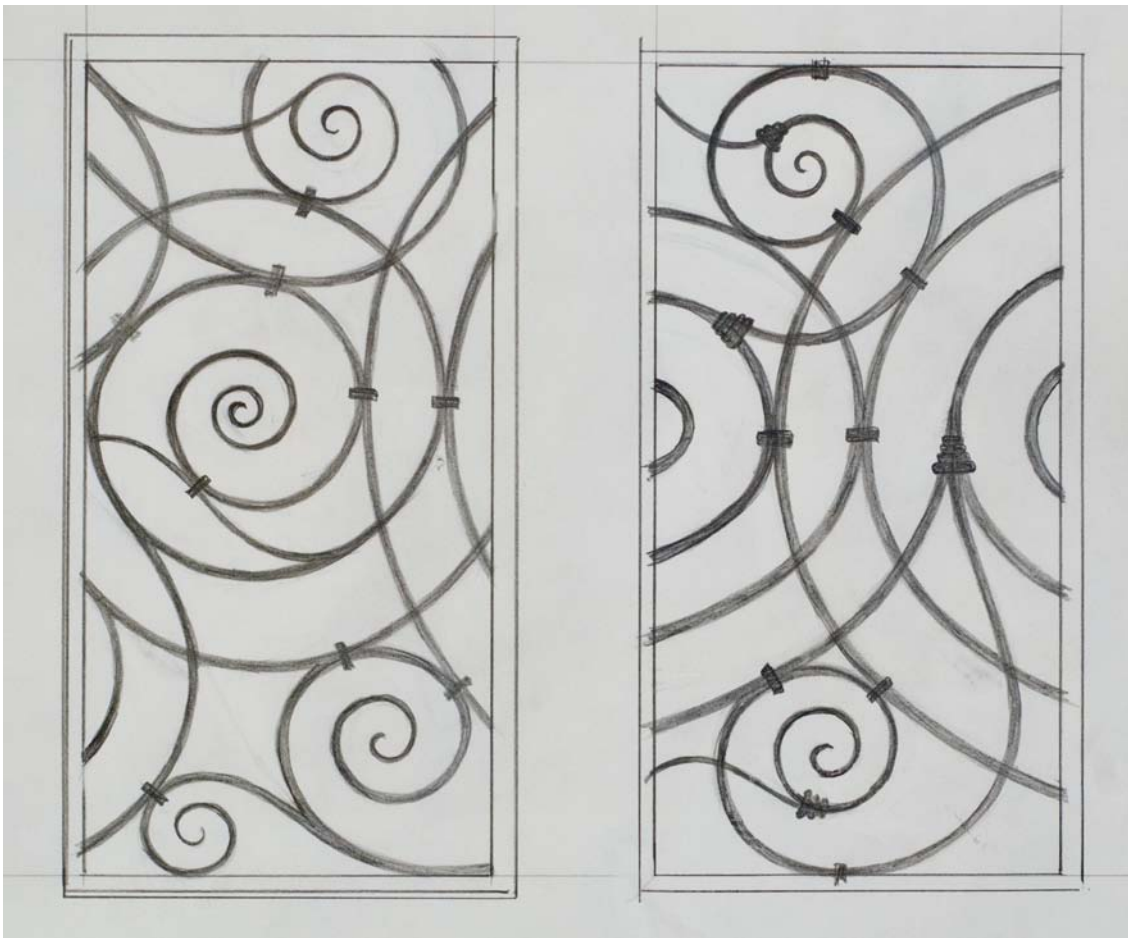




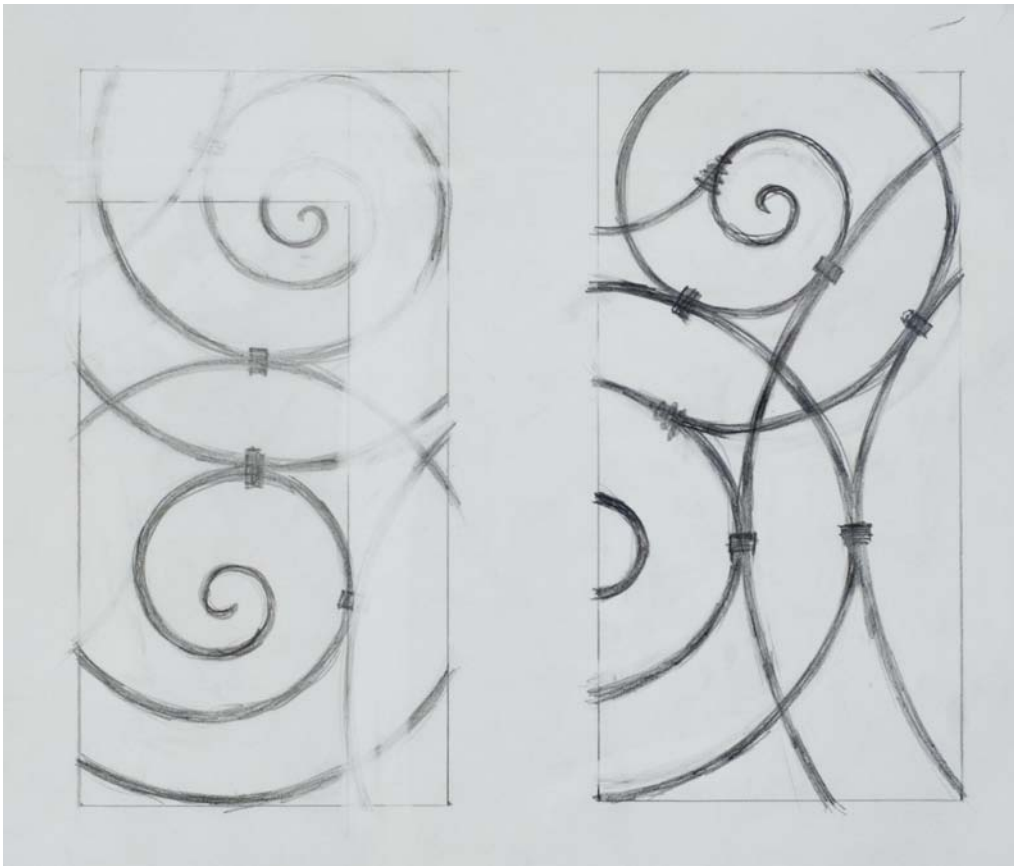




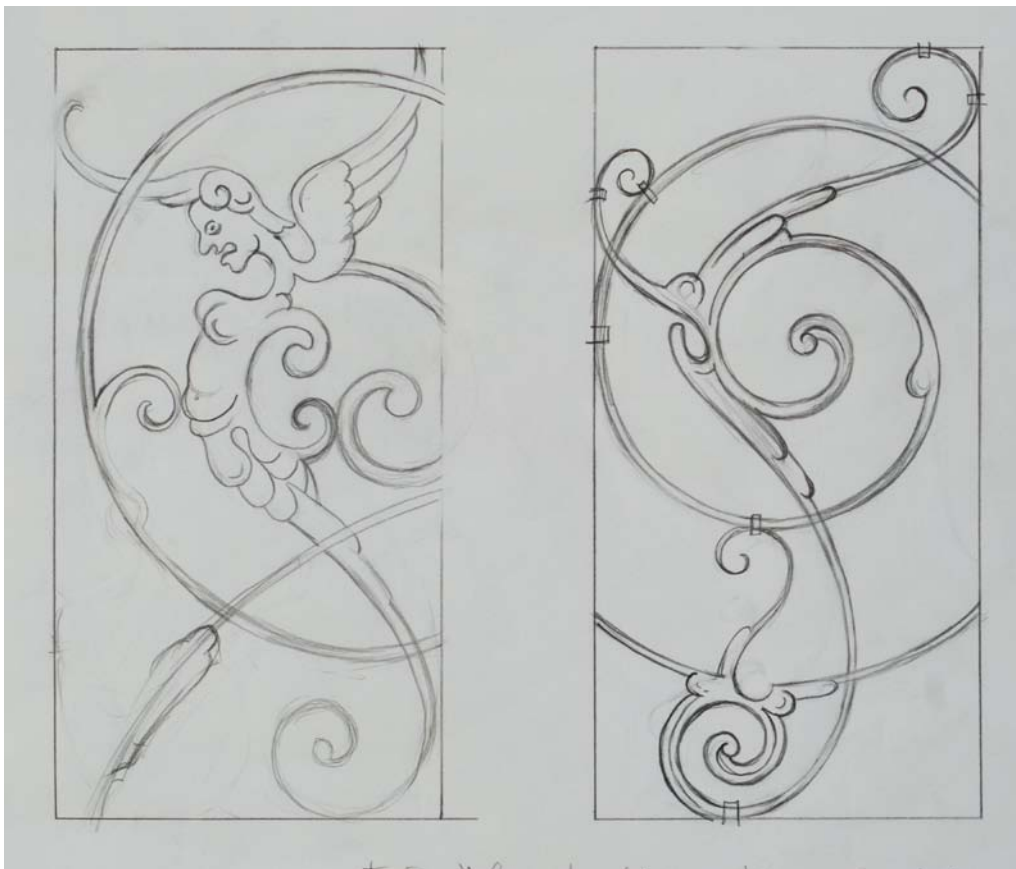
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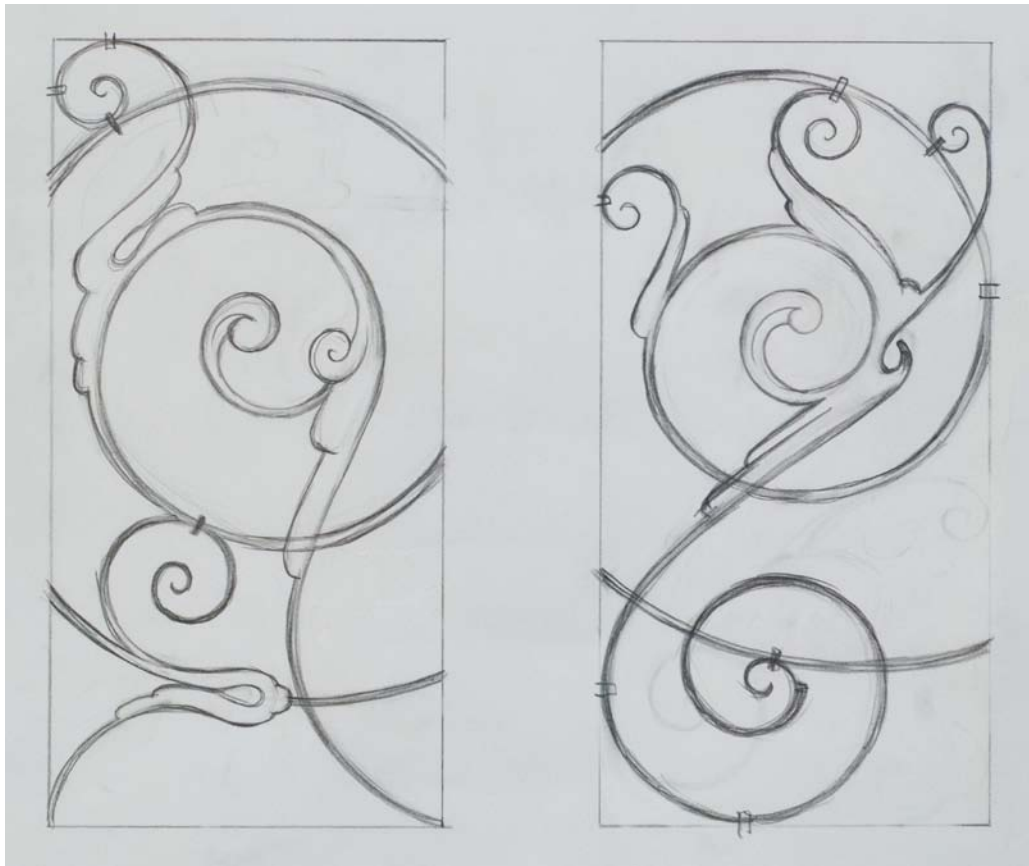
(17)



(18)



(19)



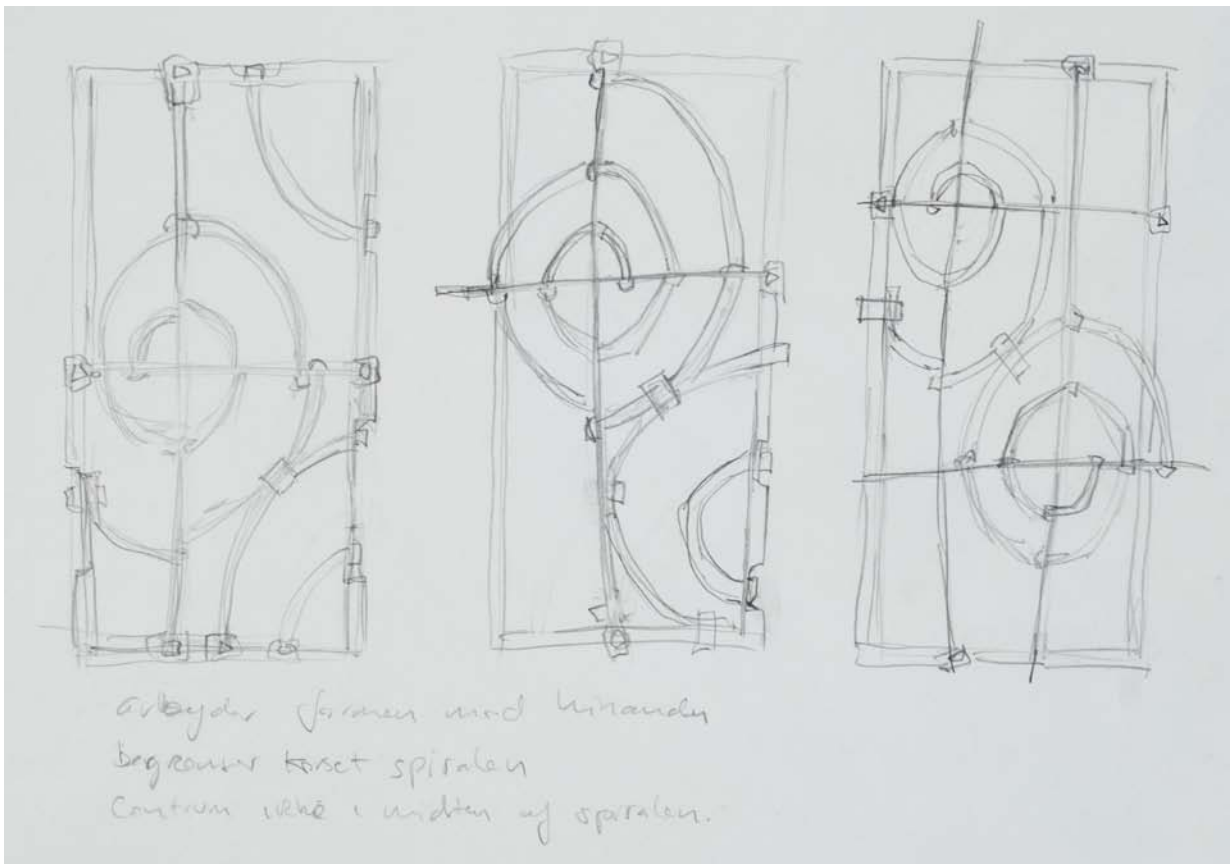
(20)



(21)



(22)



(23)



