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European
Influence on
Early Colonial
Silversmiths

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Table of Contents

3	introduction to object
4	critical research questions
5	place & time
6	people & culture
7	tools & materials
8	design process & characteristics
9	use or role within the interior
10	effects of colonialism
11-12	analysis
13	references



Title:
Candlestick

Maker:
Cornelius Kierstede (1674–ca. 1757)

Date:
ca. 1705

Geography:
Made in New York, New York, United States

Culture:
American

Medium:
Silver

Dimensions:
11 3/4 x 6 7/16 x 6 7/16 in. 26 oz. 2 dwt.

Critical Research Questions

How did European influences impact the designs of craftspeople in America?

How does Dutch or English influenced chinoiserie compare to French chinoiserie?

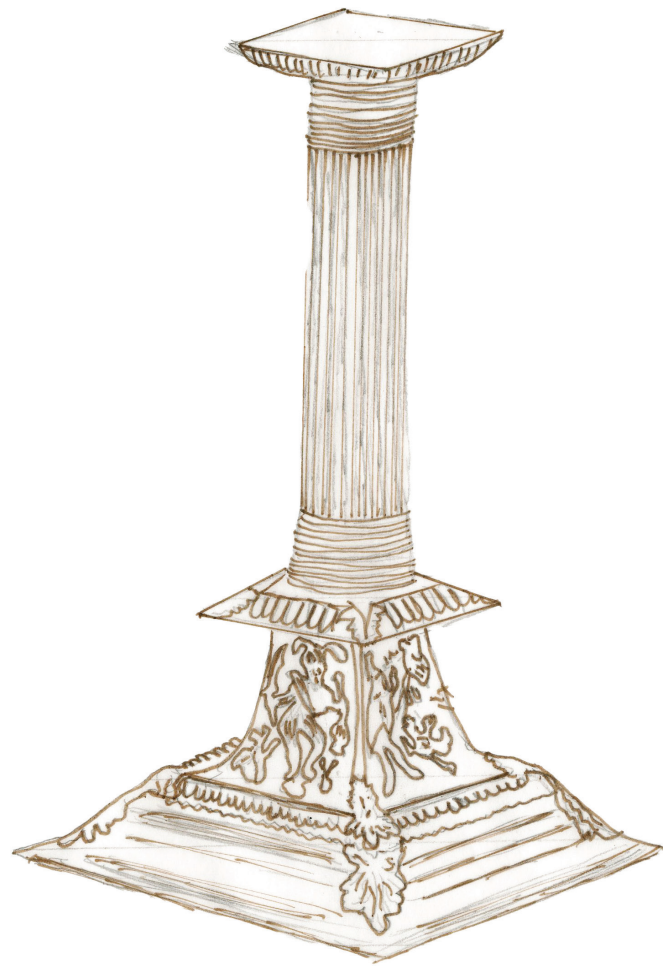
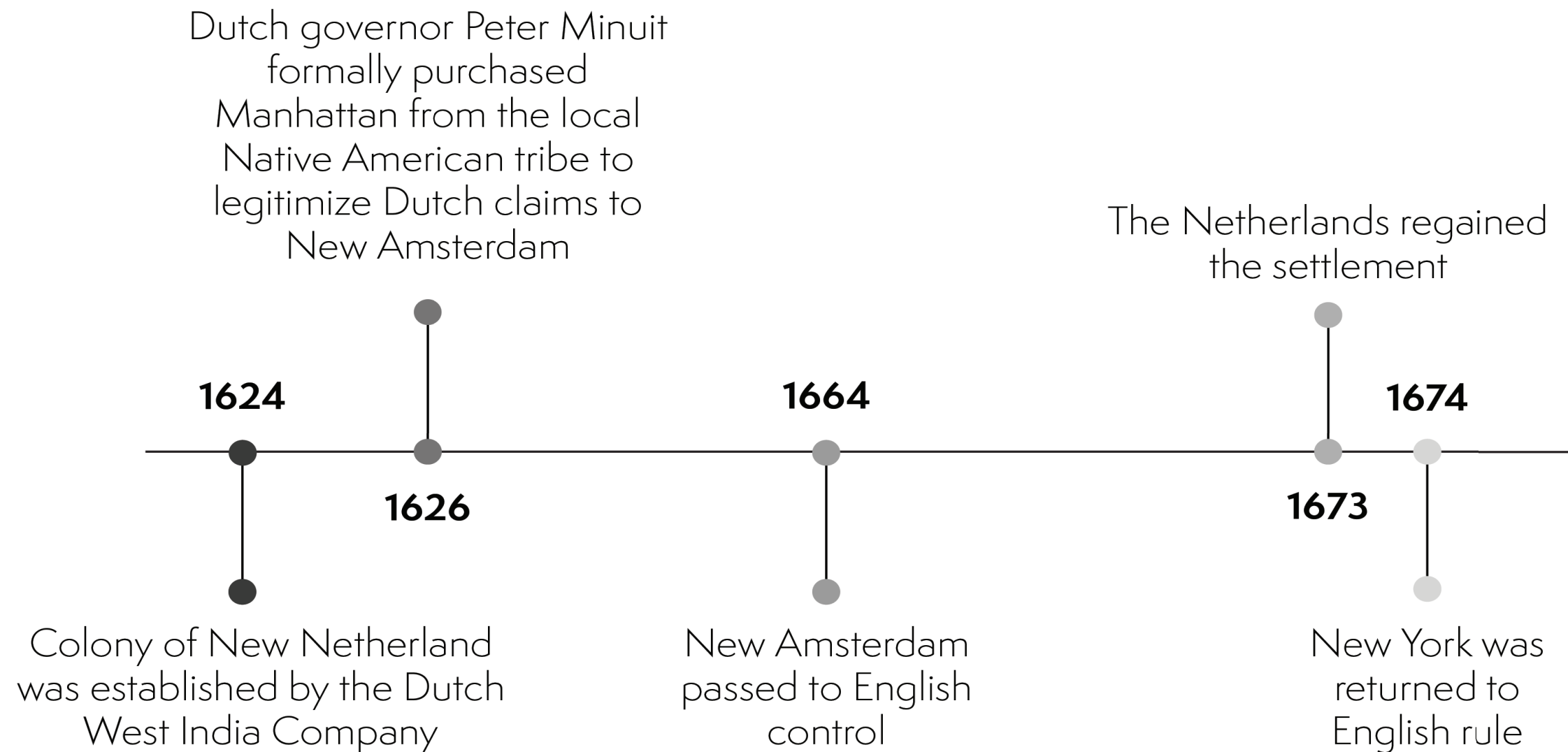


Image credits:
Images at right: Metropolitan Museum of Art, n.d.
Images above: Mclean, 2021

Place & Time

New York in the late 17th and early 18th century was incredibly culturally diverse - as a Dutch West India Company outpost, people from around the world flocked to the city, including populations of Dutch, English, French, German, Irish, and Spanish. (Burns, Ades, L., Stiers, D. O., Barteski, E., Squires, B., Moore, A., & Keane, B., 2011).



People & Culture



Johannes Schuyler and
Elsie Staats Schuyler

By Hofer, Margaret K. - New-York Historical Society, CC
BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=66474314>

Colonial objects typically derived their forms and styles from European predecessors - examples of Kierstede's work compared with earlier work by English silversmiths are notable in their similarities.



Cup with cover
Cornelius Kierstede
New York, between 1698 and 1720

Naeve, M.M., 1987



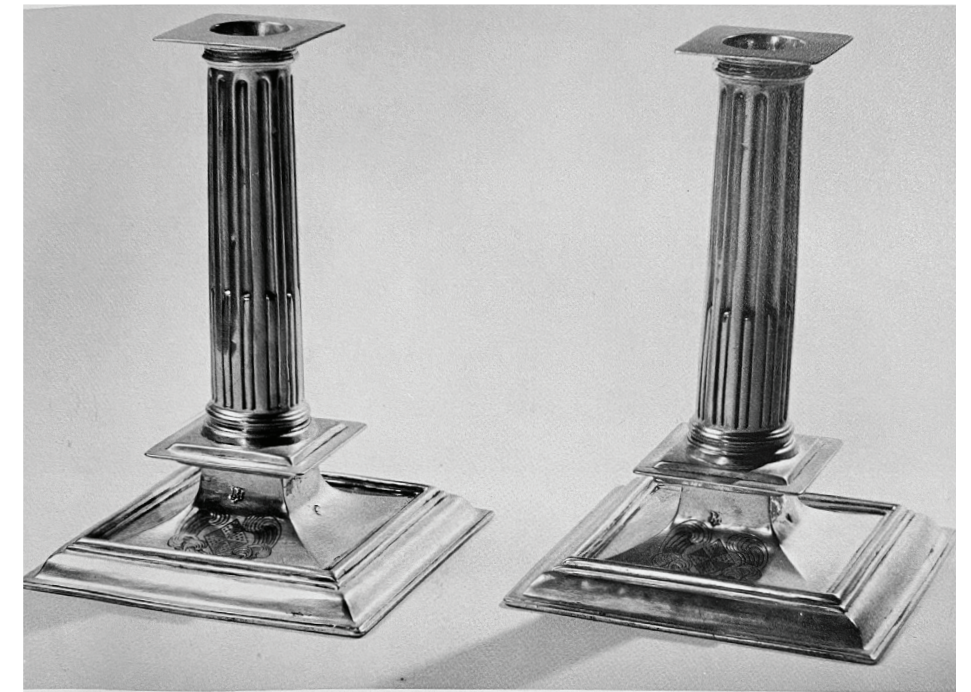
Cup with cover
Unidentified silversmith
London, 1676-1677

Naeve, M.M., 1987



Candlesticks
Cornelius Kierstede
New York, 1705

Metropolitan Museum of Art, n.d.



Candlesticks
Richard Morrell
London, 1681

(Trent, R.F., 1989)

Tools & Materials

Silversmiths during this period typically received their supply of metal from their customers. This silver arrived in the colonies through both legal and illegal trade - much of the silver arriving in New York was from pirate ships, targeting wealthy merchant ships from New Spain carrying bullion and coins. These coins, as well as broken or unfashionable pieces were generally the raw material used to create new objects. This gathered silver would be melted down and refined, to ensure it had the proper metal content to be formed.

source of materials

broken items

unfashionable items

coins

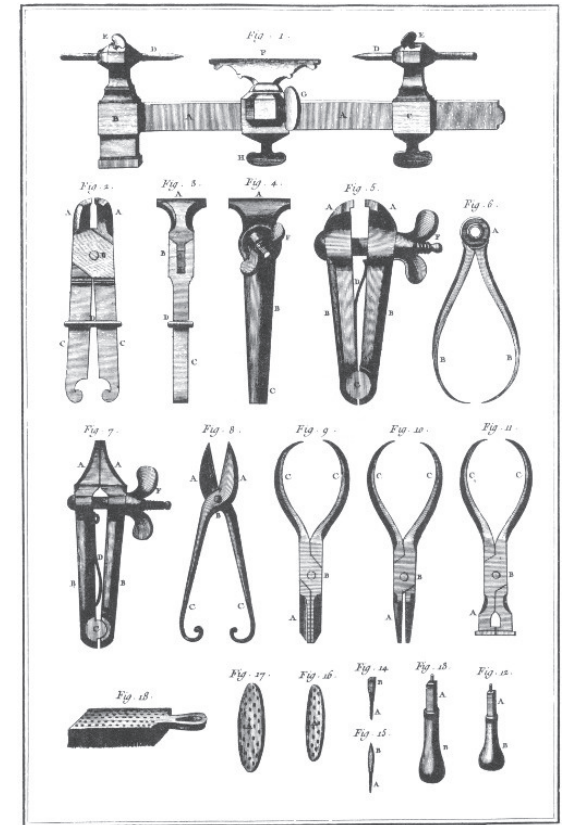


bullion

pirates

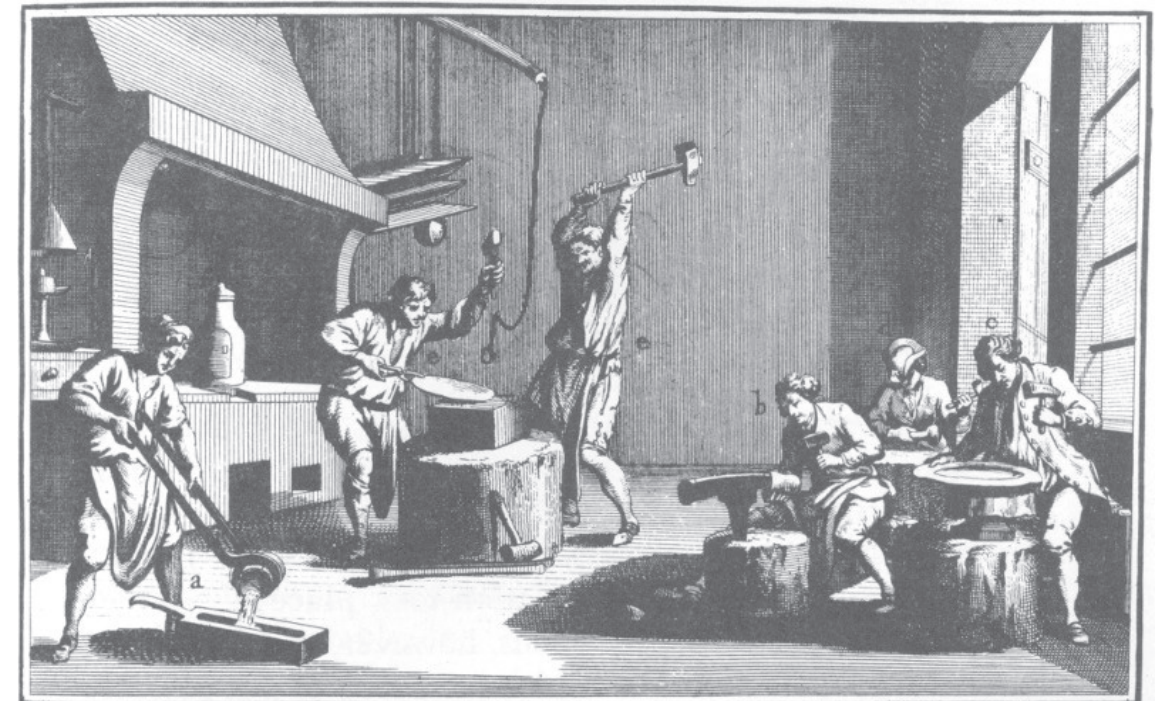


silversmith tools for detailing



Ford, T.K. (2018).

silver shop for household items



Ford, T.K. (2018).

Design Process & Characteristics



Metropolitan Museum of Art, n.d.

Repoussé

Parts of the design are raised in relief from inside the objects by hammering or punching. The name repoussé is derived from the French pousser, "to push forward." (Britannica, T, 2018)

Meander Wire

Thin wire is bent into a wavy line, then applied to an object. Typically used to embellish certain elements such as hinges, bases, and lips of tankards or cups.

(Wahlberg, 2008)

Chasing

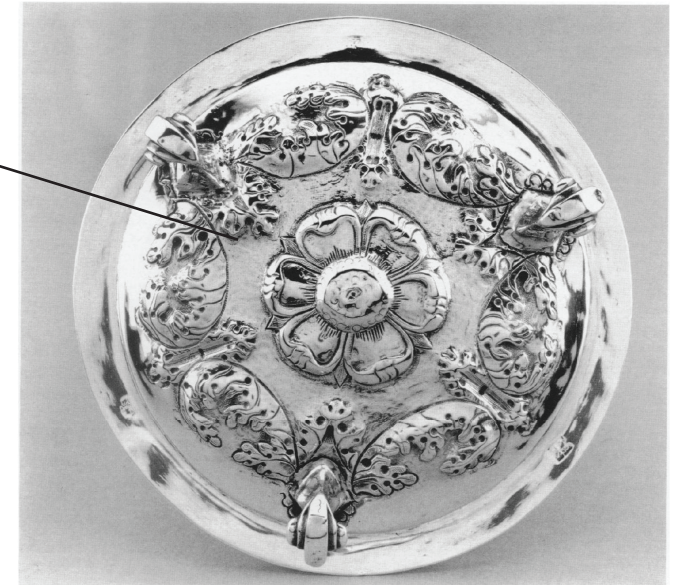
A punch or blunt-edged tool is impressed or tapped against the silver to impress a design. The metal is displaced, but not removed in this technique. (Ford, T. K., 2018)

Cut-Card Decoration

Sections of thin sheet silver are cut into decorative patterns and soldered to an object. This creates a relief effect and adds strength to the item. This is a French technique that spread to the colonies through the immigration of Huguenot craftsmen. (Britannica, T, 2018)

Engraving

Cuts are made with a knife or other sharp-edged tool that removes metal from the surface. (Britannica, T, 2018)



Næve, M.M., 1987

Use or Role Within the Interior

Questions

Were the candlesticks used on a daily basis, or given how ornate they are, only for special occasions?

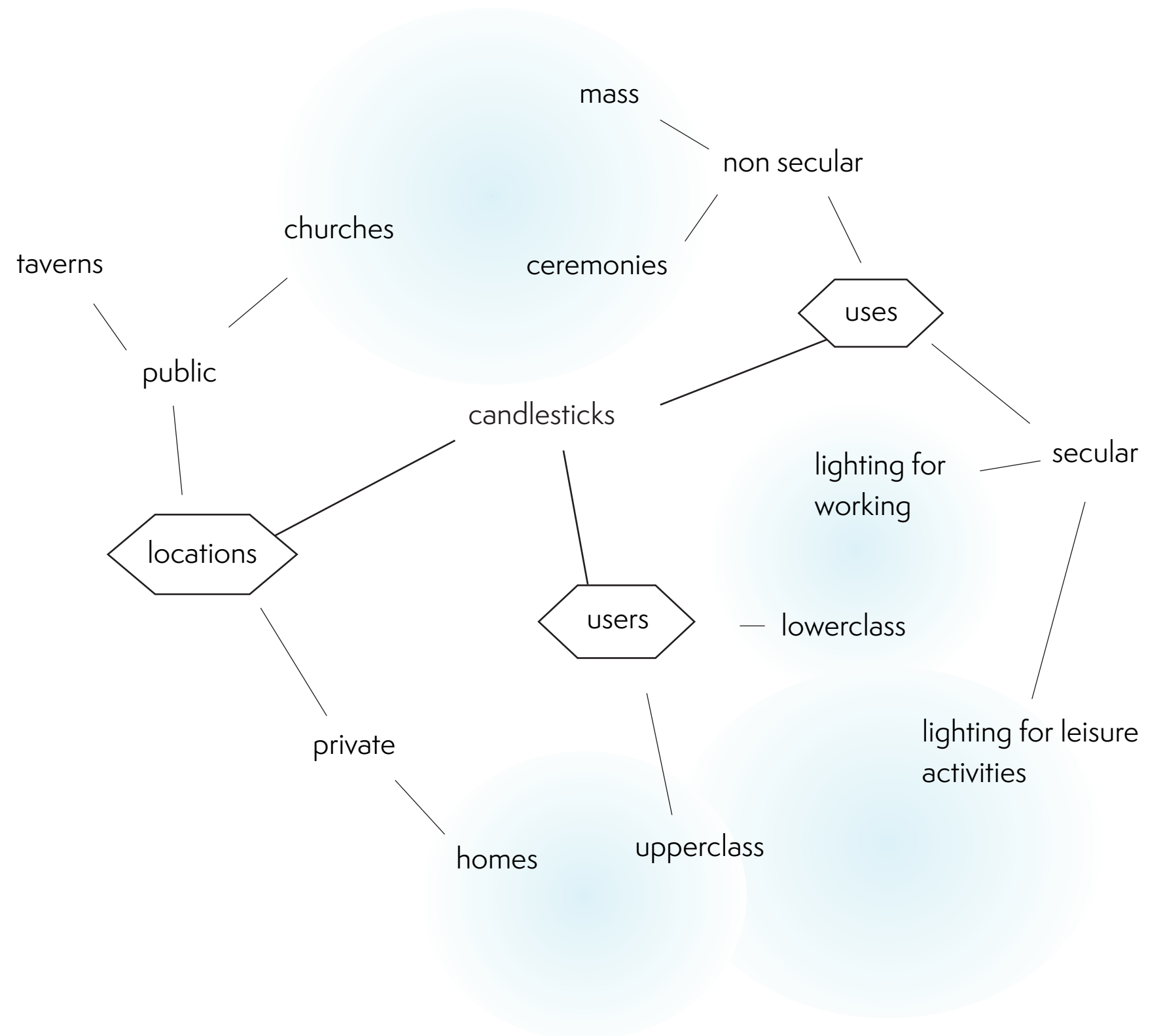
- Candlesticks were a physical representation of wealth and status, so it's very likely these were regularly kept on display during meals or in the bedroom.
- Candles themselves were expensive - given the prosperity of the Schuylers, it's probable that these were used fairly regularly, as they could afford to maintain a supply of candles.

How would they use have used these? For navigation through a dark house? To read, write, or do embroidery? Placed on a dinner table?

- Because they were originally made in a set of four with a snuffer stand, I believe these were made for display purposes, likely in a drawing or sitting room where the Schuylers would entertain guests.
- These would have been a definite status symbol for the Schuylers - the fact that these were very large, entirely silver and incredibly detailed, and they had four made, reveals how wealthy the family was.

Who used these? Would the mayor have been the one to use and light candles, or were they used by servants, and just admired by the owners?

- If and when candlesticks were not kept on display, it was usual for them to be stored in one room - either the kitchen or adjacent storeroom. (Duits, R., & Dumargne, A.-C., 2020) This leads me to believe a servant would have the more likely user of the candlesticks, or at least would fetch it and prepare a candle initially.



Effects of Colonialism

New York had a very heterogenous population, which I believe resulted in the intricate blended craft seen in American objects of this time period - because silversmiths in these cities had access to other styles and ideas, they were able to produce more compelling work by melding styles and creating new, hybrid objects. Ideas and designs from Europe had a major impact on who was using or commissioning each style, which makes sense - you want to use things you are familiar with and recognize. However, in the larger cities like New York, I think the diversity of the population contributed to the more unique work than that of New England - people were more willing to meld ideas and motifs to create something that was both functional, recognizable, but also aesthetically appealing.

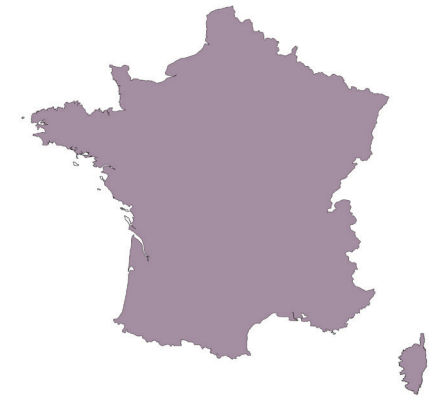
One of my critical research questions was how did European influences impact the design of craftspeople in America -- in the case of the candlesticks, influences from various colonizing countries can definitely be seen in the design. As I discussed previously, the form is a recognizable English form, while the motifs in the chinoiserie chasing and leaf edging are traditionally Dutch. And finally, the methods of decoration used on these comes from the French.



form



motifs

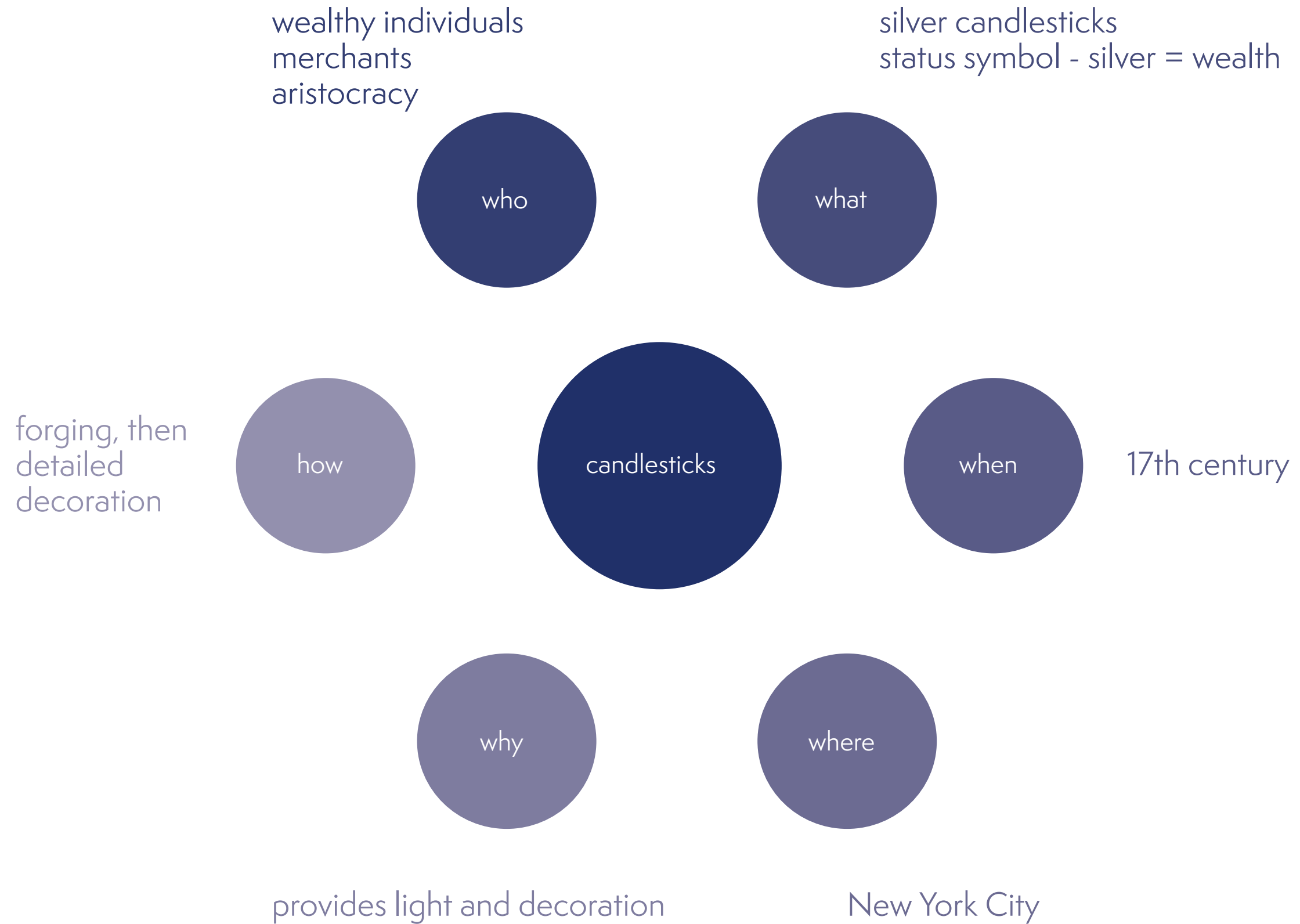


methods of decoration



England: Wikimedia Commons. (n.d.) France: Free Vector Maps. (n.d.)
Netherlands: Free Vector Maps. (n.d.) Metropolitan Museum of Art, n.d.

Analysis



Analysis



William and Mary Japanned Cabinet
England
1690-1700



Armchair (fauteuil à la reine)
France
1690-1710



Delft candlestick
Amsterdam
1680-1690



Silver tankard with chinoiserie figures
London, John Richardson
1685-86

Chinoiserie motifs in metal appear in the late 17th century in England, with flat-chased designs seen on punch bowls, cups, and other household goods. The intricate chinoiserie seen on the base of the candlesticks is unique - no other American example like this has been recorded, and it's clear that it was heavily influenced by the popularity of chinoiserie in England and the Netherlands from the earlier decades.

The popularity of chinoiserie motifs throughout Europe is seen a few decades later in the colonies - whether colonists brought items with them when they immigrated, or used sources such as John Stalker's treatise to commission items, colonialism provided the means for this design to spread to the Americas.

French chinoiserie as seen here seems to me heavier than it's Dutch and English counterparts - perhaps that can be accounted for in the different materials, however the even in the box at the far right, the design is repoussed versus engraved or chased, which feel lighter to me. The flora and fauna motifs are consistent with the candlesticks in both the Dutch and English objects seen here, however only the tankard seems to come close to replicating the actual designs.

Clockwise from top left:
Victoria & Albert Museum
Metropolitan Museum of Art
Artstor
Artstor
Metropolitan Museum of Art
Metropolitan Museum of Art
1stDibs

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