

# Constructing modern armorials

*Daniel de Bruin*

## INTRODUCTION/HISTORY

From the late fifteenth century to the nineteenth century the armorial played the predominant role in the European bookplate. The great social and cultural upheavals of the nineteenth century that brought an end to this could not disguise the fact that the armorial was artistically bankrupt.

A revival in the last quarter of the nineteenth century arrived in time to avert a complete decline: designers from the English and German heraldic traditions emerged and propelled the armorial

to great heights. C. W. Sherborn and G. W. Eve in England and Otto Hupp in Germany can be regarded as *primus inter pares* among an eminent school of heraldic artists and imitators. This golden age lasted until well after the First World War; after the Second World War the armorial again suffered a lack of favour as well as an artistic decline. This was painfully perceptible in the 1960s when, in a short space of time, some great names were lost. In 1965 the Danish artist Johannes Britze and the



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Bookplate (P1/4) for Jonkheer P. B. Goldman. The family was ennobled in 1838 by King William I of the Netherlands. The coat of arms was newly created and is a nice example of allusive or punning arms.

Frenchman Robert Louis died, followed by the underrated Swiss artist Hans Lengweiler in 1968, and a year later his fellow countryman Paul Boesch. When George Taylor Friend passed away in 1969 the last of a brilliant bookplate generation was gone, apart from Leo Wyatt.

It was clear from the 1970s that another generation of heraldic designers would follow, who would be less trained in both the old graphic techniques and the traditional heraldic school.

### THE PRESENT DAY

In spite of the short supply of heraldic designers who also devote some of their work to the modern armorial, the Bookplate Society, in contrast to the continent, has continued to maintain interest in this phenomenon. I also agree with Brian North Lee when he says in his book, *Some bookplates of heralds*, that 'blazons in good colour can do their part in displaying heraldry and its splendour to full advantage'. But I agree with him even more when he says in relation to technical execution in particular: 'reproduction by process from drawings could be extended'.

Lee's words are somewhat at odds with the situation in the current bookplate world; namely, the excessively one-sided appreciation of the modern graphic bookplate. The utilitarian function is gradually being pushed completely to the margins. Not only does he argue for a good functional plate but, at the same time, that more forms of colour reproduction could be used and that is the essence of my armorial work.

I therefore gratefully accepted the Bookplate Journal's invitation to write something about the background to my heraldic designs (1981-2005) at the hectic start of the twenty-first century – hectic because, compared with 20 or 30 years ago, the development of the internet offers enormous access to new heraldic sources and at the same time all the advantages of unlimited and swift communication.

My many years of experience in the computer industry gave me the advantage of being able to factor in these developments early on and make maximum use of them. As early as 1996 an American friend, David Robert Wooten, built a website which included a cross-section of my armorial work. As

a direct consequence I made new contacts in the United States, Australia, Asia and various countries in the former Eastern Bloc.

Above all, the boom in genealogy in the United States sparked great interest among Americans in their European roots. Within the former Eastern Bloc countries too, to name another big market, there was a growing awareness of a collective European history.

### BEGINNINGS

My fascination with small, colourful images was already latent in early childhood and manifested itself through my collecting football badges. Of course, I was not yet aware that this was only one of the many applications of heraldic design. I was born on 23 September 1950 in Krimpen aan den IJssel. When I was 20 I discovered my facility for graphics, which led me to teach myself calligraphy and letter design. Through civic arms I became familiar with personal coats of arms and have since accepted various commissions. In 1973 I began collecting heraldic manuscripts and literature, both antiquarian and modern, with the emphasis on heraldic design. In 1975 this pursuit was enlarged with membership of various heraldic societies and European bookplate societies. As a bookplate collector I commissioned bookplates made in my own name from, among others, well-known engravers such as Professor Mark Severin, Wim Zwiers, Lou Strik, Pieter Wetselaar and Pam Rueter. My intense commitment to bookplates led to my chairing the jury of the first Johan Schwencke competition in the Netherlands in 1990. The combination of my growing interest in graphic techniques, bookplates, typography and heraldry led inevitably to me designing my first armorial in 1981.

### STYLISTIC DEVELOPMENT AND VISION

Many times I am asked why I specialised in this specific small area. For me, heraldry, and the armorial in particular, is an authentic form of European decorative art. It creates a pictorial language in which all social aspects are brought to the fore, both symbolic and realistic. Besides the inexhaustible stock of heraldic motifs, at the same time it offers the opportunity of working on a fascinating graphic

design with naturalistic and abstract forms. Heraldry is above all a formal language that transcends boundaries, as my work will show.

The fascinating family histories of my clients give an impression of their social mobility, such as the exodus of Swiss and German Mennonites to Pennsylvania, the Spanish conquistadors to Mexico and also the fate of the descendants of the Ottoman aristocrats.

Although Dutch heraldry offers abundant challenges and is also known for being beautiful and understated, I was nevertheless intrigued by international heraldic stylistic developments, and particularly English, German, Scottish and Swiss. This preference is not surprising, since these countries produced a number of good and outstanding heraldic painters in the twentieth century.

English heraldry, often viewed critically for its somewhat dry and stiff execution, has maintained to this day a strongly traditional form, an unrivalled heraldic administration (College of Arms) and a worldwide diffusion throughout the English-speaking countries. The developments in Canada in particular may serve as a model for this. The grants of arms from the College of Arms, in terms of their artistic execution, are pearls of heraldic art. Among the notable artists, I highly rate the powerful draughtsmanship of G. W. Eve, Edward Kruger Gray and John Vinycomb.

The same is true of the Scottish tradition, with masters like Graham Johnston, Alfred George Law Samson and John Robert Sutherland. On the continent we see German heraldry, which played such an important role in the nineteenth-century revival in the 1870s, with Adolf Matthias Hildebrandt, Emil Doepler and Professor Otto Hupp being the best-known artists.

Finally the Swiss school, in which, as previously mentioned, Paul Boesch stands at the top alongside the excellent Carl Roschet. Roschet made an impression with his style, related to that of Hupp, and his masterly *Wappenbuch der Stadt Basel*, with which he matched, and even surpassed, Hupp's *Münchener kalenders*. Among these great names the Austrian Hugo Gerard Ströhl can certainly not go unmentioned, a great heraldic artist.



1. Willem F. de Kovel.  
In black with some green highlighting.



2. Dr. Peter Nawroth.  
Black with terracotta highlighting.



3. Fritz Arnsmeier. Black and terracotta.



4. Hassan Kamel Kelisli Morali. Black, green and red.



5. Cornelis Fontyne. Black and yellow.



✘✘ JÜRIG ✘✘  
BRETSCHER

6. Jürg Bretscher. Monochrome.

In order to find my way towards a balanced armorial, a thorough study of the graphic bookplate was essential. My years as a collector brought me into contact with the best that Europe had to offer: Paul Boesch, and also the Dutchman Pam Georg Rueter and the Italian Tranquillo Marangoni – both wood engravers. Alongside Boesch, and the inimitable way in which he reduced his heraldic designs to their essence, and his barely recognised modern design, Rueter and Marangoni excelled by contrast in compositions with a perfect black/white relationship. In the work of these three artists I also studied the solid line technique, which is barely used in heraldic design. In my later designs I was influenced by the classical and functional way in which the Dutch typographer, calligrapher and engraver Pieter Wetselaar gave form to the bookplate.

As a clear statement about the armorial, for years I have abided by the motto 'Dare To Be Different' and have striven to explore the boundaries of the armorial, with its firmly fixed rules. The personal direction I took is symbolically represented by the choice of the ermine and the signing of my work with the ermine spot. The story goes that this animal, at a crossroads in flight from approaching danger, chose fire over dirtying its white paws in mud.

The reader may be interested in my methods of working. All my bookplate work is drawn and painted by hand at four times the size of the finished ex-libris. Firstly there is a sketch, then a more detailed sketch; sometimes there are as many as seven sketches including fine lettering design. The final drawing, on special paper of a subtle hue, is then painted using Winsor and Newton designers gouache, for me the highest quality of this medium. All the creative work is entirely with my own hands, i.e. there is no computer element whatever.

Although I don't print my bookplates myself, I take great trouble overseeing the printing which is done by a firm using Enterprise Printing Systems (EPS) of the Xerox family. I am constantly liaising with the printer and experimenting with all kinds of papers and new printing technologies of which he keeps me informed. There are great developments in the offing in the field of colour printing. It is perfectly possible for the client to receive from me a digital image from which he or she can arrange their

own printing but they mostly prefer that I handle it.

#### MY OWN WORK

In 1981, after various stylistic explorations, I was able to design my first armorial. This opportunity arose after I designed a coat of arms for the Dutch de Kovel family. For Willem de Kovel (1981) (fig. 1) I used a style strongly influenced by Paul Boesch. To make the composition more interesting I placed the crest next to the shield, a form I later chose many times. I also tried to integrate the text with the heraldic image in the most original way possible. I would continue to use the solid line technique with changing success until the 1990s: see Peter Nawroth (1983) (fig. 2), Fritz Arnsmeier (1984) (fig. 3) and Hassan Kamel Kelisli Morali (1998)(fig. 4).

In spite of encouraging reactions to my bookplates, I did find myself facing clients who were shocked by my designs: not that they thought I was taking too little care over them, but rather that the unusual designs deviated greatly from their expectations. I noticed that they were very attached to the old models of their family coats of arms which had been passed down, even though these were, to put it mildly, very conservatively or badly designed.

Many times I was faced with the dilemma of whether to choose a strong modern design or make a concession to the taste of the client. I chose the former and have now had around twenty bookplates rejected. This *salon des refusés* paints a nice picture of the boundaries I wanted to explore in order to arrive at a renewal of this genre. Perhaps precisely because I did this there are now a few much-loved designs, and in particular my first one for Cornelis Fontyne (1981) (fig. 5), in which there is a nod towards Marangoni. Another rejected example was the fake woodcut bookplate I made for Jürg Bretscher (1988) (fig. 6).

To a certain extent I understood why they were rejected, but not always. The design for D. W. Harvey (2002), for which I garnered approving words chiefly from the heraldic community, I finished for my own pleasure after all, for it was clearly a bridge too far for my client in Georgia, USA.

In the nineties I worked on more commissions in a slightly more conventional style and used a different line technique. Examples of this are the designs



7. Theo Kruger. Monochrome.



8. Prince Stefan Černetić de Černe. Monochrome.

for Theo Kruger (1996) (fig. 7) from Germany and Stefan Prince Černetić de Černe (1996) (fig. 8) from Montenegro.

There is no lack of people in the bookplate world prepared to accept commissions with fake heraldry. I will never do this. There has only been one exception, and that was for Jan Rhebergen (1987), one of the most prominent bookplate collectors. He insisted that I make an armorial for him. Since he was a good and generous friend, as well as a notable chairman of the Dutch bookplate society, I agreed to it. In his daily work he had a connection with the clothing trade, so I introduced a tailor in period clothes as the supporter next to his fantasy coat of arms. Rhebergen had approximately 700 bookplates in his own name!

With the internet breakthrough, in 1996 I was able to set up a worldwide heraldic network with my bookplate site. This gave me the opportunity to acquaint myself with various heraldic cultures. The website, with the bookplates reproduced on the

flickering computer screen, almost gave the effect of stained glass and emphasised the strong edges of the heraldic art even more.

There follows a recent selection of armorials with background information about international heraldic traditions. As the title of this article indicates, preliminary drawings and sketches make up some of the illustrations. These clearly show the basic design upon which these bookplates are built.

One of the interesting commissions I was permitted to work on was for an American with Turkish and Egyptian ancestors: Hassan Sheriff Kamel-Kelisli-Morali (2003), (fig. 9) a descendant of a Turkish bey from a time when the Ottomans still had power and influence deep in the Balkans. The name Kelisli, incidentally, comes from Klis, a small place in Croatia. The arms date from the early eighteenth century. An heraldic innovation, comparable to a crown on a baldachin, is the beylical hat designed in collaboration with the client. The client is well-



9. Bibliotheca Familiae Kelisli Morali.  
Full colour with black lettering.



10. Darius von Güttner Sporzyński.  
Full colour with black lettering.

versed in Egyptian and Turkish genealogy and is a correspondent for the *Almanach de Bruxelles* – the *Gotha* for the non-European aristocracy.

The design for a client with Polish ancestors, Darius von Güttner Sporzyński (2002) (fig. 10) from Australia, shows the connection between the old and new fatherlands; the kangaroo's paw points significantly to the horseshoe, a common Polish heraldic charge. There is also an institutional design for the museum library in Gliwice (2003) (fig. 11) in Polish Upper Silesia.

An example of Spanish heraldry is the bookplate for the Mexican David Alejandro de Olvera-Ayes (2005) (fig. 12) whose forefather, Diego de Olvera, was a soldier in Cortés's army during his first expedition in 1519.

For my Flemish friend Marc van de Cruys (2003) (fig. 13) I created a daring composition in the form of a heraldic symbol from his coat of arms, the cross potent. The bookplate for Johan Deboutte (2002) (fig. 14) is also suffused with a Flemish spirit;



11. Gliwice museum and library (Poland). Full colour.



12. David Alejandro de Olvera.  
Full colour with black lettering.



13. Marc van de Cruys. Monochrome.



14. Johan Deboutte.  
Full colour with black lettering.



15. Ernst Grefe. Full colour.



16. Dieter Grefe.  
Black with blue Bavarian lozenge.



17. Liselotte Grefe.  
Black with blue female shield.

it is a simple and clear coat of arms, which is so characteristic of the Low Countries.

For Ernst Grefe (2001) (fig. 15) from Bavaria in Germany I first designed the family coat of arms, with symbols from the history of the Bavarian farming family, in combination with the coat of arms of Bavaria. After much insistence from the father, Ernst Grefe (I really only wanted to make 'serious' heraldic designs!), I also made two children's bookplates for him, for his 9-year-old son Dieter (2004) (fig. 16) and his 12-year-old daughter Liselotte (2004) (fig. 17) incorporating lighthearted heraldry.

For a member of the Cromartie branch of the Urquhart clan living in Florida, Robert Allen Cromartie (2005), (fig. 18a,b,c,d, preparatory sketches; the finished ex-libris is shown on the back cover) I made a bookplate based on the letter patent published by the Lyon Court in Scotland in 2005. For this bookplate, four successive phases of the

design are shown. Although in this article I will not weary the reader with blazons, for this example I will include the formal description. Here, the reader can compare the words and the accompanying illustrations:

*Or*, on a chevron azure between three boars' heads couped gules three mullets of the first pierced of the second. Above the shield, behind which is placed his feudo-baronial mantle gules doubled of silk argent, fur-edged of miniver and collar ermine and fastened on the right shoulder by five spherical buttons *or*, is placed a chapeau gules furred ermine thereon an helm befitting his degree with a mantling azure doubled *or*, and on a wreath of the liveries is set for crest a horse's head *or* having pendent from a chain around its neck a crescent gules, and in an escrol over the same this motto *Per actum intentio*.



18a



18b



18c



18d

18a, b, c, d. (this page and opposite) Robert Allen Cromartie, Baron of Urquhart. Preparatory sketches. The finished ex-libris in full colour can be seen on the back cover.



19. Emory B. Morris.  
Red, blue and gold, black lettering.



20. David Wooten. Monochrome.

Another design with a more or less recognisable American heraldic signature is that for Emory B. Morris (1998) (fig. 19). The heraldry is recent and the coat is registered in the Heraldic Register of America, an annual publication by The American College of Heraldry, of which David Robert Wooten is executive director. In 2000 I created a crest bookplate for him with a satyr's head (fig. 20).

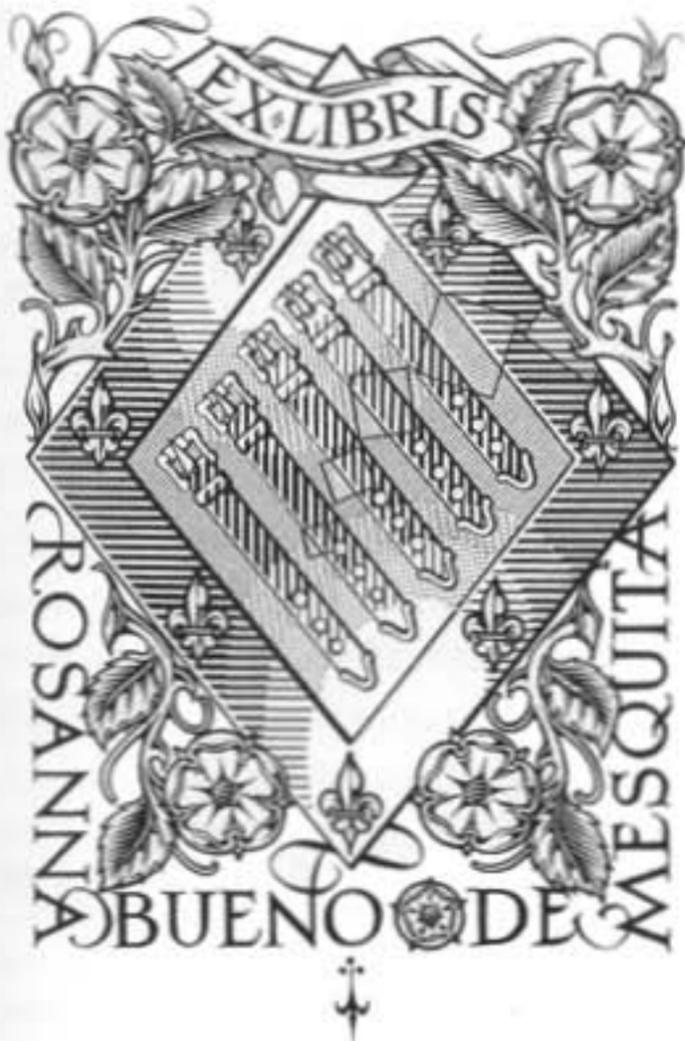
In my search for new compositional forms, the diamond shape, within which a heraldic image can be placed, was highly suitable. This form is used a great deal for funeral and armorial panels in old Dutch churches to commemorate the armigerous dead. In 2002 I produced such a composition for Dr John J. FitzPatrick Kennedy (see back cover). The coat of arms was registered in 1961 with the Chief Herald of Ireland, and is based on the old blazon of the O'Kennedys, with three silver helmets on black. The owner also wanted his Maltese Order as Knight of Magistral Grace on the shield.

Another diamond-shaped bookplate was for the

English surgeon Dr Ian Willetts (2004) (see back cover), with a coat of arms registered in 2004 at the College of Arms. His choice of three Staffordshire knots in the form of a thread is original (the Willetts are mentioned in Staffordshire as far back as the sixteenth century).

The coat of arms of the Morgan-Jones family (2005), registered in 1964, has a Welsh background (see back cover). The client requested the mullet as a mark of cadency, symbol of the third son during his father's lifetime. At the same time he requested the introduction of a distinctive element, with a reference to his expertise in falconry and as a hood maker for falcons.

The four bookplates on the back cover, besides showing a range of British and Irish heraldry, also represent the whole spectrum of heraldic colours (red, blue, green and black) and the two metals (silver/gold). The set of four also allows one to see the applications of original composite heraldry from recent years (Willetts, Morgan-Jones) alongside



21. Rosanna Bueno de Mesquita.  
Black with four-colour highlighting.



22. Nicholas Milissis.  
Full colour, black lettering.

old heraldry (Urquhart, Kennedy). Once again, it shows the vitality of heraldry and its many potential applications as the centuries go by.

One of the most enjoyable challenges with armorials is designing for a woman. One of the five in my work has roots going back to an old Portuguese family, the Mesquitas (2004) (fig. 21).

Finally, another notable bookplate from the melting pot of American society. For Nikolaos (Nicholas) Milissis (2002) (fig. 22) of Chicago, the red thread in his ancestry represented the great sacrifices the family made in the Greek struggle for freedom from Turkish rule. In addition, on the coat of arms (a pierced crescent!) a Greek revolutionary warrior from 1820–1830 was also included as a supporter. The Greek words on the label can be translated as ‘that which does not kill me makes me stronger’.

It would be going too far to put all the traditions in the spotlight. Besides the previous examples, I have also designed bookplates for clients with heraldic traditions from countries including Sweden,

Lithuania, Italy, Austria, France, Switzerland, Hungary and, of course, the Netherlands.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the marginality of the armorial, both as heraldry and as ex-libris, there is nevertheless talk of a modestly growing interest. The danger remains that the increasing demand is chiefly met by the many so-called bucket shops which trade in fake arms, but fortunately there is still a public who want to use the image of their family or themselves in a serious way in bookplates. In a visually-focused society, many people see that the heraldic pictorial language is still meaningful in the midst of an advancing mass culture. My modest mission is to depict contemporary forms in this glittering, almost lost, pictorial language: the armorial.

## PUBLICATIONS

There has been no shortage of interest in my work. Even when still small-scale, there was already interest

from various countries. In 1982 Opus 1 had already appeared in the yearbook of the Deutsche Exlibris Gesellschaft.

In 1985 there followed a limited edition publication (print run: 150), which featured eleven original bookplates, through Exlibristen, Klaus Rödel's publishing house in Denmark. A set of four colour plates was included in *De kleine prentkunst in Nederland in de 20ste eeuw* (1986), after which in 1987 a set of six bookplates made it into *The art of heraldry*, a standard work by Carl Alexander von Volborth.

An interview with various illustrations was incorporated in the well-known series *Enciclopedia bio-bibliografica da arte do ex-libris contemporaneo* by the publisher Artur Mario da Mota Miranda in Portugal in 1988.

Since the 1990s my bookplates have also appeared in publications from the international bookplate biennales and also in a large number of catalogues of bookplate exhibitions and competitions such as Malbork, Sint Niklaas, Barcelona, Ankara, Hong Kong, Chrudim, etc.

Since 2000, various drawings have appeared in heraldic periodicals and books in England, Belgium, the Netherlands and the United States, including Stephen Slater's *The complete book of heraldry* (2002). Various colour drawings were featured in a Belgian publication entitled *Wapens kennen en herkennen* in 2004, one of which was the title page. Finally, an important heraldic summary work with five colour illustrations is due to appear in Poland in 2006.

Daniel de Bruin, Middenwetering 95, 2922 EG Krimpen aan den IJssel, The Netherlands. Email: danielde\_bruin@hotmail.com. Websites: www.heraldicermine.com (USA); www.heraldic-arts.com (UK).

Daniel de Bruin has generously supplied an original bookplate to be loosely inserted with each copy of this issue of the Bookplate Journal. If so desired it can be lightly tipped in to the space provided on page 75.

