



□ **A special Silberling ceiling**

Silberling & Co was the Netherlands' largest plaster decoration company between 1850 and 1920. This Amsterdam-based firm collected the source material of ceilings in the Louis XIV style (1750-1810), Empire style, Neogothic and Neoclassical style, up to and including Art Deco and Jugendstil. Ca. 1900 – the high period of ornamental art in the Netherlands – the engineer J.C.L. Silberling had artists make new designs themselves. He included these too in the collection, which thus embraces three centuries of artistic ornament in detail and has much to teach us much about the design and style history of ornament.

If initially the catalogues were created and published by Silberling in the form of drawings, from 1912 onwards he had all the master moulds recorded in detail through the newest technique of the time: photography. The negatives used were light-sensitive glass plates.

Silberling had received training as an architect in Delft. His factory produced mainly ceiling and wall decorations in plaster, decorations in plaster, sometimes based on his own design, but also by commission. He showed a great interest in historical ornamentation and in 1912 he purchased the models used by the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam for the ornaments on the walls and ceiling of the Holland Empire Room, which had been set up there to house an exhibition.

Shortly after World War I, Silberling & Co was forced to close and the collection of ornamental mouldings fell completely into oblivion.

Fortunately, a large number of the ancient and original master moulds was preserved. The plaster casts are now used by *Rescura-Bleijenberg*, a company in The Hague.

□ **A stately building from 1914**

Since its establishment in August 1983, the *Puppetry Museum* has been housed in a stately (farm) building dating from the early days of the last century. The house still contains a few original stucco ceilings in the style of Louis XIV, whose inspiration was evidently drawn from the sales catalogues of Silberling & Co. Authentic tile floors, wall tiles, and panelled doors, too, embellish the building. Flower motives and the building year 1914 can be seen in the stained glass window of the vestibule door.

The original potato cellar was converted into a '*poesjenellen*' cellar, a primitive theatre for puppet plays. Today – as in the past – cellars like these harbour typical Antwerp *rod marionette theatres*. In the Puppetry Museum they house a meeting and exhibition room below ground level.

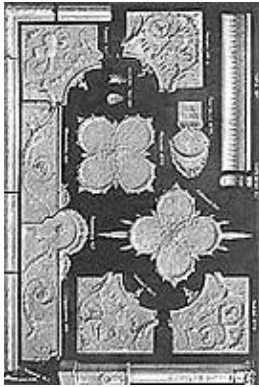
□ **Historical stucco and decorations**

Back when architectural ornamentation effectively defined the status of a house, stucco ceilings and their ornaments were a means of showing that one had 'arrived'. The ceilings were chosen from the factory's sales catalogue. The corner and centre pieces, the cove-, inner- and outer frames, rosettes and consoles mixed and matched (they were factory-made), and the various elements could be lengthened or shortened to fit any particular ceiling. They were applied with screws or nails and were often painted because, contrary to the Puppetry Museum, stucco ceilings were never bright white at that time. The builder or architect decided how sumptuous the end result should be – which, of course, depended on the taste and budget of the commissioner.

It was common building practice to use different styles of ceilings within a single property. In the Puppetry Museum some ceilings are modern while others are classicising.

□ Restoration

Early in 2010, one of the finest ceilings in the museum came down unexpectedly, wreaking havoc in one of the exhibition rooms. The binding that was supposed to keep the reed of the stucco ceiling in place, had been gradually corroding during its 100 year existence, notably where the thread had been wound around the nails. The force of gravity detached the reed from the ceiling causing it to sag under the weight of the stucco. By great good fortune, owing to the collection of Rescura master moulds, it was possible to duplicate the moulds for the damaged ceiling and by the end of 2010 the ceiling had been entirely restored to its former splendour.



Contributions

The renovation of the ceiling, the redecoration and some extra furnishings – for the sake of, among other things, ICT, and a special educational multimedia presentation in the central meeting space – were realised owing to the generous and very welcome contributions and donations by: ANWB Fund, Egbertina Wilhelmina Langenberg Foundation, A.H. Martens van Sevenhoven Fund, Dr Hendrik Muller's National Fund, Jan Nienhuis Society, Jan Wolters Fund (Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds) and the Friends of the Puppetry Museum.

Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds


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□ *Image: Example of a page from the Silberling catalog (ca. 1912).
Puppetry Museum/Poppenspe(e)lmuseum. OvdM (Vorchten, September 2010).*

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