



Grotesque Ornaments

Date

published 1610 (possibly printed later)

Primary Maker

Christoph Jamnitzer

Medium

Engraving

Description

A draftsman, printmaker, and goldsmith from a celebrated family of metalsmiths, Christoph Jamnitzer probably studied in Italy and is recorded as having traveled to Prague in 1609, yet his style remained very much in dialogue with Mannerist trends in his hometown of Nuremberg. The *Neuw Grotteßken Buch*, published

there in 1610, was Jamnitzer's first and only book, consisting of sixty illustrations of grotesques and other fantasy subjects along with a title page, dedication, and poem for each of its three parts. Grotesques are ornamental designs combining scrollwork and architectural elements with floral and faunal forms; they were initially inspired by the discovery, at the end of the fifteenth century in Rome, of the intricate painted decoration of Emperor Nero's Domus Aurea (Golden House), which was built between 64 and 68 CE. Jamnitzer's pattern book was intended as a source of designs for artists, architects, and other metalworkers, but its complex forms were rarely adopted in actuality. This plate from the book depicts six grotesque forms that meld floral motifs with zoomorphic elements; hidden within are faces that peer out at the viewer. In the dedication, the artist compares his creative inventions to Christopher Columbus's discovery of the West Indies, as both had paved the way for others; in fact, Jamnitzer derived the forms in this plate from tropical plants such as coca, guava, and coconut palm that he had likely seen only in books, such as Francisco López de Gómara's *Cronica della Nueva España* of 1555. The Carnegie Corporation gave this print to the College in 1928 as part of a program to provide colleges in the United States and Canada with raw materials from which to teach the history of art. Under the program, the recipients received "laboratory collections" of art containing original prints, such as this one, along with textile samples and photographs of great works of architecture, sculpture, and painting. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, *INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS*, 2017)

Dimensions

Sheet (trimmed within edges of plate): 5 3/16 x 5 15/16 in. (13.2 x 15.1 cm)