

ORNAMENTAL DESIGN
ACANTHUS

2

ADVANCED TECHNIQUES &
BASIC SHADING



INTRODUCTION

The Acanthus is one of the most common ornaments in visual art generally and design and decoration particularly. Similar to the perception of other divisions or artistic aspects, should an Acanthus ornament be complex or simple, a secondary element or the main design concept depends on the artist's personal uses and experiences.



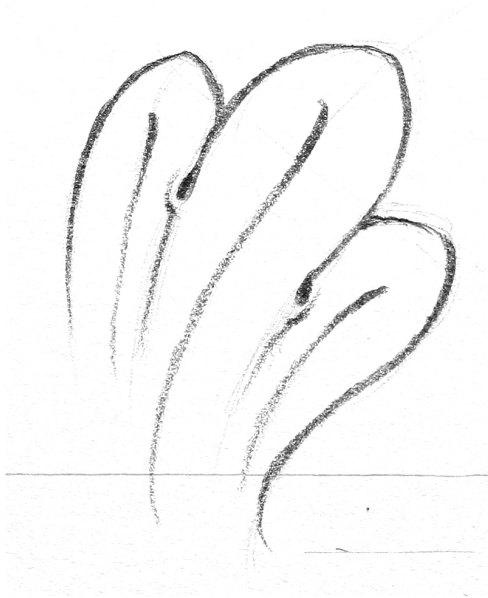
As a sequel to the basic Acanthus drawing guidelines published on my website (trishiba.com), this time, I will focus on more advanced aspects which are Acanthus shaping techniques and basic shading methodologies that are commonly used in graphic arts.

There is no better way to improve your ornamental design than to practice it regularly. By listing down detailed steps in the implementation process, every part or ornament in this document can be considered as an additional exercise.

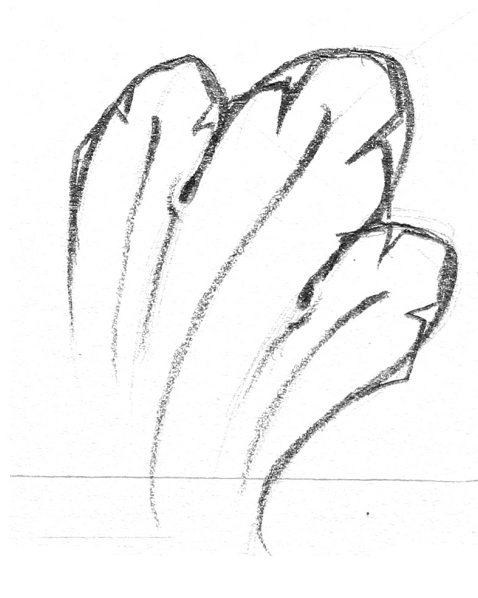
I hope that it can help those who appreciate the beauty of ornaments to have a firm and consistent first step before being able to let your creativity flow.

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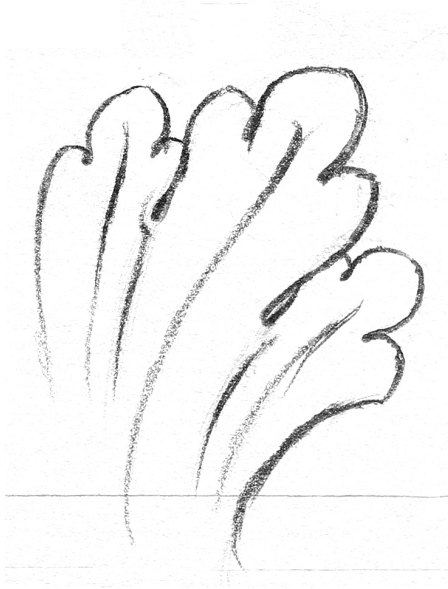
PART 1: SHAPE AN ACANTHUS LEAF



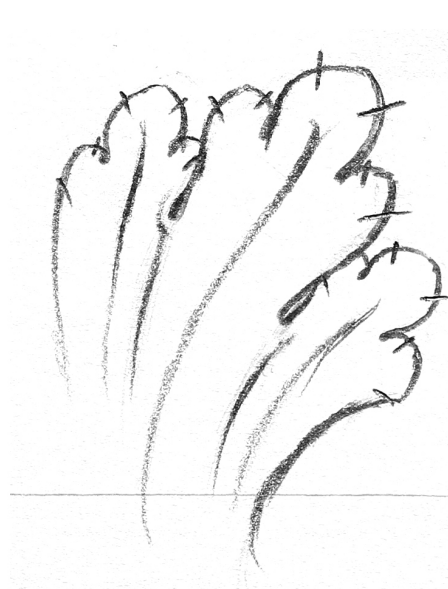
Let's begin with one part of a typical Acanthus leaf including 3 main parts: 1 central lobe and 2 others on either side.



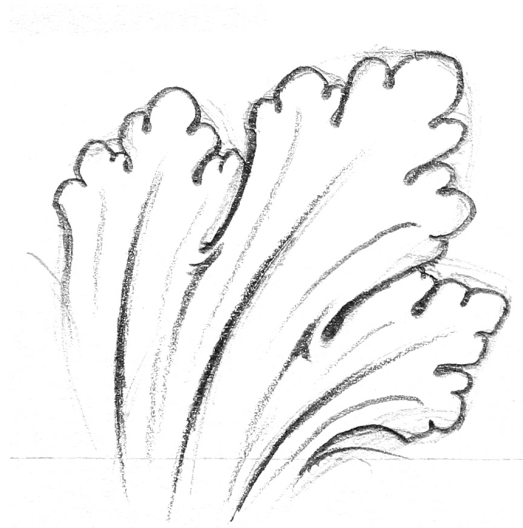
Following the same principle (*1 primary and 2 secondary lobes*) to divide each lobe into 3 small sprouts.



Adjust the leaf shape with curve strokes to create visual harmony.



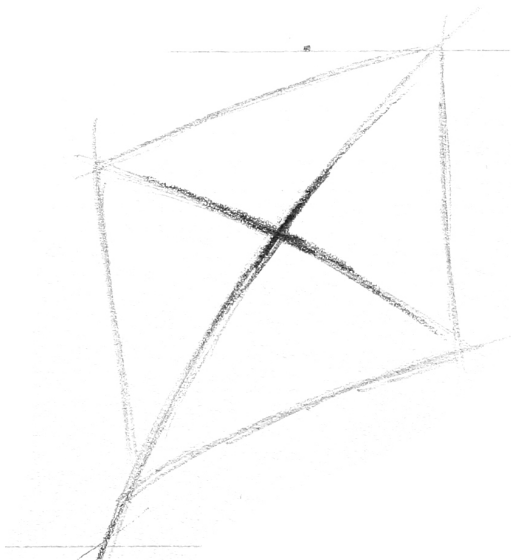
Continue dividing each secondary sprout into 3 smaller parts by following the same principle.



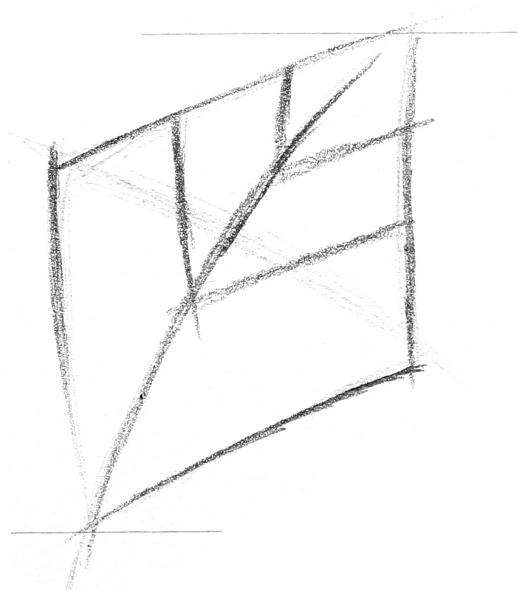
By creating harmonious curves, we have finished dividing the leaf blade. Thus, with these first steps, we can see that an Acanthus leaf can be divided into smaller details by following one principle: 1 central and 2 smaller lobes. In that example, we have divided one leaf blade twice - from a typical 3-lobe Acanthus into 3 sprouts and then 3 smaller parts.

An Acanthus leaf with 5 lobes

Next, we will create an Acanthus leaf with 5 lobes shaped in one rhombus.



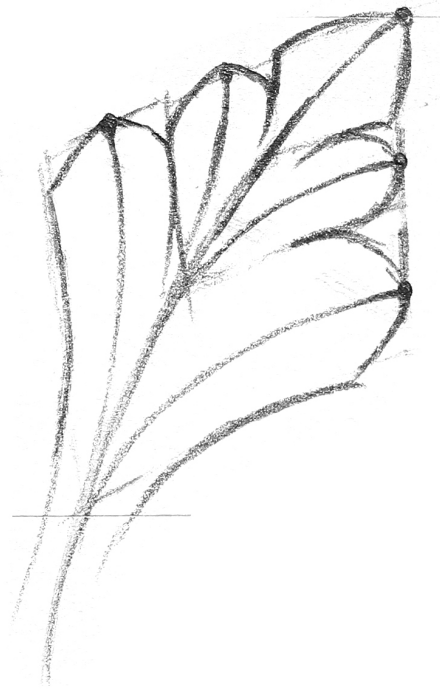
Step 1: Draw a rhombus with the shape of a kite.



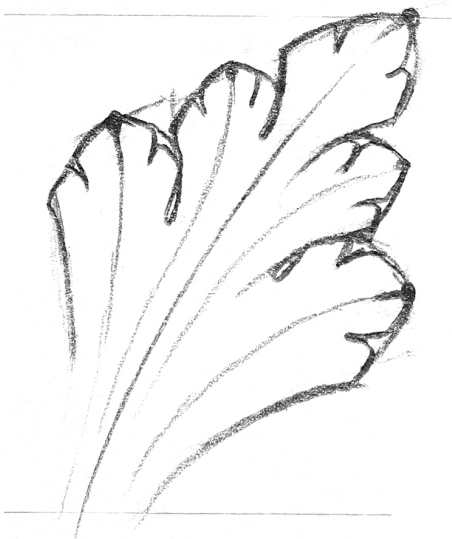
Step 2: As illustrated, divide that rhombus into different parts by creating parallel lines to its lower adjacent sides. The distance between these lines gradually decreases towards the apex.



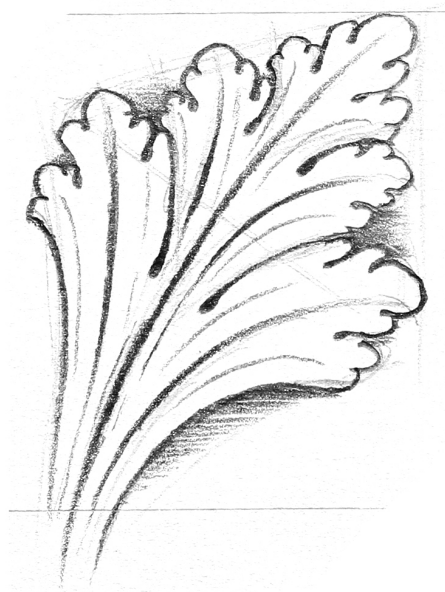
Step 3: Mark the points where these parallel lines and the rhombus edges intersect to identify the leaf apex.



Step 4: Shape the leaf in a basic style. Then, we will see 5 lobes formed: 1 central and 4 secondary lobes on both sides.



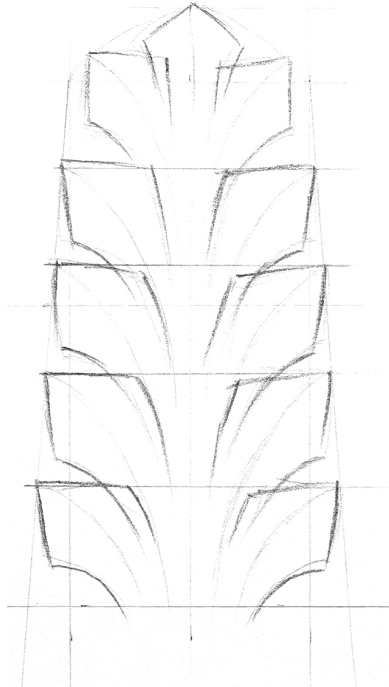
Step 5: Divide each single lobe into 3 secondary sprouts.



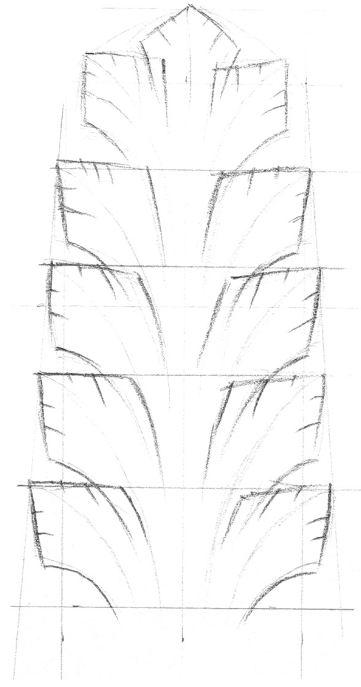
Step 6: Continue dividing each sprout, then finish by polishing our strokes.

A straight Acanthus branch

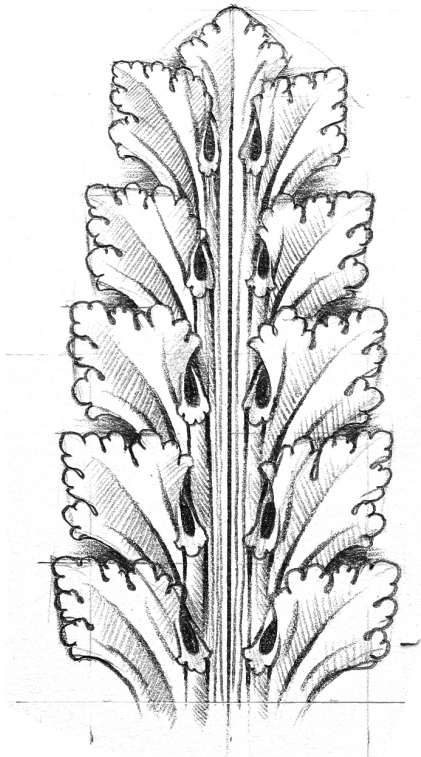
After elaborating on single leaves, our next step is to apply leaf-dividing techniques to a large Acanthus branch.



Step 1: Let's begin with a basic, upright Acanthus branch.

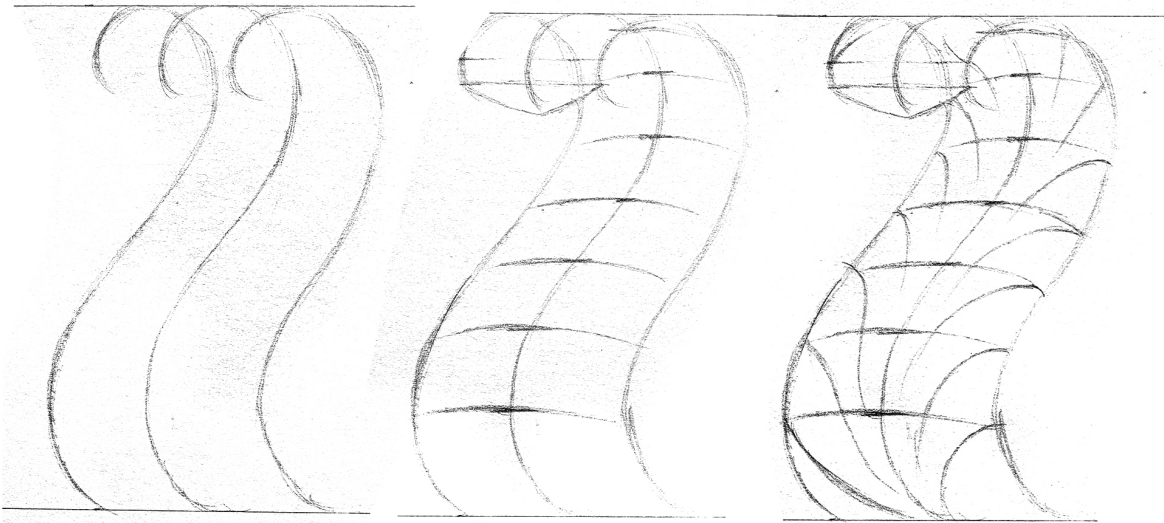


Step 2: Each leaf is drawn within a rhombic shape. Then, turn each rhombus into 5 single lobes like what we did in the previous part.

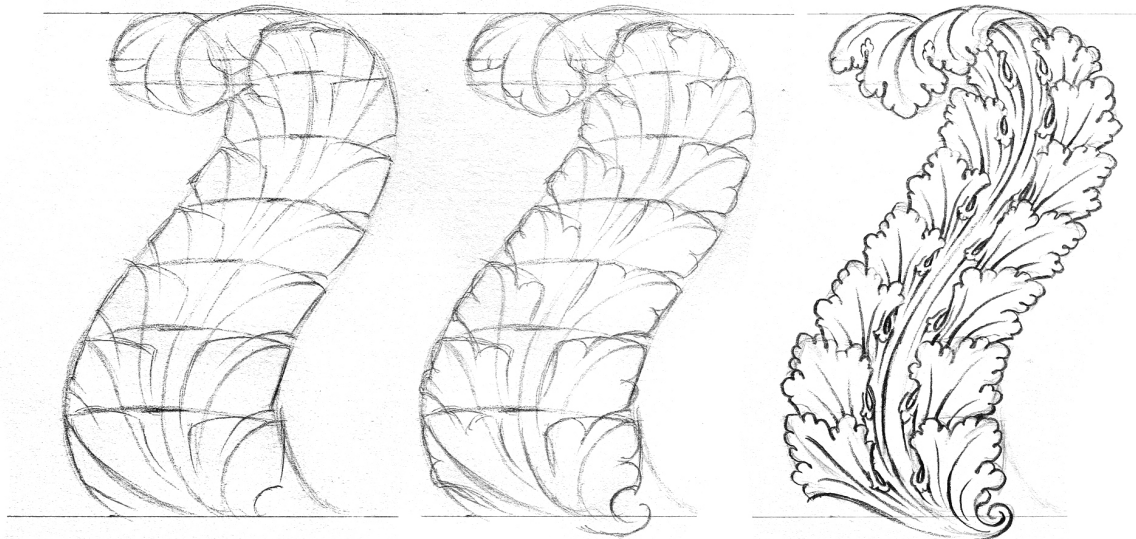


Step 3: Divide all lobes in step 2 into sprouts. At this step, whether those lobes will then be divided again or not depends on how detailed the artist wants. If the Acanthus branch already has too many details, there is no need to create more secondary elements.

A curved Acanthus branch



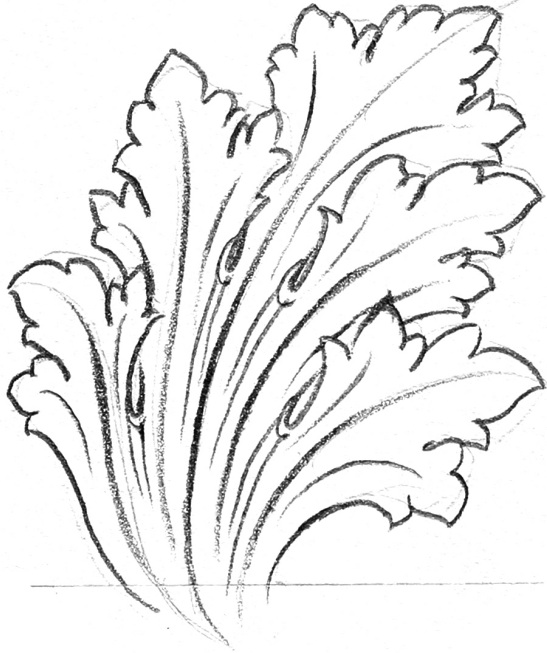
Begin with how to draw a curved Acanthus branch: Creating parallel lines. At the same time, we divide the position of single leaves and create a curved top (*The specific instruction is introduced in Acanthus Guidelines Vol. 1.*)



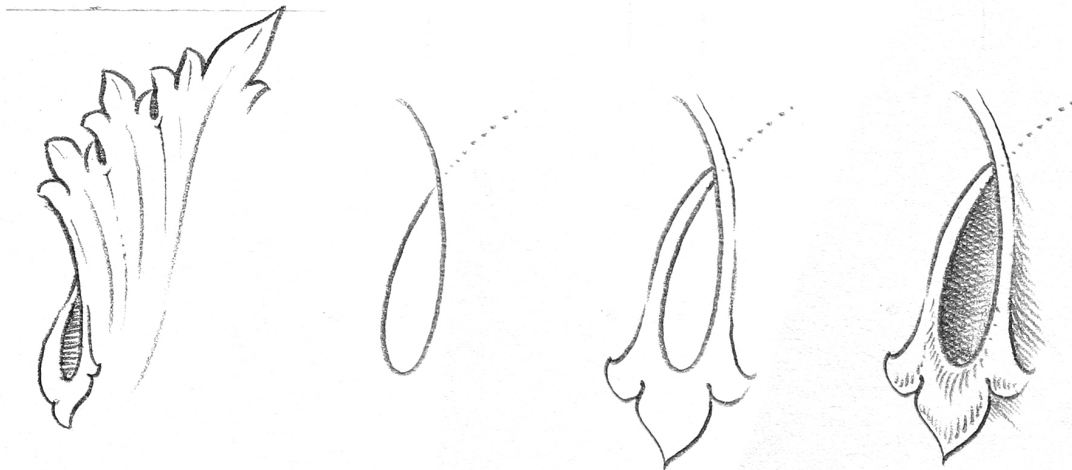
Similar to the upright Acanthus drawing techniques, after dividing single leaves, we will continue the work for a couple of times (*depending on the complexity of the drawing*) to form secondary lobes.

An pointed Acanthus leaf with folds

Beside the oval Acanthus leaves in the previous parts, we can also create a pointed leaf shape.



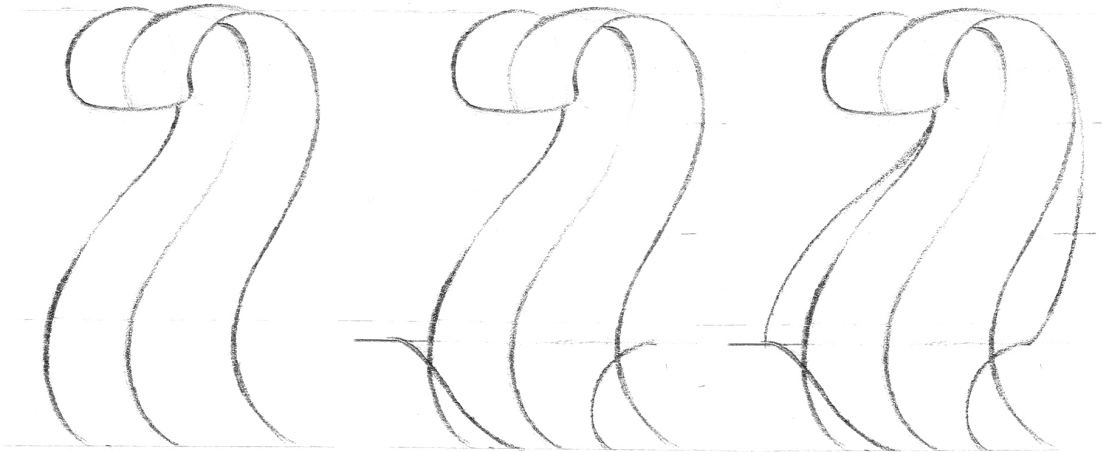
Furthermore, there is one unique element that, if done well, can breathe life to our Acanthus drawing. That is the gap between folds. Similar to the shape of folded clothes, at the intersection between two folds, there will be a loop-like gap. Please follow the illustration below to create this fold.



The shape of these folds among lobes seems like a fish - an oval with a pointed tip. This fold can be remained untouched to keep its natural look or added minor details as illustrated.

Shape an Acanthus branch

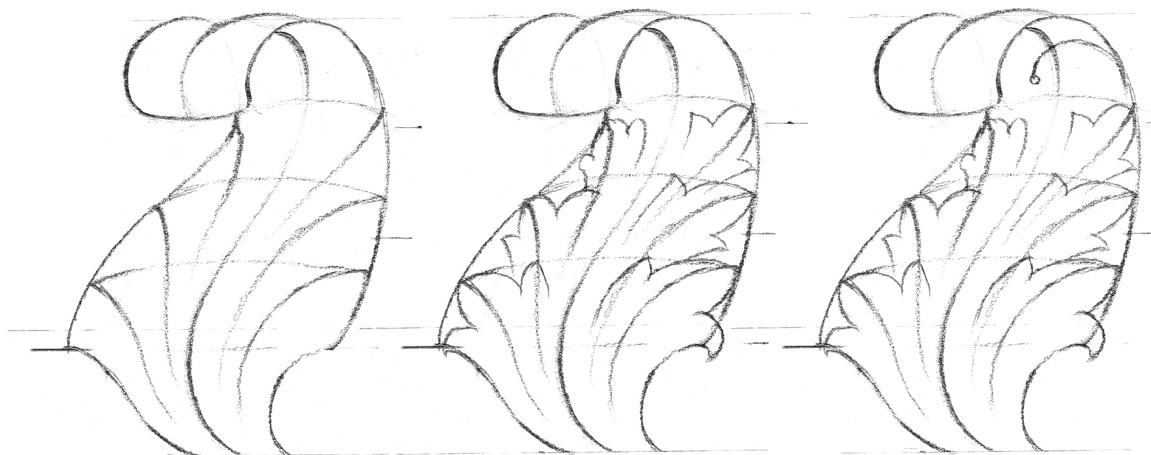
As mentioned several times, an Acanthus branch is usually drawn with parallel, straight or curved lines. There, single leaves are created and arranged by applying the principle of leaves getting smaller towards the tip. However, to create diversity in visual expression, I will share another Acanthus shaping technique with all steps depicted and illustrated below.



Let's begin with a basic Acanthus branch with a curved tip.

From the branch attachment, draw two symmetrical curves on both sides.

Bridge that curved line to the tip. Now, the shape of the Acanthus branch will change.



Position all leaf shapes according to the previous principle.

Position and create small lobes. Note that their sizes should fit the original shape.

Create another detail at the intersection point of our curved tip.



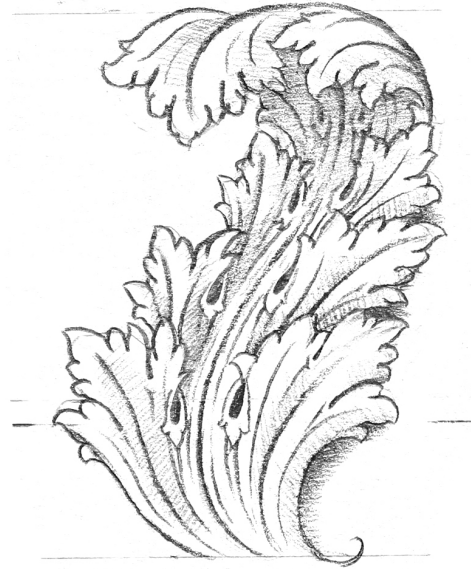
With that stroke, form a single leaf to create visual coherence and harmony for the Acanthus branch.



Continue to shape the leaf apex based on the sketched frame.



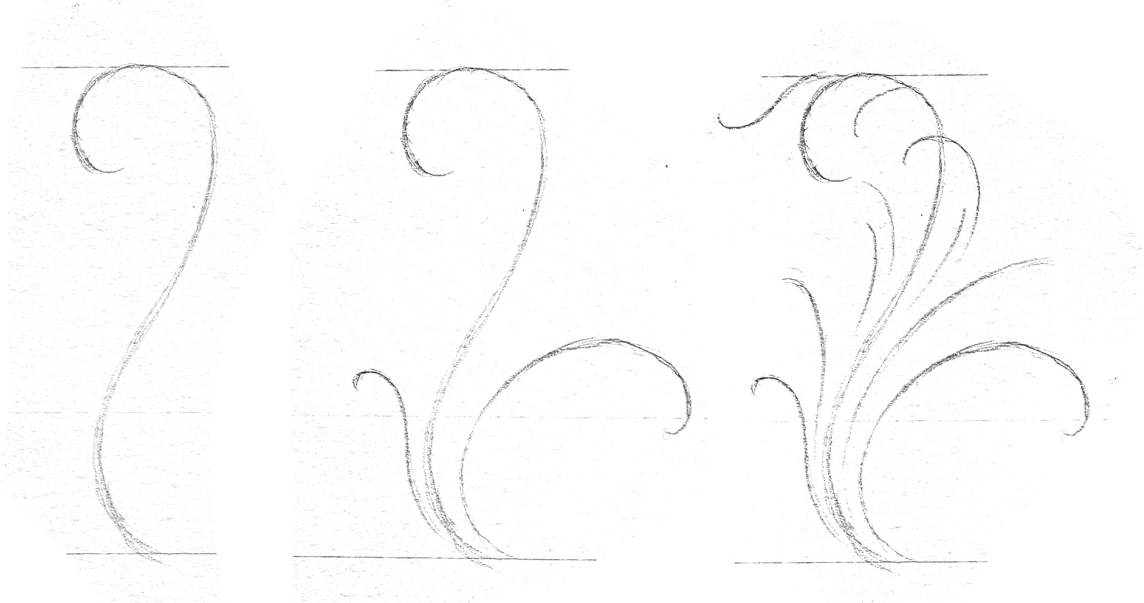
Divide all single leaves into lobes. In this example, I will work on the pointed leaf shape.



A completed Acanthus branch with curved shape.

Combine different Acanthus

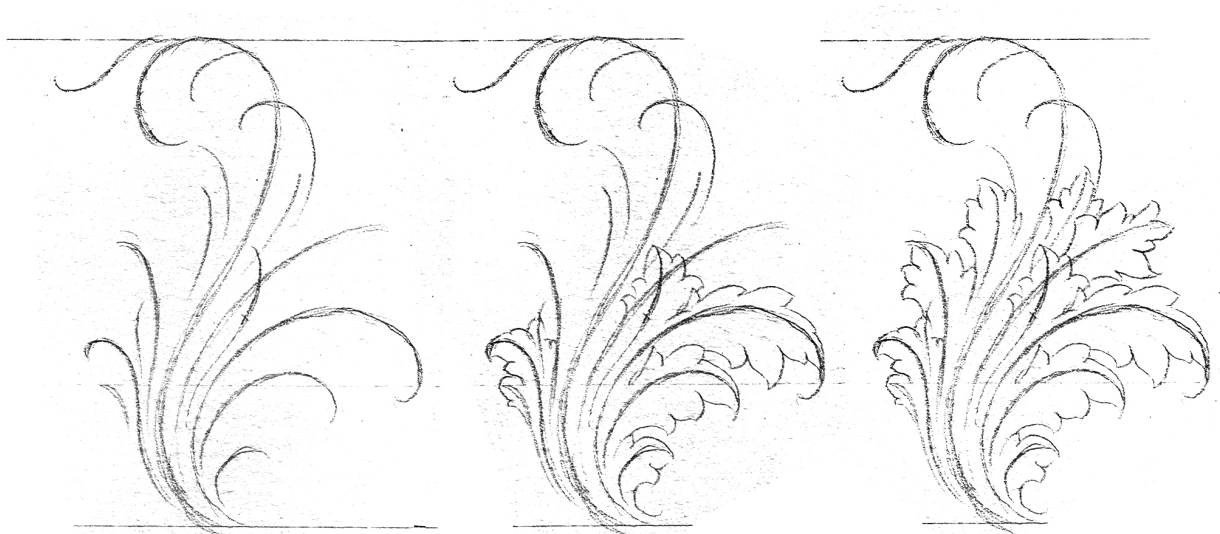
To enrich the Acanthus design/drawing, not only can we create a single branch/blade, but also combine them. However, it is important to balance the presence of primary and subordinate elements to keep the design from losing visual interest.



Create a midrib for a basic shape.

Draw two secondary veins from the axil to shape new leaf blades. These veins are smaller than the original.

Add minor details to create a well-balanced composition for the design.



Continue to elaborate additional details.

Start drawing single leaves based on the sketched veins

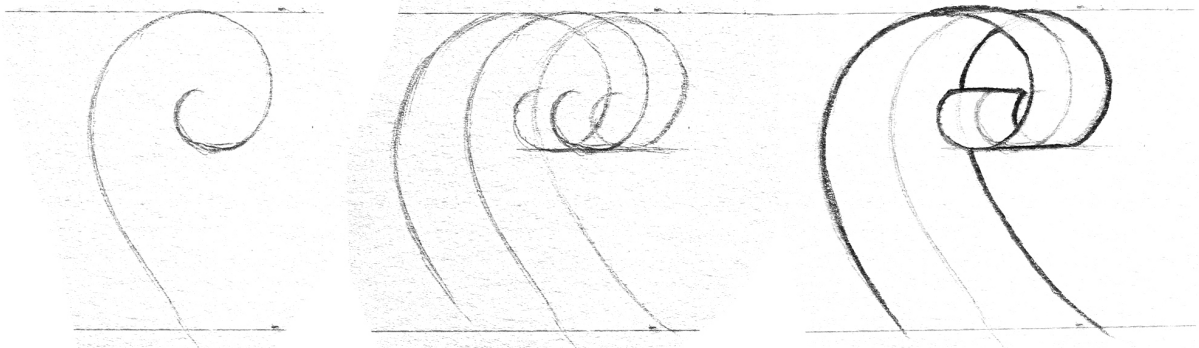
Arrange the superposition of leaves harmoniously



Finish

Bend the Acanthus apex

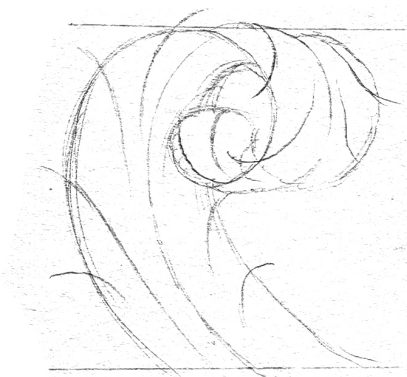
In the previous examples, the apex of the Acanthus is bent downward once. In this section, we will learn how to bend it twice to shape a spiral.



While drawing the midrib, pay attention to the apex shaped like a spiral with its tip pointing up

Draw two lines parallel to the midrib to shape the leaf blade

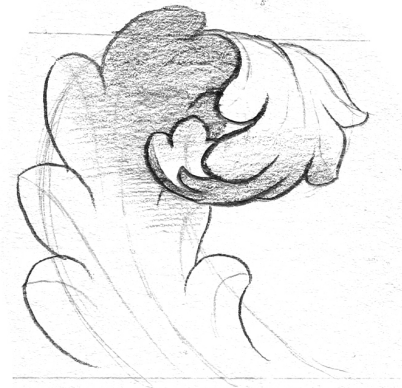
Shape and identify the three-dimensional space of the Acanthus branch



Identify the positions of single leaves that are symmetrical through the midrib.



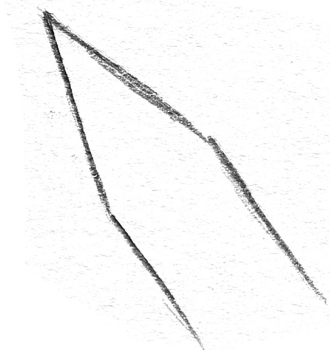
Identify the single leaf shapes based on the sketch.



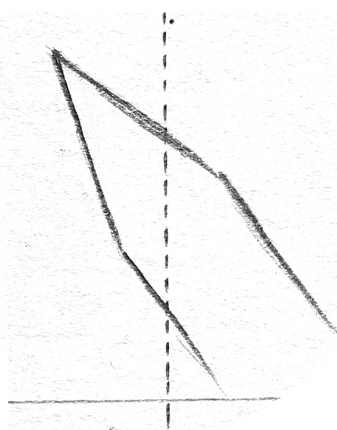
Finish.
The Acanthus apex is bent twice like a spiral.

Create a folded leaf

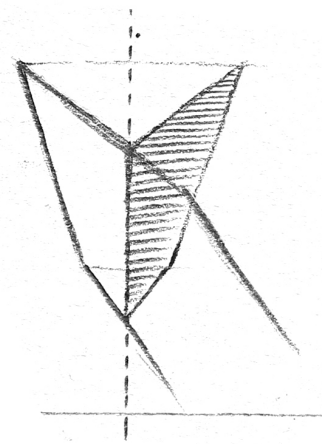
In reality, single leaves do not always follow common directions. Therefore, to make the drawing look more realistic and add vibrancy to our Acanthus branch, we shall create folds for these leaves. Please have a look at the example below.



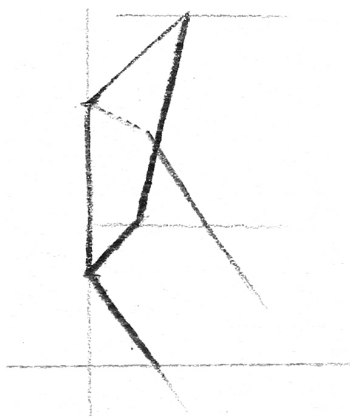
Sketch a simplified image of a single leaf
(similar to the shape of a sword tip.)



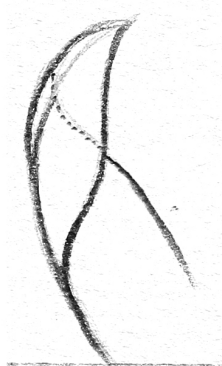
Identify an axis that forms an angle to the leaf axis.



Symmetrically draw the left side of the leaf to that axis.



Erase the half left.



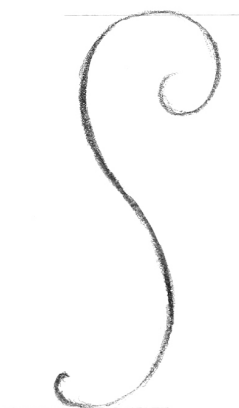
Based on simplified sketches, create curves following the original shape.



A leaf created by applying techniques that we have just learned.

Acanthus sketching techniques

For Acanthus sketching in particular, I use the image of a scroll (*or a bolt of cloth or banner*) to visualize the space of the whole drawing. This technique will be useful for both simple and complex designs since it gives us a better overview of how details should be arranged.



In the first steps, we will shape the drawing by using main veins from the Acanthus branch, along with primary and subordinate elements properly arranged.



From these veins, create more scrolls/cloth bolts by drawing parallel lines on both sides. This is not only the process of creating space for our leaf blades but also arranging the ornamental superposition for visual impression.

Exercise no.1

We've been through some fundamental elements in the advanced Acanthus guidelines. For a comprehensive assessment, I will accompany you to create a design based on the drawing that we have created in the Acanthus sketching techniques.



Let's begin by creating an upright Acanthus branch with an S-shaped. This branch is accompanied by an extra Acanthus branch on the left. Elaborate that branch with single leaves.



Draw main veins for another secondary Acanthus branch on the right.



Elaborate that Acanthus branch with detailed leaves.



Insert an extra Acanthus branch in the middle
(based on our previous sketch.)



Create more additional details. Note that these details should have simpler and smaller shapes to avoid conflict between primary and subordinate elements.



In this step, using a mechanical pencil for polishing the drawing is recommended.

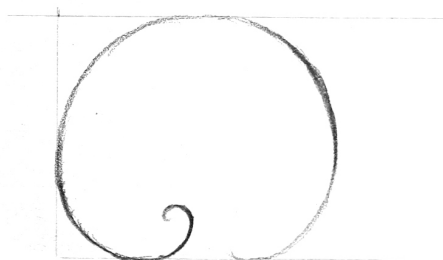


The drawing with a mechanical pencil after clean-ups.



Complete the Acanthus drawing by using shading techniques, which will be further discussed in the second part of this material.

Exercise | Outline a horizontal Acanthus



Begin with a spiral-shaped stroke.



From the ornament's starting point, insert another wavy Acanthus branch interwoven with the first one.



While adding extra details, please make sure that two original strokes are the dominant elements of the drawing.



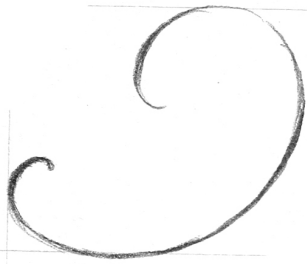
Sketch an Acanthus branch based on the main veins that we have just sketched.



Finish polishing other parts. The size of details should be varied to balance the visual harmony between primary - secondary elements.



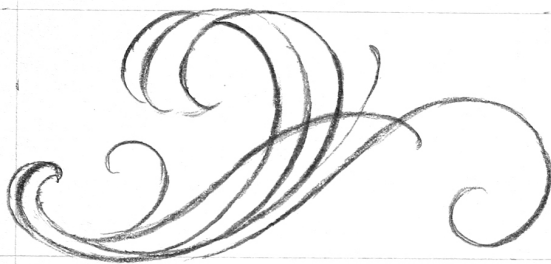
Finish



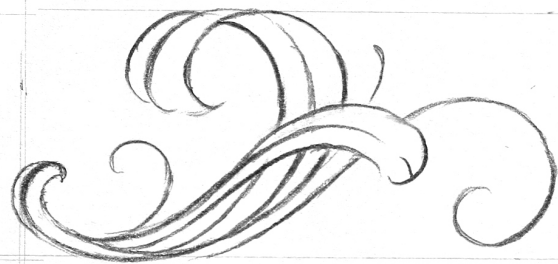
In the second example, we will begin with an upward curve.



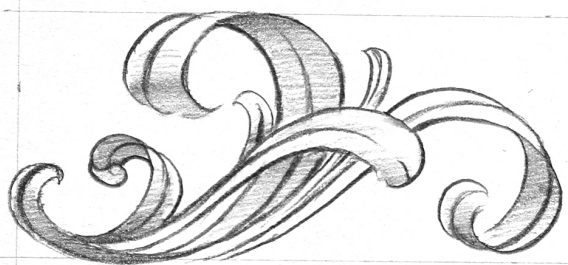
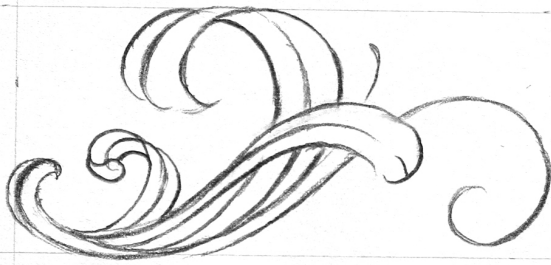
Create another branch in the opposite direction, and add extra branches to visually balance the drawing.



Use the “scroll/cloth bolt drawing techniques” to position and create space for our Acanthus blades.



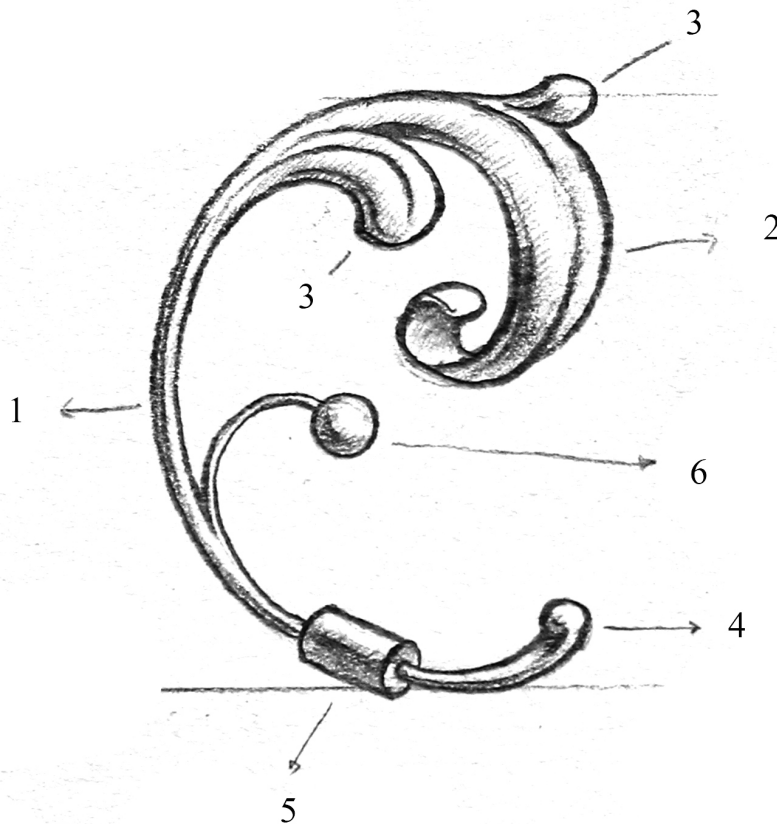
Continue to sketch other branches. Please mind their superposition.



Finish

Analyze the Acanthus composition

For intermediates, when drawing Acanthus, we can explore more than just one branch. Details like branch attachments, leaves, flowers and roots all hold a functional role in the design. Below is the description of the components that can be used in a completed Acanthus drawing. Each component will be well discussed and analyzed in the following sections.



1. Stem/branch

It's a thin, leafless part that shapes the Acanthus branch.

2. Leaf blade

It's a combination of many single Acanthus leaf shapes.

3. Lobe

It's a secondary blade added to support the main leaf blade.

4. Stump

It's the starting point of an Acanthus branch.

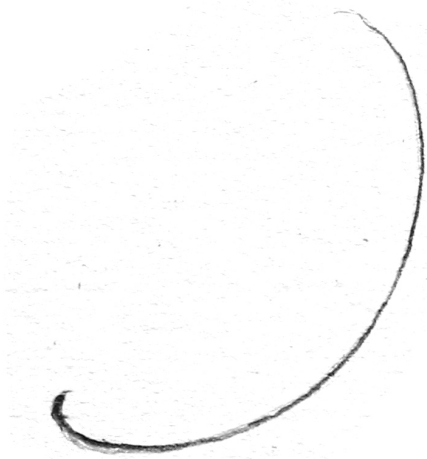
5. Leaf attachment

The connecting part is a small part, usually located on the body/branch.

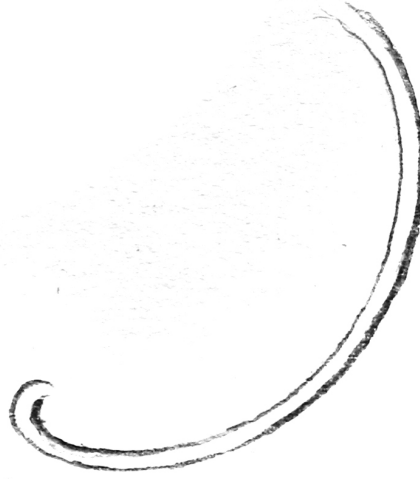
6. Minor details

Minor details can be varied from flowers to grains or seeds, etc.

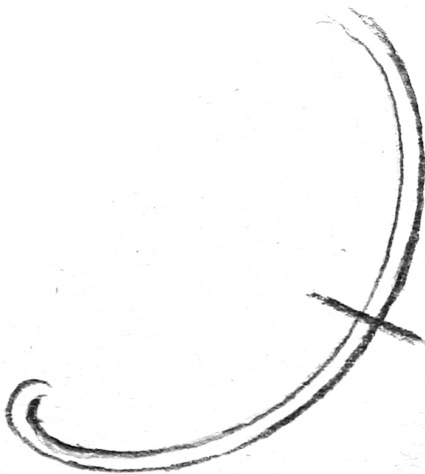
Draw an Acanthus stem/branch



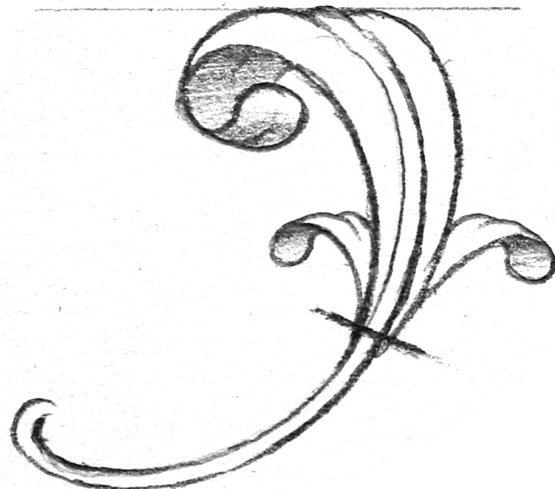
Similar to how we draw veins, let's begin with a curved stroke.



Draw a line parallel to the one we have just created to thicken its body.



A leaf blade can start anywhere as long as it suits the artist's personal preferences. In this example, I will place it in the center of the stem.

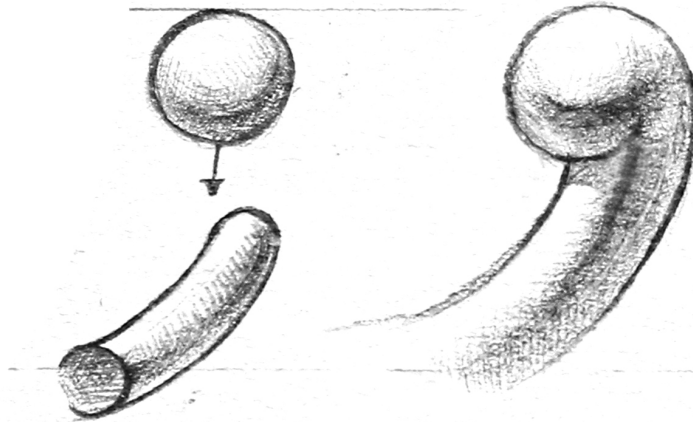


The Acanthus leaf blade will grow from the middle of the stem. Thus, for an Acanthus branch in general, the leaf blade and stem will be clearly positioned.

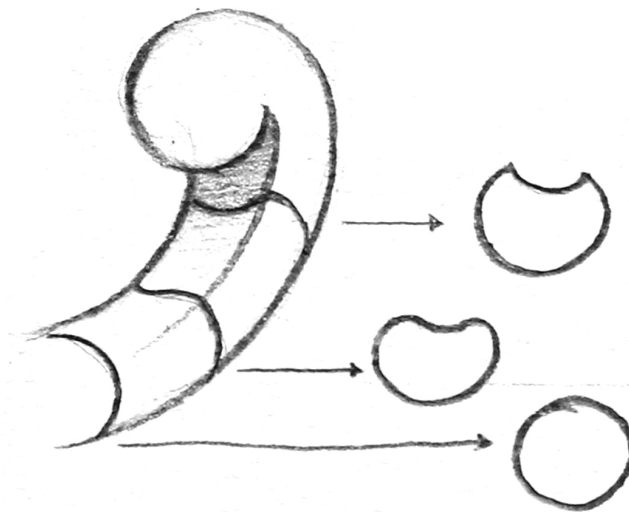
Acanthus stump drawing techniques

Acanthus stump is the point where all details of an Acanthus ornament begin. As the law of nature, it will help other parts of the ornament maintain their visual coherence.

Type 1: The spherical stump

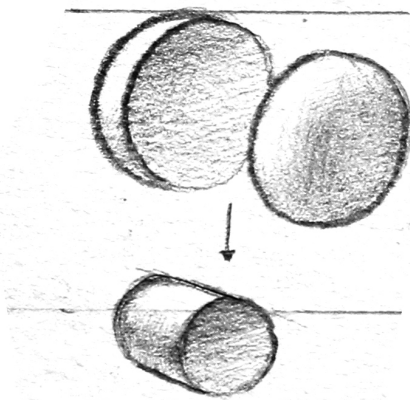


The first type is a combination of a sphere and a long cylinder which represents the Acanthus stem that we have learned in the previous section. By bridging these two blocks, we can create a good starting point for the ornament.

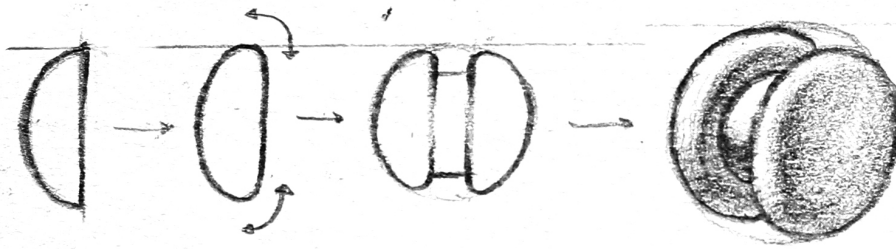


Above are the cross-sections when a cylinder (the stem) moves towards the cylinder to show how its shape changes. This illustration can support the shading techniques which will be introduced in the next section.

Type 2



The second type of the Acanthus stump is created by combining two half of a sphere with a cylinder in the middle.



To create this Acanthus stump, we start by cutting off around 1/3 the sphere.

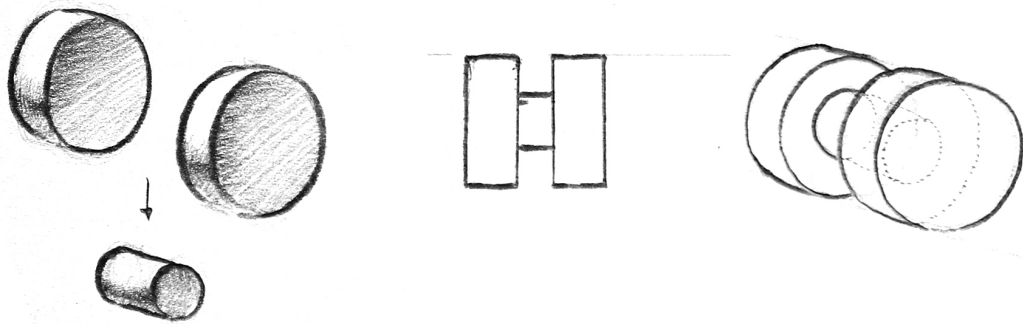
Its hard edges will be rounded to soften the design.

Put those 2 elements symmetrically to each other through a cylinder, which has a smaller size.

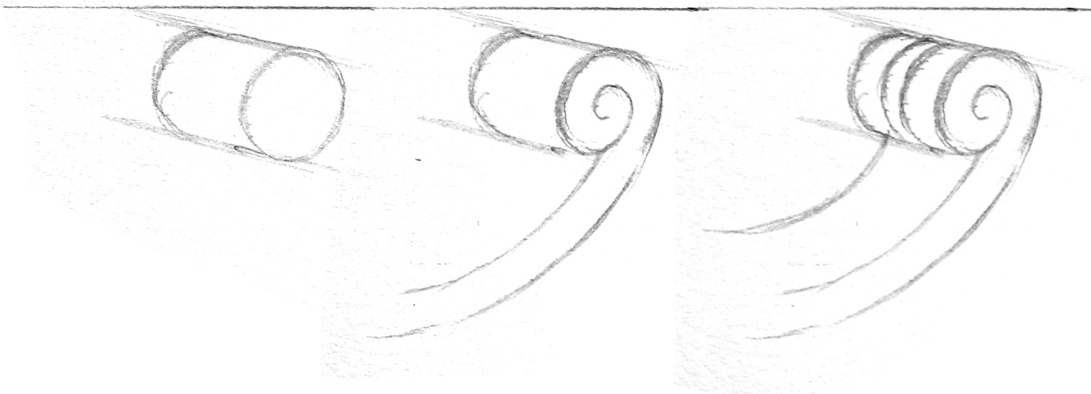


Overall, although the second-type is a cleavage and combination of shapes, it is still created within a sphere. The cylindrical between these two hemispheres also links with the Acanthus stem in the previous section.

Type 3



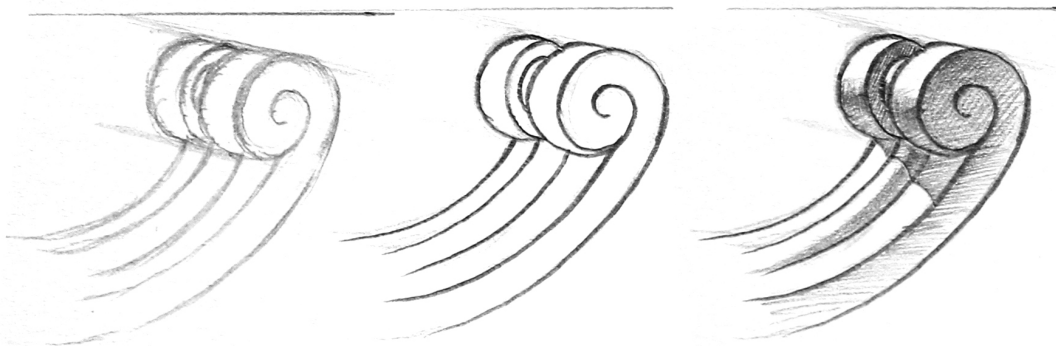
Similar to the second Acanthus stump, this third type is also made from 3 parts. However, this time, all of them are cylinders, two of which are flat on either side.



Draw a horizontal cylinder.

Stick that cylinder to the Acanthus body.

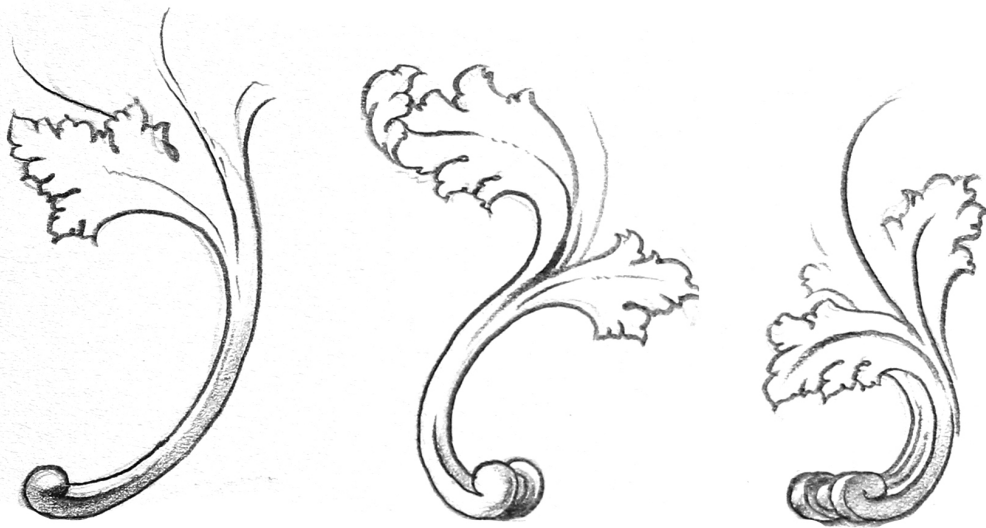
Divide the cylinder into three parts.



Decrease the size of the central cylinder.

Do the linework and clean up the sketch.

Finish. With this form, the Acanthus stem can be converted to a flat shape.

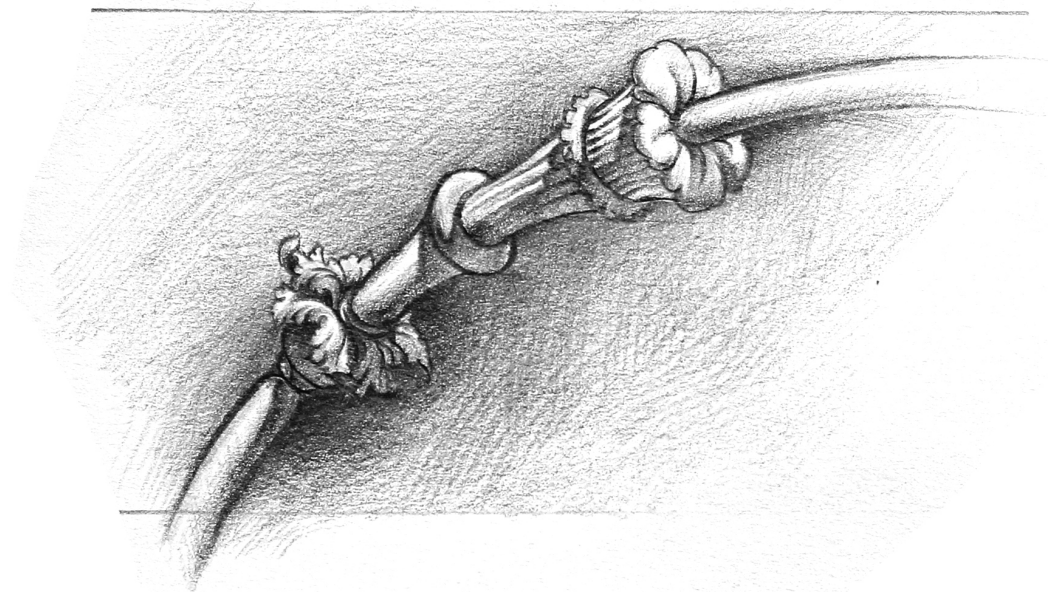


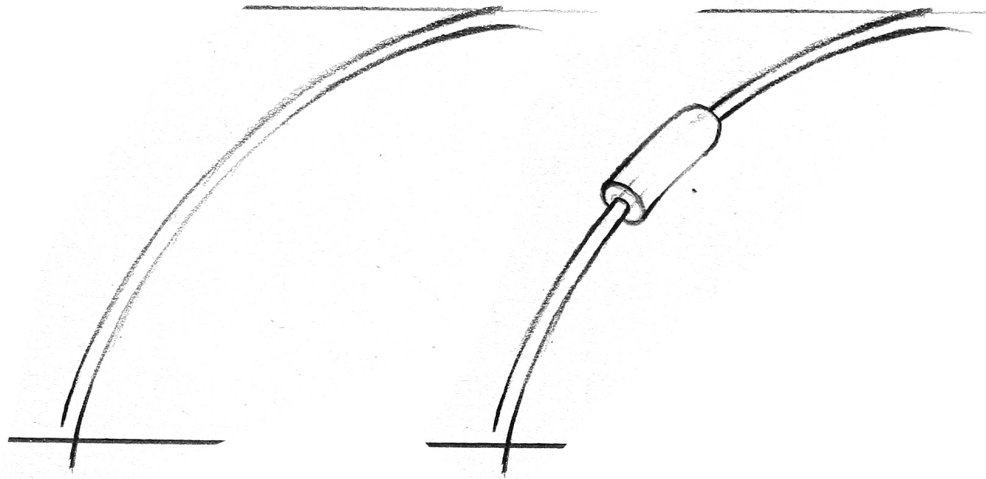
The summary of three stump drawing techniques in the previous sections.

The connection knot

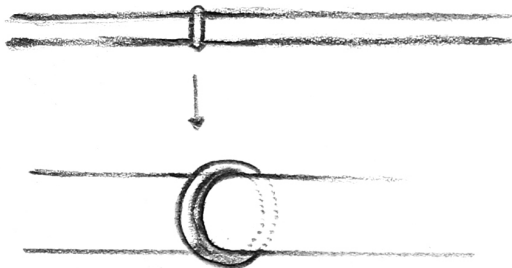
Among compositions of a completed Acanthus stem, we have basically accomplished the stump and branch drawing techniques. Our next goal is the connection knot. Even though considered as a minor detail in certain points of view, in fact, using the connection knot can make the drawing more impressive, maintain visual coherence and balance its layout.

These knots are usually inserted between excessively long Acanthus stems/branches in the design. Obviously, a cylindrical slender stem without any supporting details will be boring.



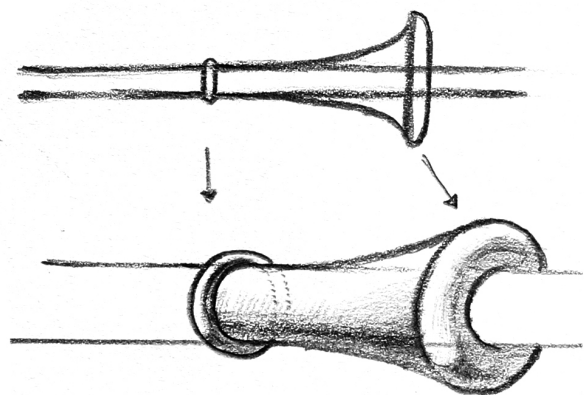


To make it easy to understand, let's have a look at two illustrations above - one Acanthus stem without a connection knot (left) and one with a connection knot (right). Based on the description, we can see that the connection knot usually has a cylindrical shape, the diameter of which is larger than the stem. However, depending on personal purposes, sometimes it is merely drawn as a ring surrounding the Acanthus stem.

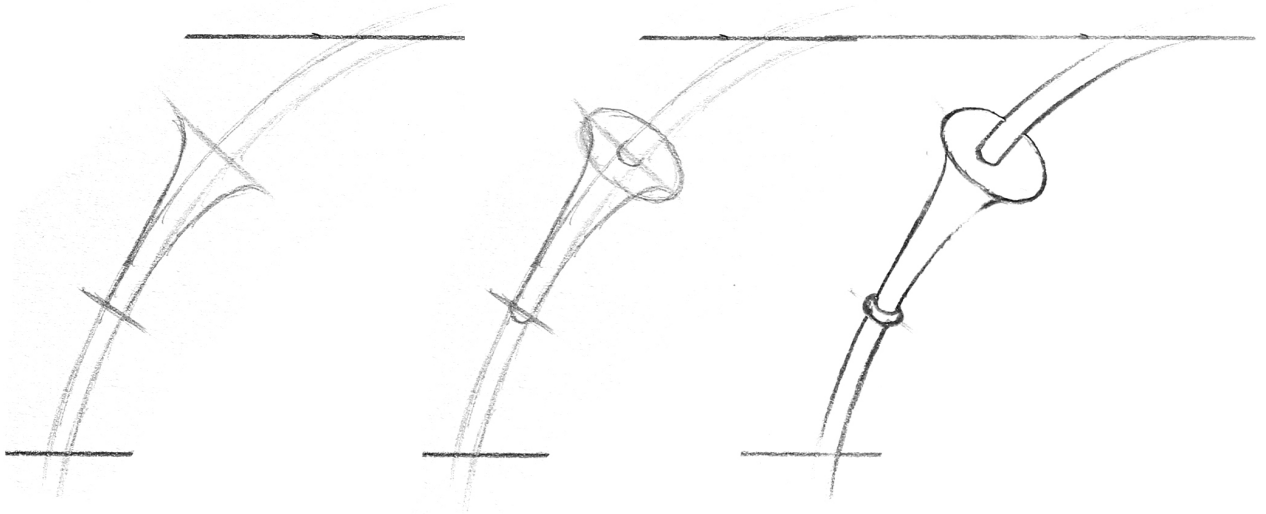


By drawing a ring around the Acanthus, we can somehow create a certain highlight to the design.

In the other direction, let's start with a trumpet-shaped connection knot. Its base has the same size with the Acanthus stem but gradually grows bigger towards the top.



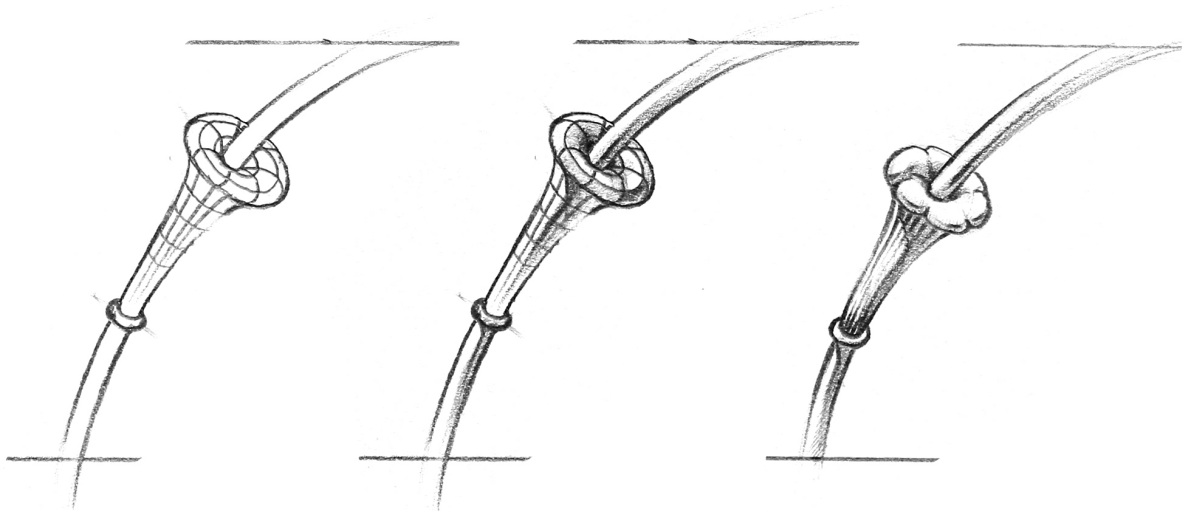
Vi du 1



Let's begin with a trumpet shape attached to the Acanthus stem.

At its top, draw an oval to create a three-dimensional space for our connection knot.

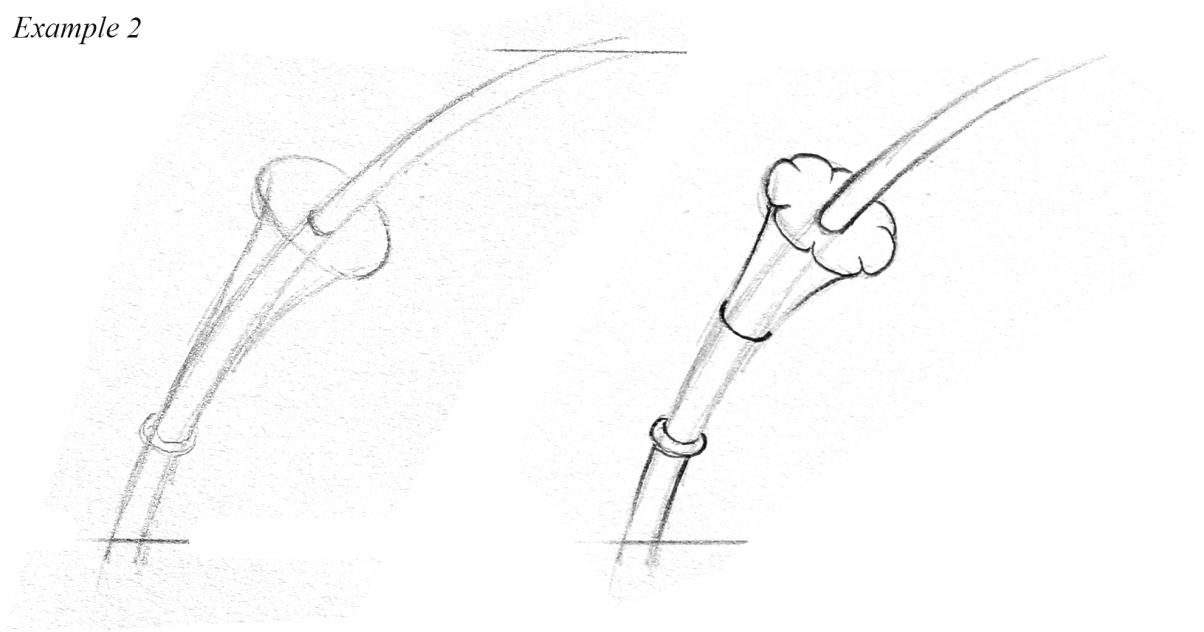
Erase any excess sketch to polish main lines of the ornament.



From the perpendicular intertwin illustrated above, we can see the space and shape of this knot. At its upper part, the closer towards the Acanthus stem, the more concave it becomes. The purpose of this drawing technique is to support the shading instruction later on.

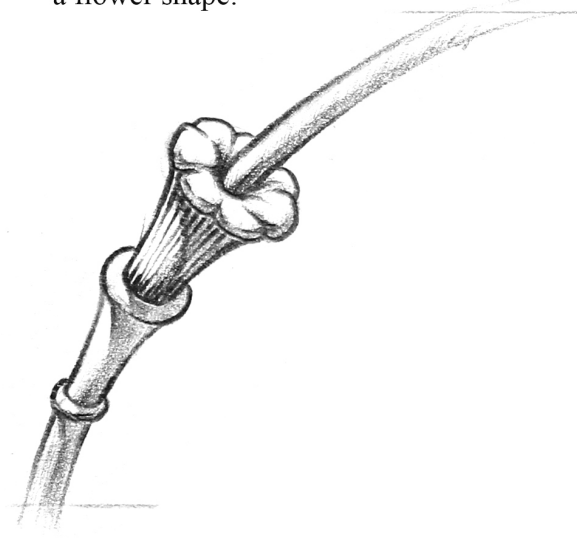
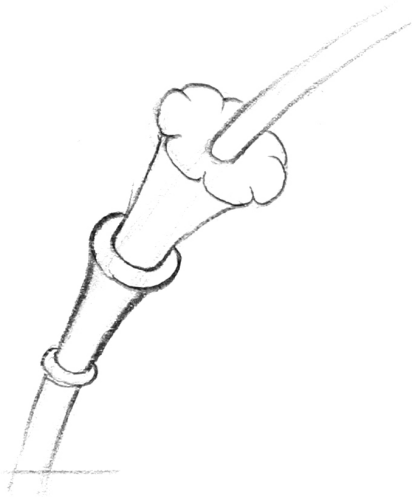
Finish

Example 2



Once again, let's begin creating a trumpet shape with an oval at the top.

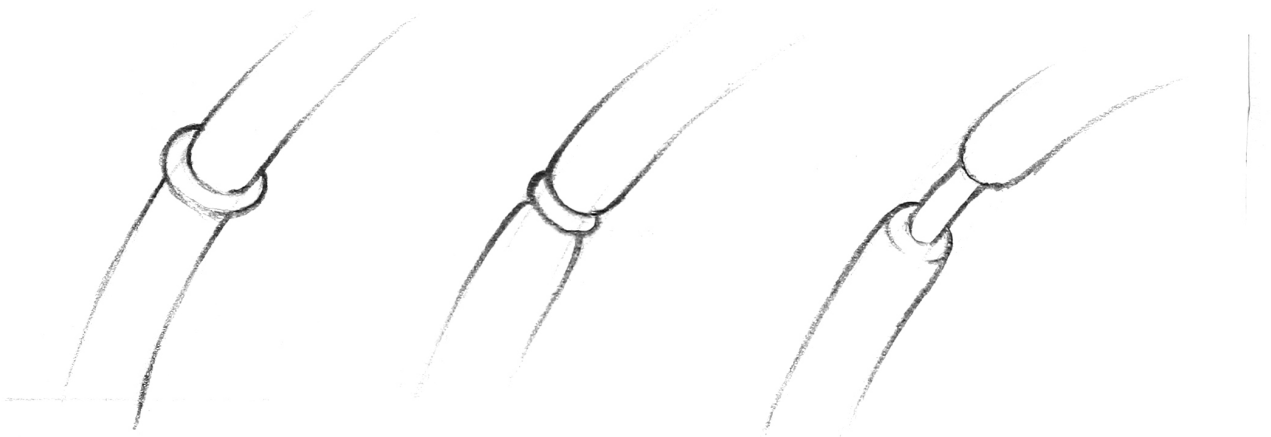
Differently, in this example, we will create one more layer in the middle of the connection knot and add a ring below. The oval will be drawn with a flower shape.



After cleaning up unnecessary sketches, in the connection knot, we will draw an oval with a smaller size than the main to create overlapping effects.

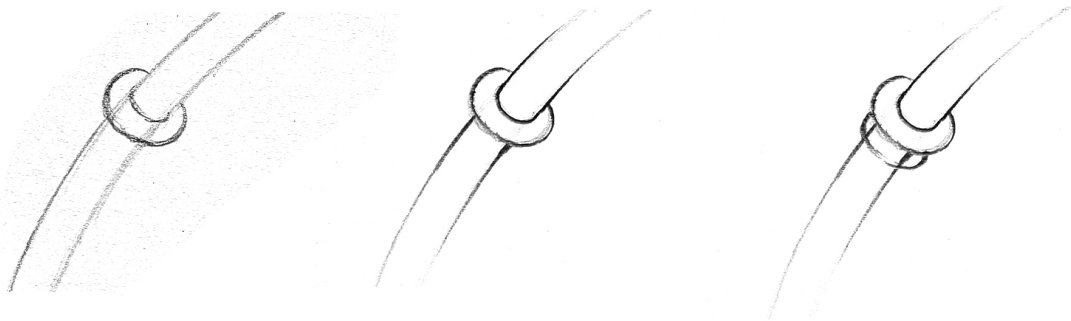
Finish

Some types of connection circles



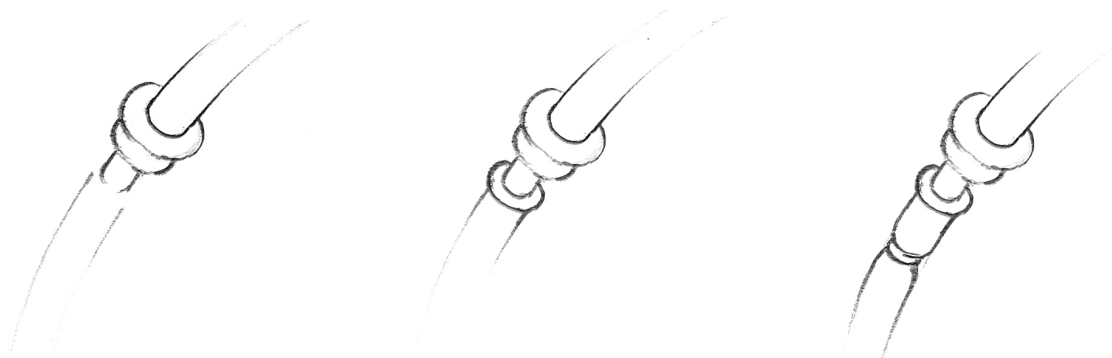
In the previous sections, I have mentioned about using a circle/ring as a connection knot. Here are 3 techniques you can apply into ornament design.

Example 3 | Combine different types of circles



Let's begin with the circle that is larger than the Acanthus stem.

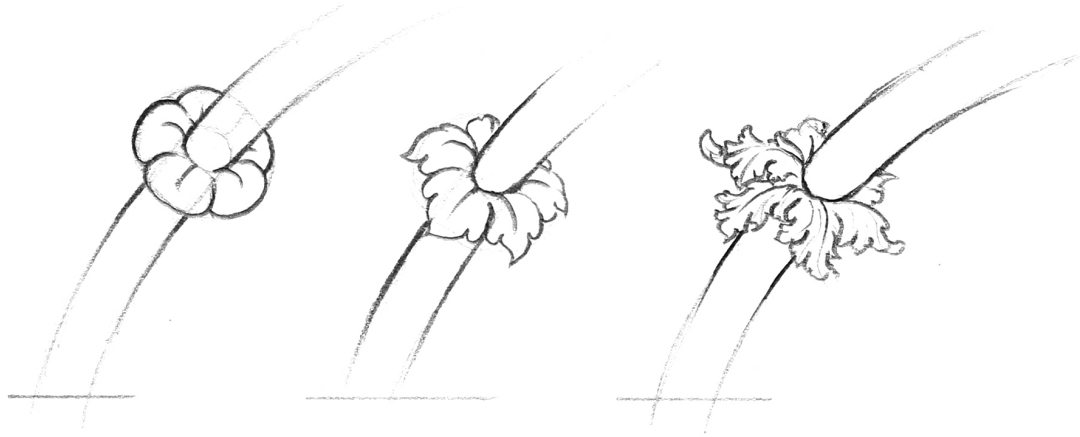
Draw another circle below.



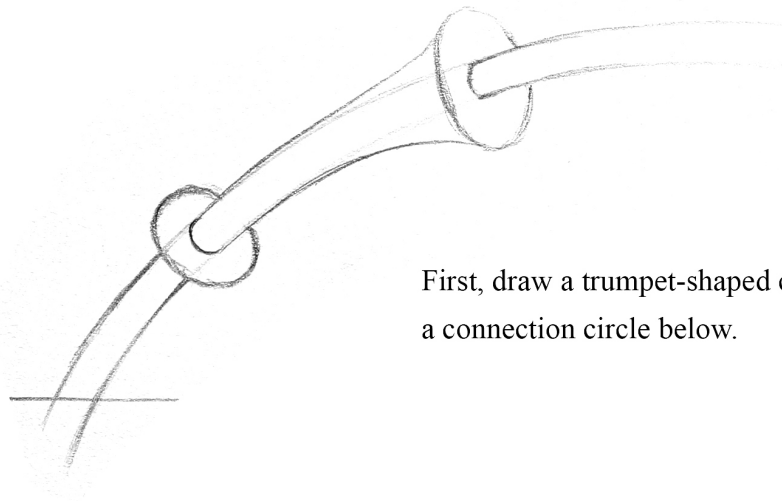
Bore the Acanthus stem to create a smaller circle, and combine it with other details to finish.

Some types of connection circles

Creating connection details is more complicated than that of connection circles. Among several drawing techniques, here are some common ones: round petals, pointed petals and Acanthus ornaments.

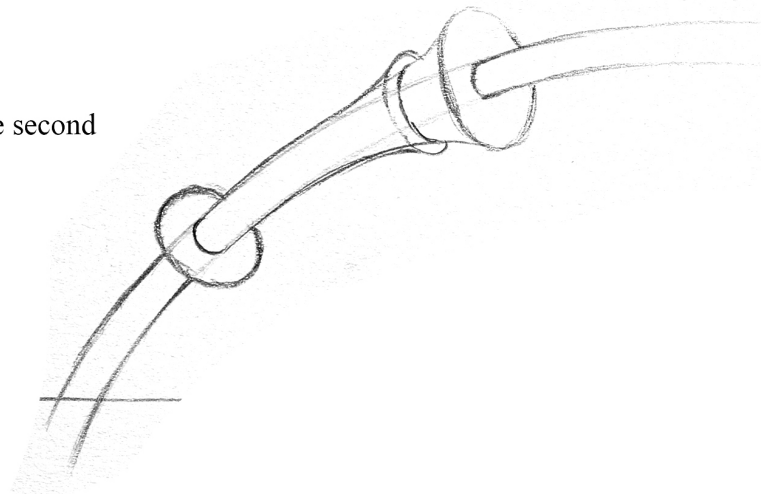


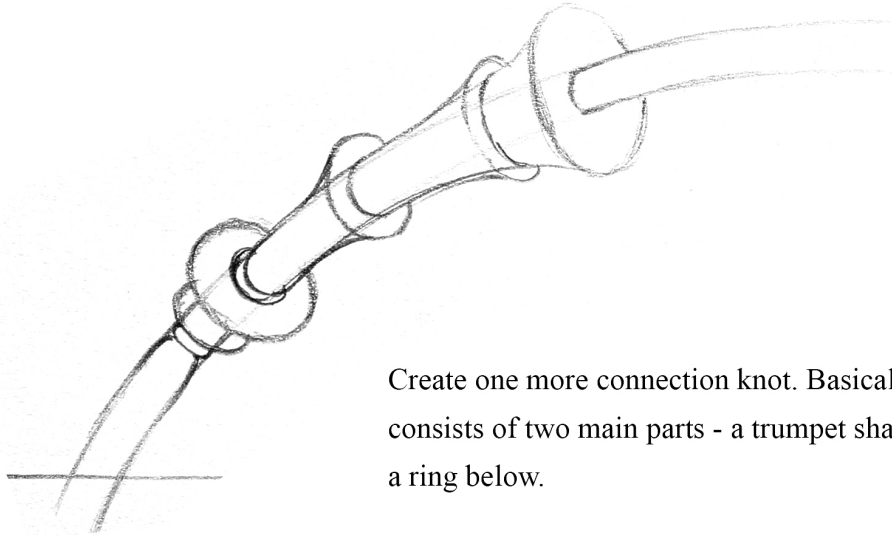
Example of how to create a connection circle (step by step.)



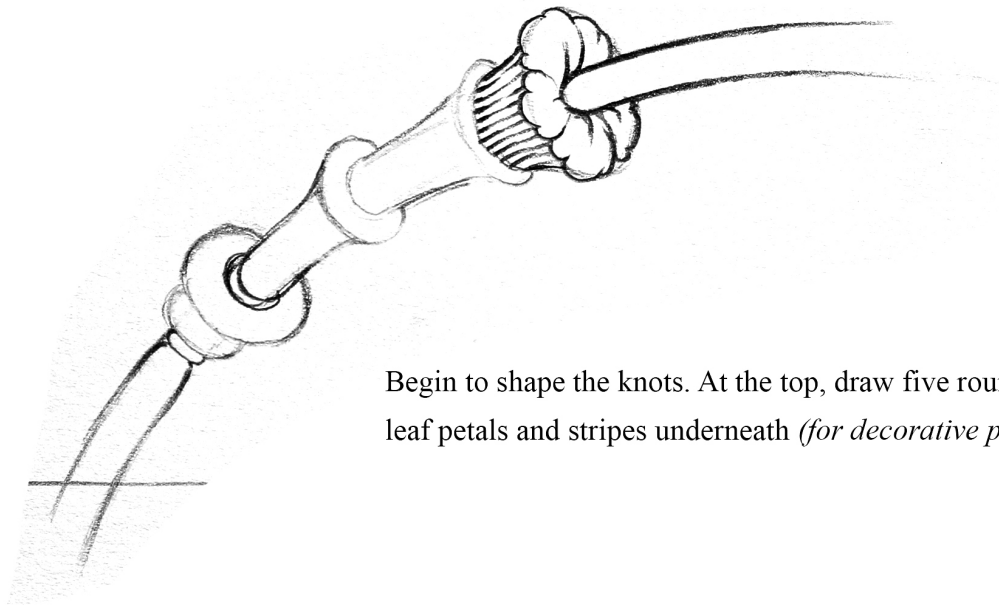
First, draw a trumpet-shaped connection knot with a connection circle below.

Applying overlaying techniques to create the second knot above the original one *(as illustrated.)*

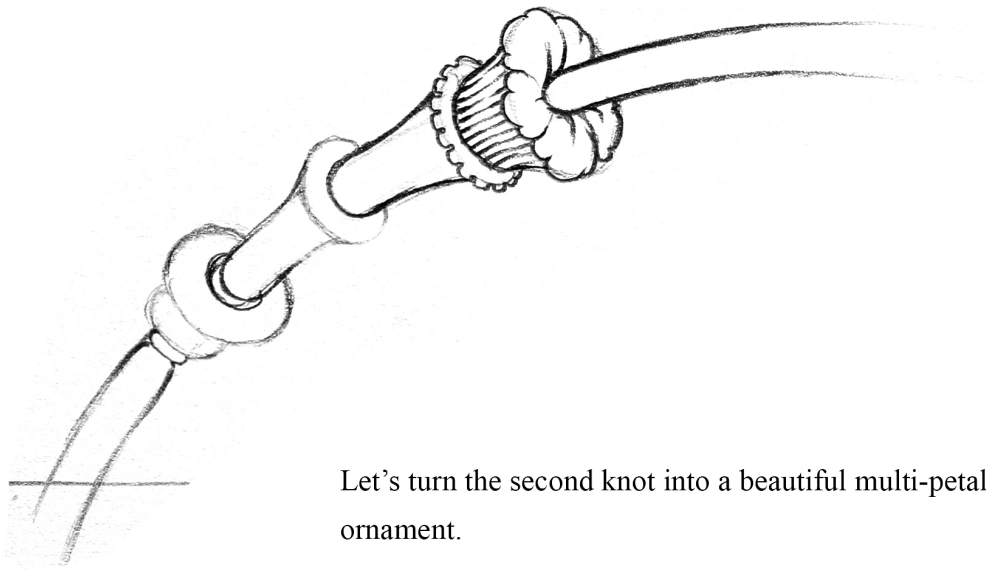




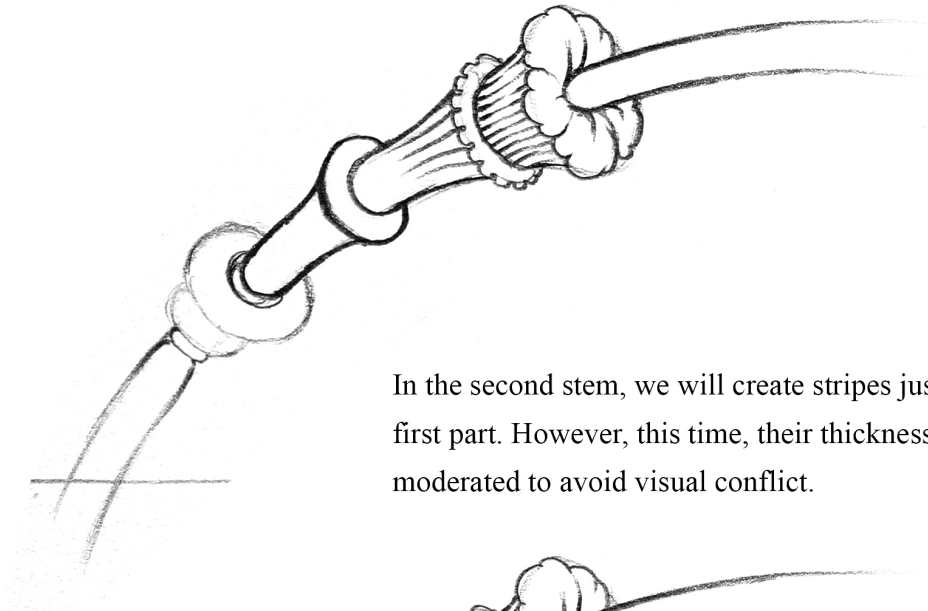
Create one more connection knot. Basically, this big knot consists of two main parts - a trumpet shape above and a ring below.



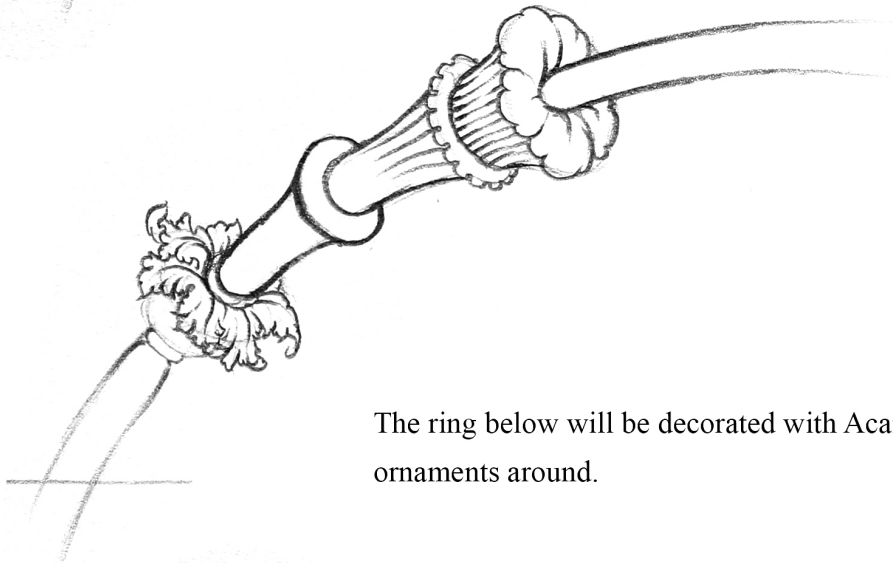
Begin to shape the knots. At the top, draw five rounded leaf petals and stripes underneath (*for decorative purposes.*)



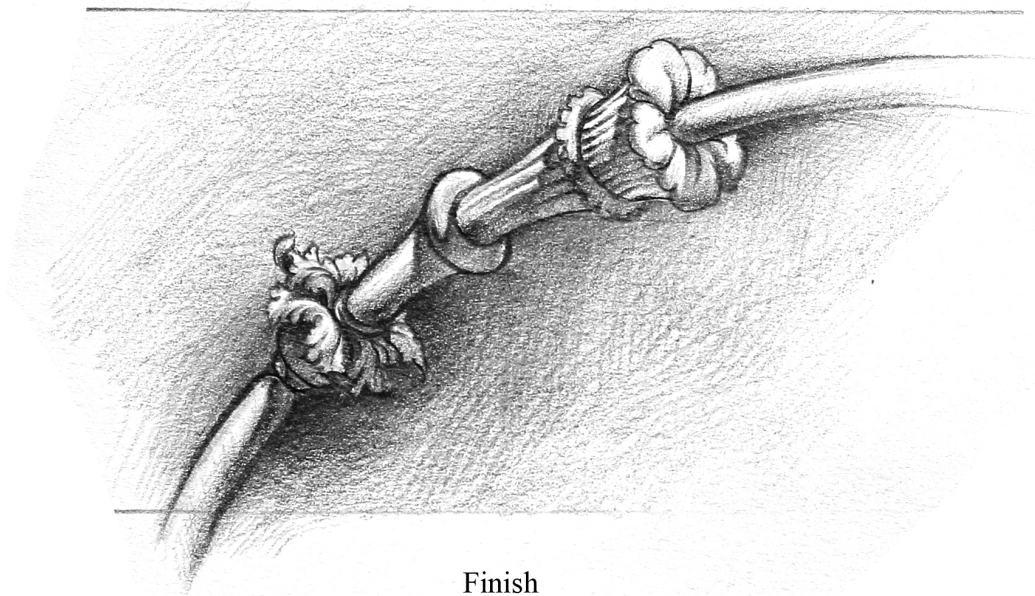
Let's turn the second knot into a beautiful multi-petal ornament.



In the second stem, we will create stripes just like the first part. However, this time, their thickness will be moderated to avoid visual conflict.



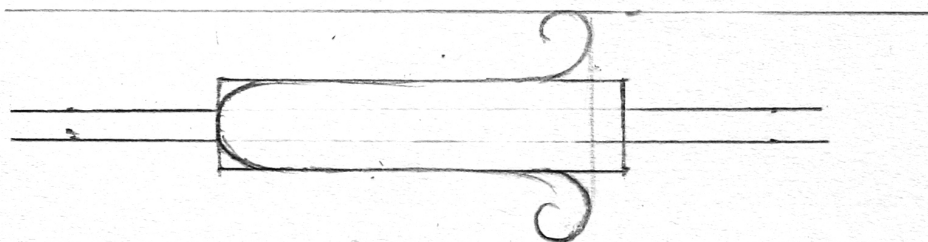
The ring below will be decorated with Acanthus ornaments around.



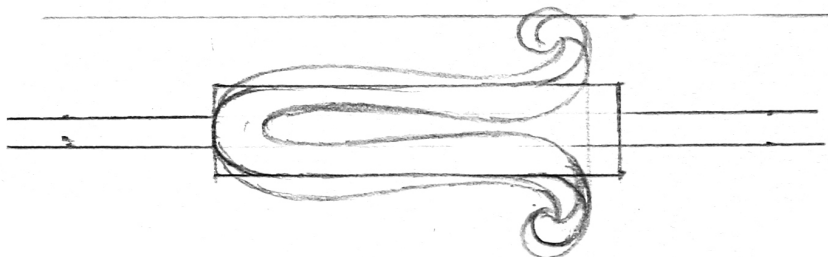
Finish

Acanthus connection knot

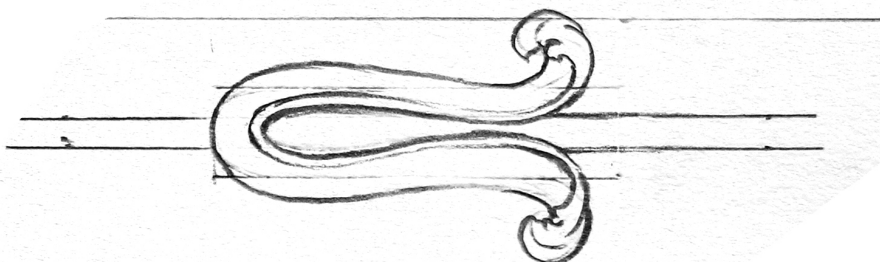
In the last section, the ornamented connection knot is created in a trumpet shape with a wide top and smaller base. Next, we will use Acanthus ornament to decorate the connection knot.



Generally, all connection knots can start from one rectangle. In the first example, based on the length of a rectangle, draw two Acanthus veins extending outward.

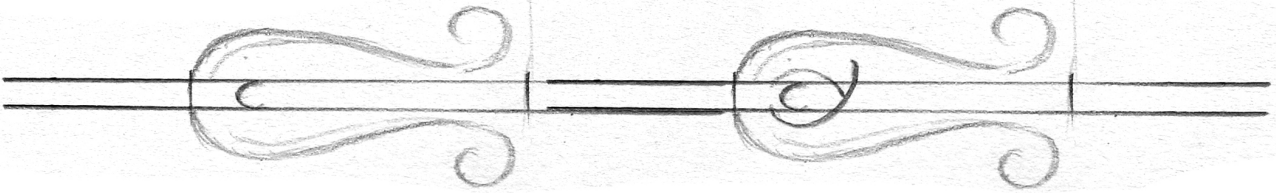


Following these main veins, draw two Acanthus leaves. In the first style, two Acanthus leaves will not overlap each other, but separate to form a gap in the middle.

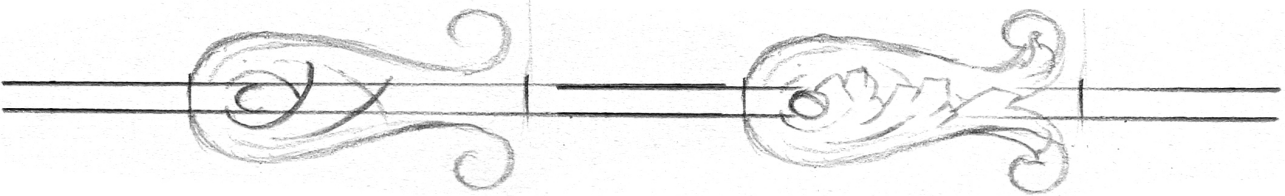


Elaborate the details of the Acanthus.

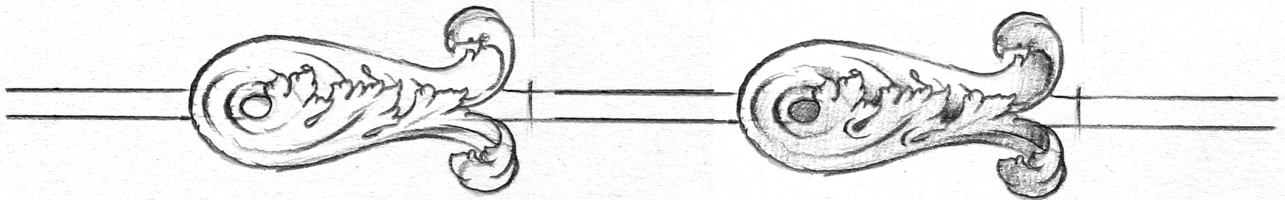
Example 2



Similar to the first example, the second drawing is made of two Acanthus veins. However, the shape of the connection knot now changes. Instead of a standard rectangle, the body of the ornament will get larger towards its base, smaller at the neck and extend again (*as illustrated in the first example*).

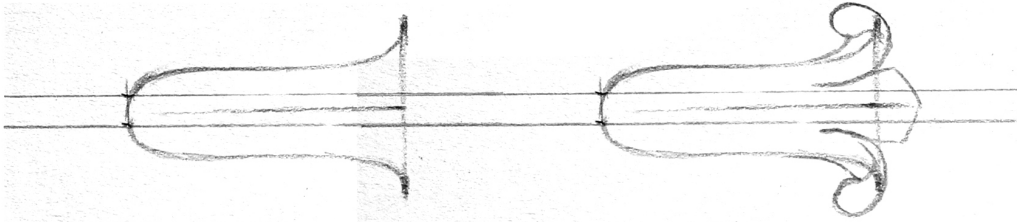


Beside that difference, now these two Acanthus leaves will overlap each other. To create a good layout, we will draw secondary veins which form a curved line. Also, their endpoints will intersect in the middle. Based on these secondary veins, we can create basic shapes for secondary Acanthus leaves.

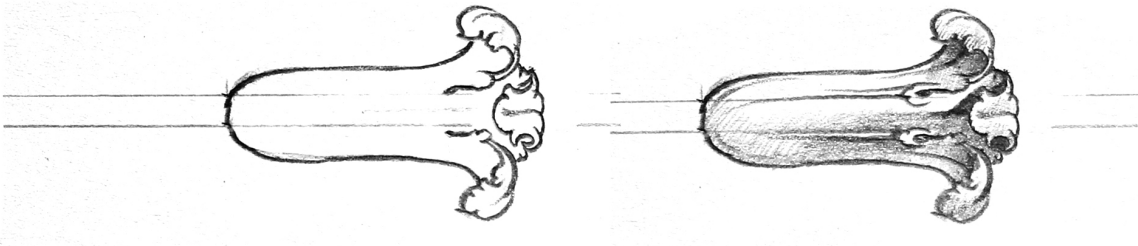


Complete the drawing based on the details we have sketched.

Example 3

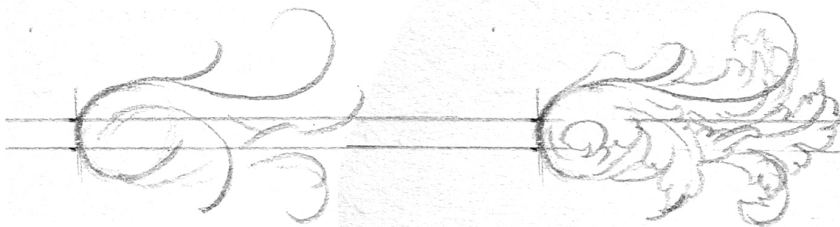


This is the third technique to draw connection knots from the Acanthus leaf. This type also consists of 3 Acanthus leaves - two are created in the previous examples and one in the center.

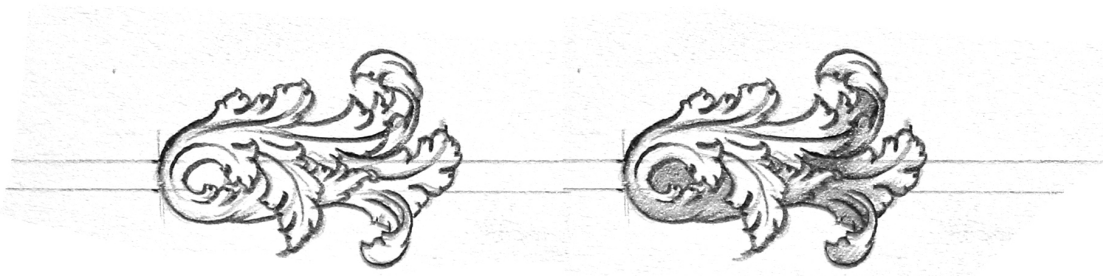


Add more details for a beautiful finish. Please note that it may be necessary to overlap leaf folds at the intersection of the leaves.

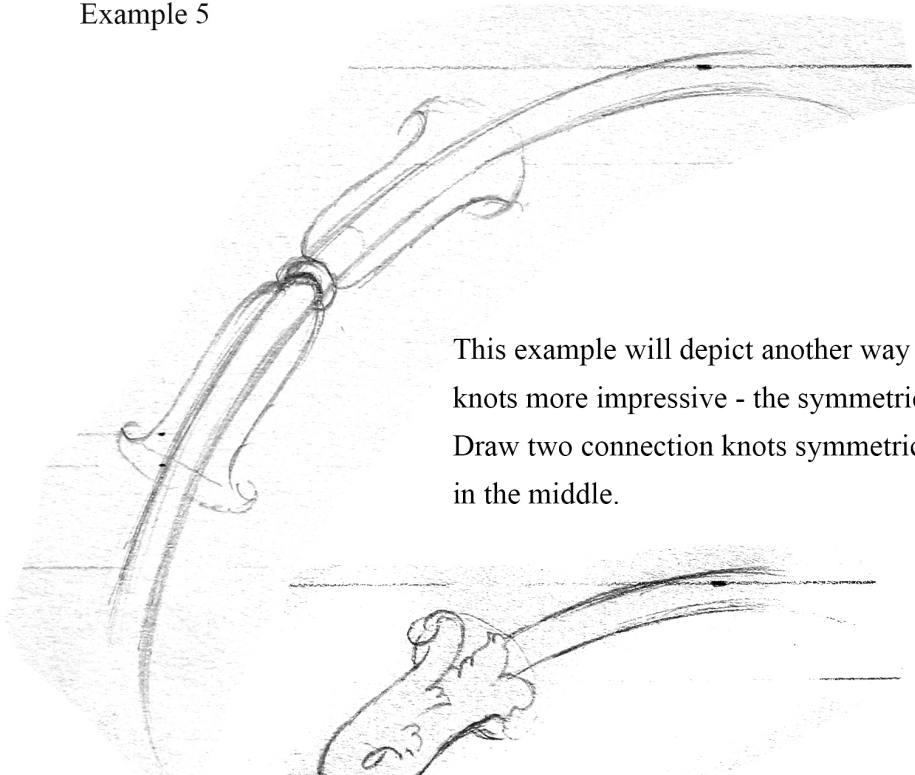
Example 4



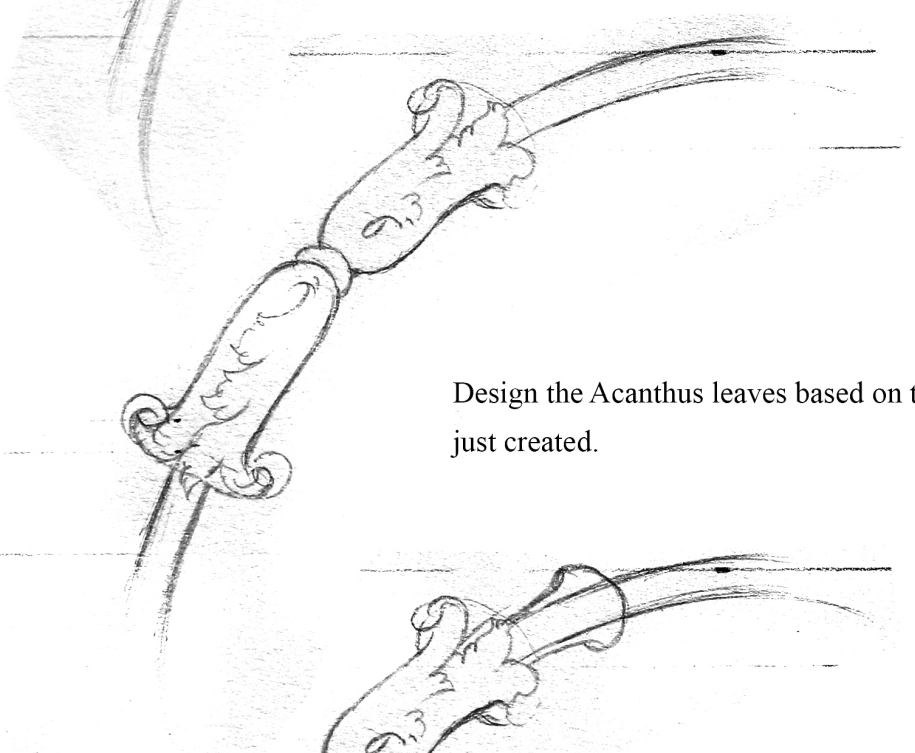
The last technique in this section is freestyle drawing. Here, the artist is able to freely design their Acanthus branches as long as they can maintain the visual harmony and complexity to avoid the major-sub conflict among Acanthus branches.



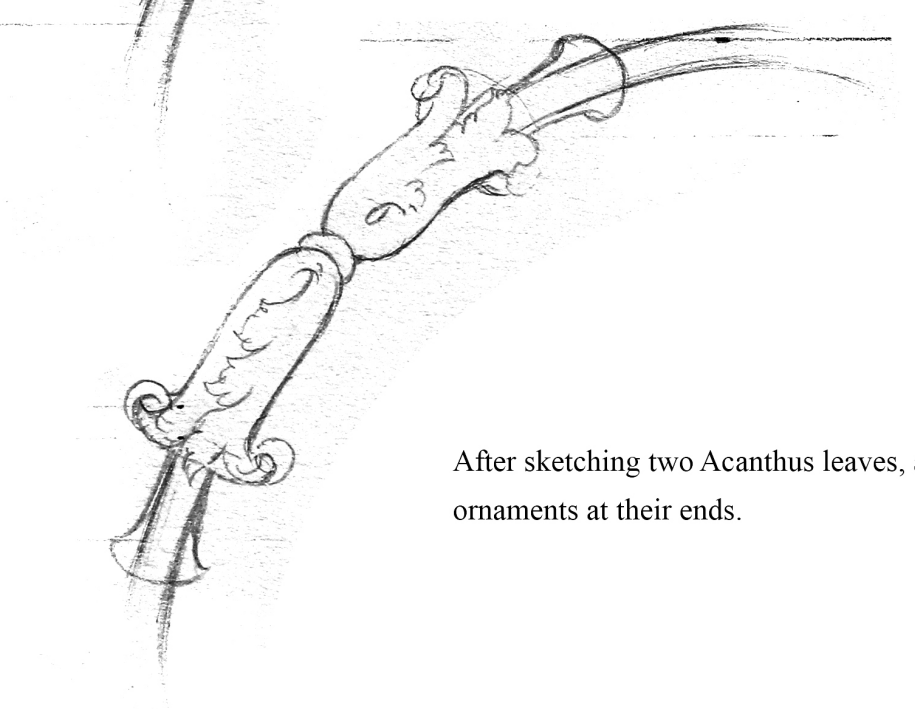
Example 5



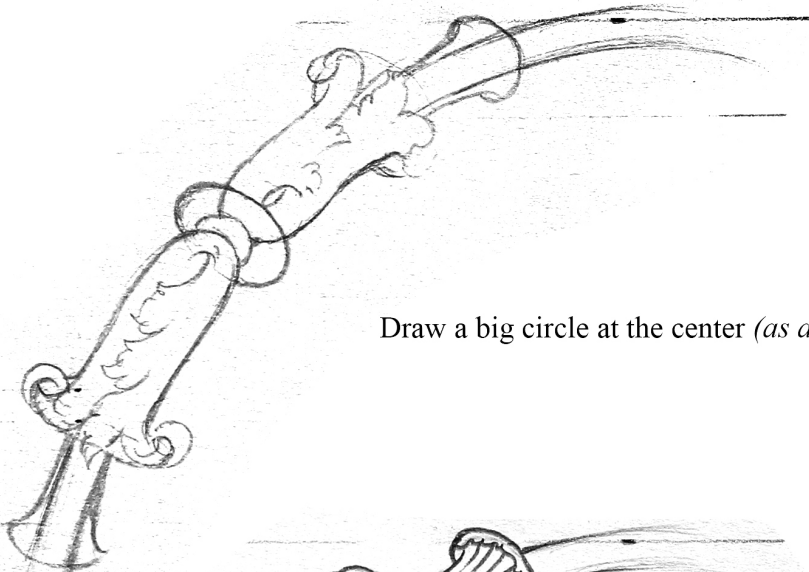
This example will depict another way to make connection knots more impressive - the symmetrical technique. Draw two connection knots symmetrically through a ring in the middle.



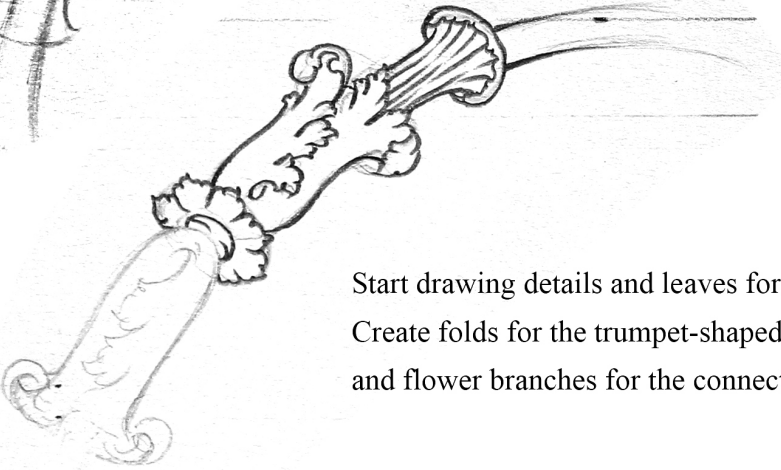
Design the Acanthus leaves based on the frame we have just created.



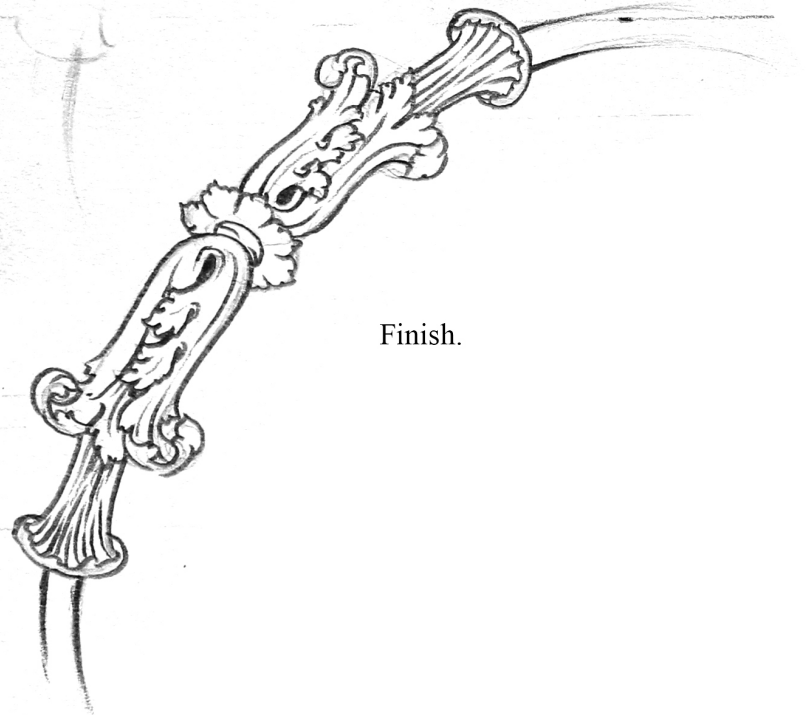
After sketching two Acanthus leaves, add two trumpet-shaped ornaments at their ends.



Draw a big circle at the center (*as a symmetric point.*)



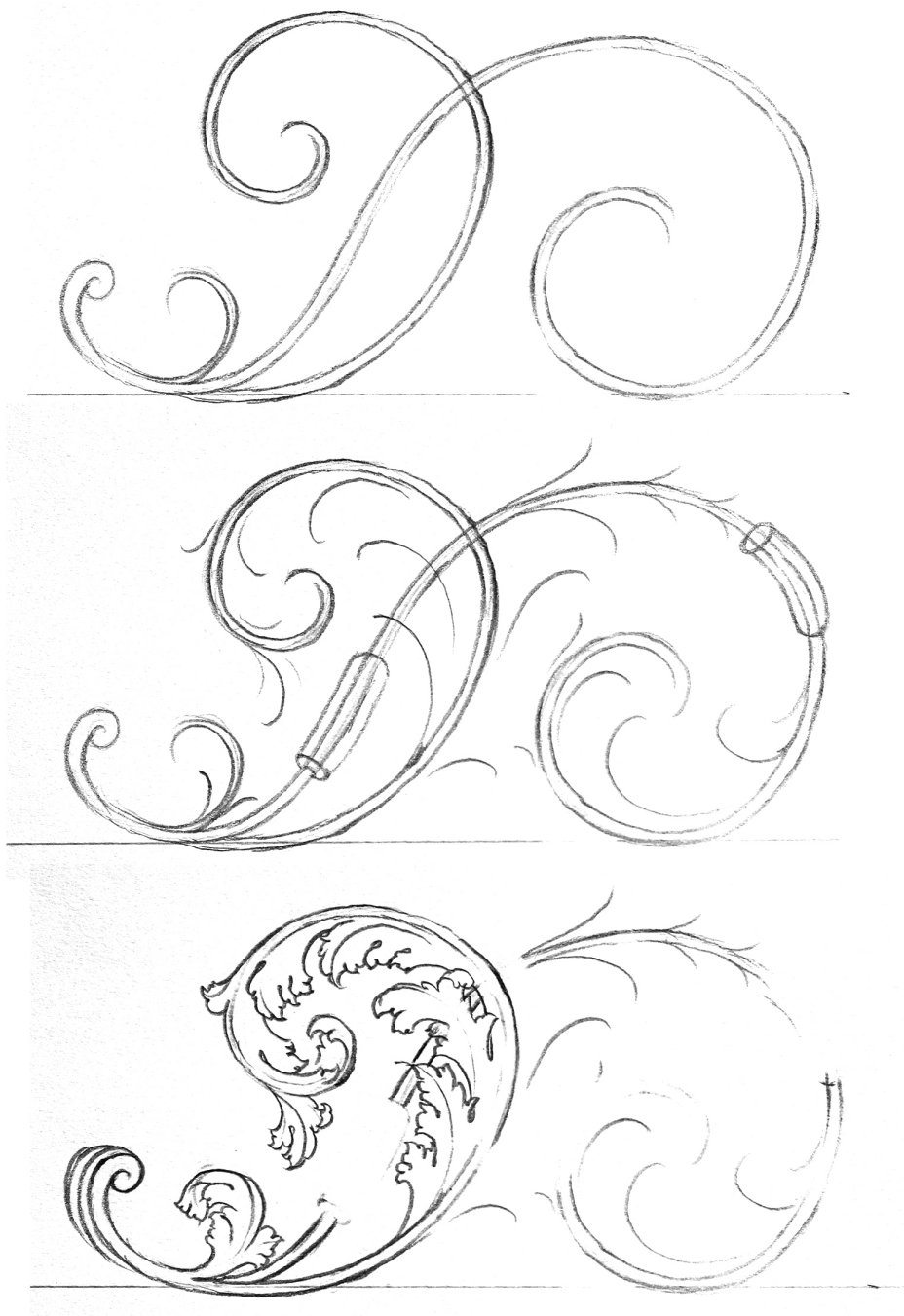
Start drawing details and leaves for the Acanthus.
Create folds for the trumpet-shaped ornament,
and flower branches for the connection knot.

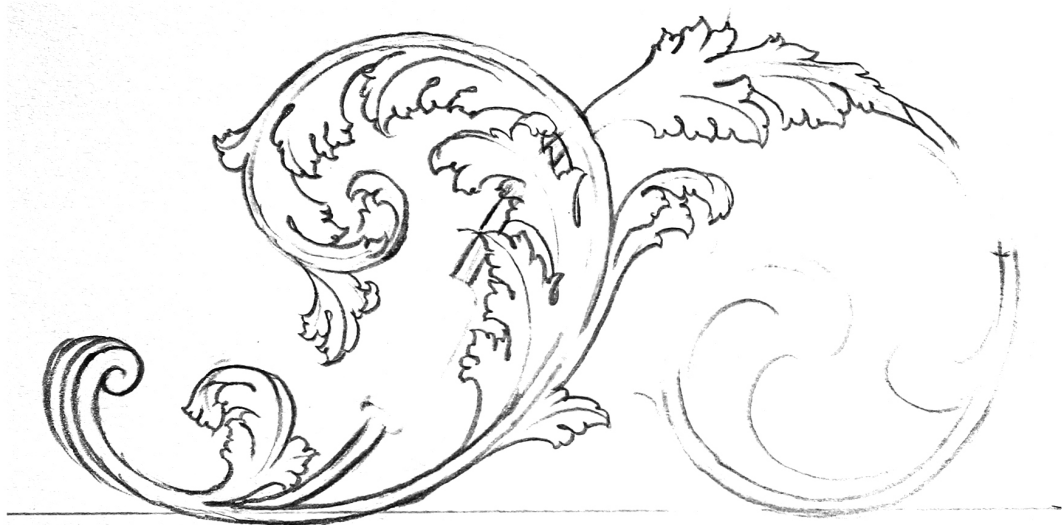


Finish.

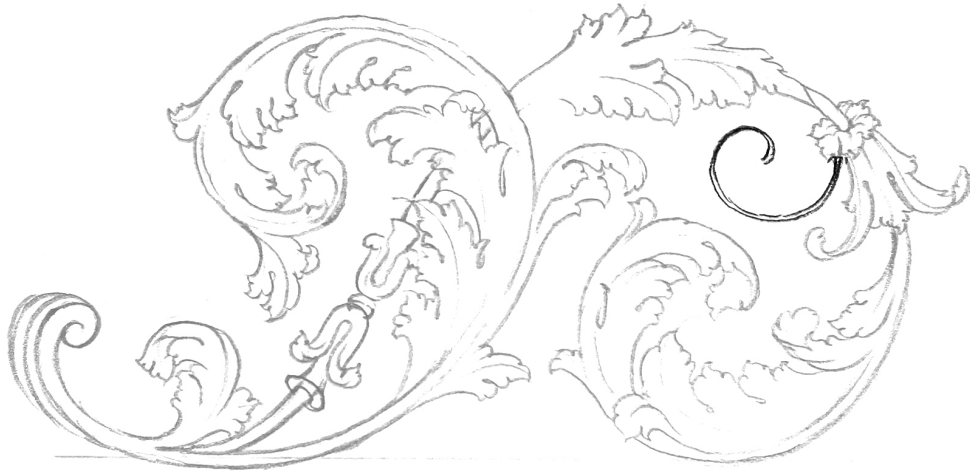
Compilation of samples

Before moving to the next section, we will review all lessons and techniques (step by step) with a sample illustration below. Elements that have been discussed include: *How to draw an advanced Acanthus leaf, shape main veins for the ornamental design, and create connecting knots.*

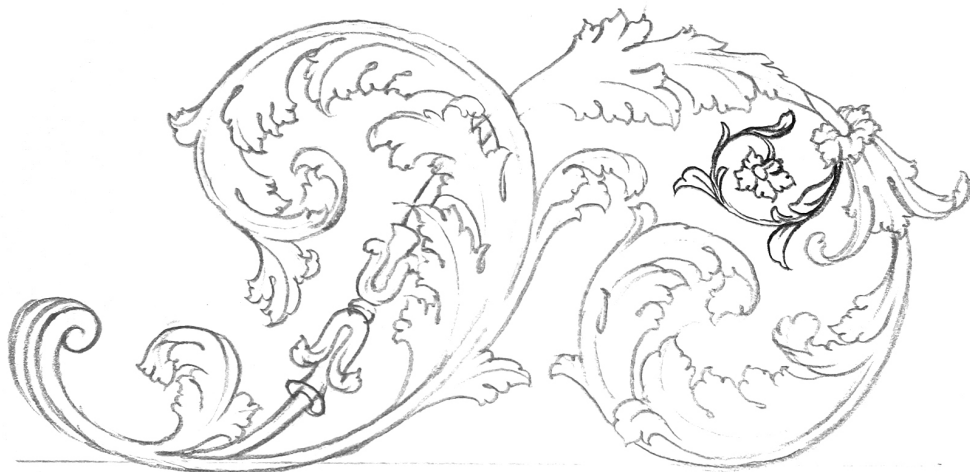


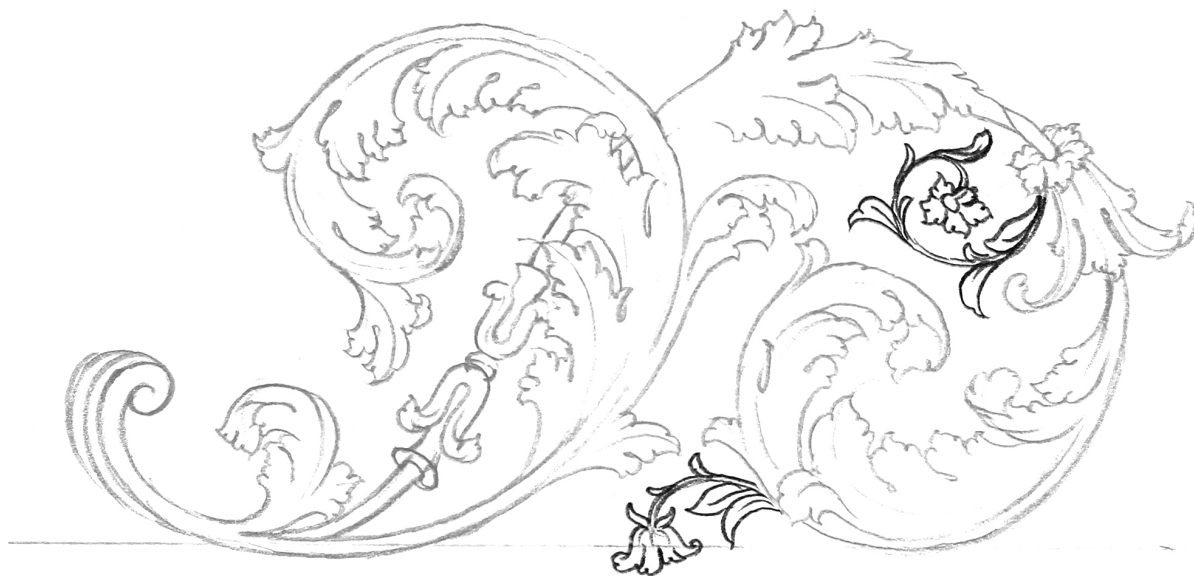


All steps ahead are within the scope of learned techniques. However, now, we will take a short break to talk about an additional part but still important in drawing: Gap filling details.

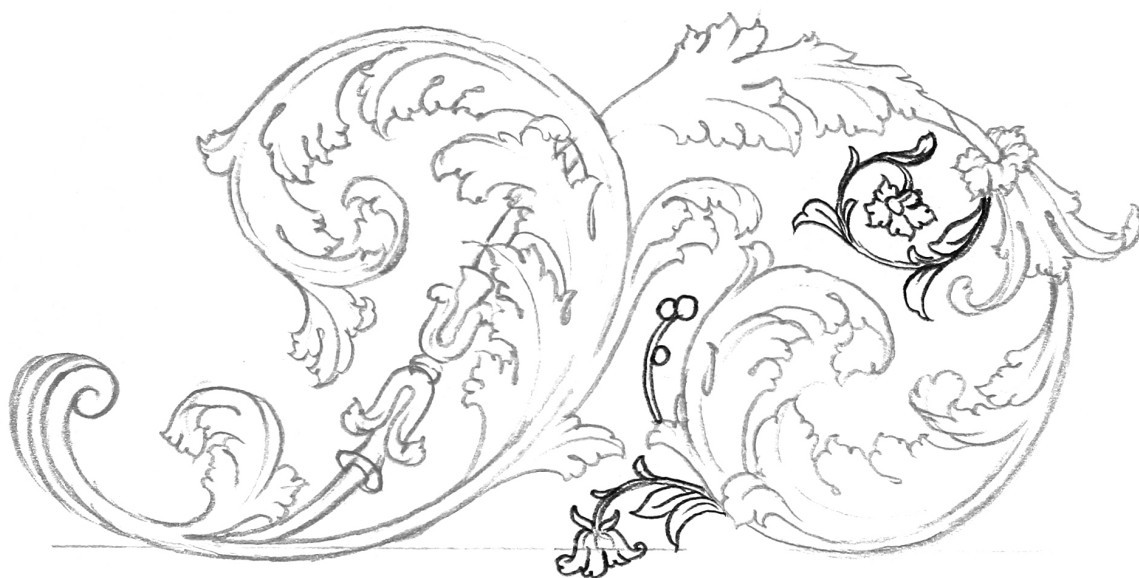


We can easily see that, after the main parts are almost done, there will be some empty spaces. Usually, these spaces won't affect the overall design quality, but sometimes it does lead to a clear imbalance. To avoid affecting visual harmony, we need to fill it with an ornament. However, if you just add a common Acanthus, the drawing may become boring. Therefore, we have some other ornaments (*like flowers, normal leaves, barley, grains, etc.*) that are specially designed to fill those gaps.

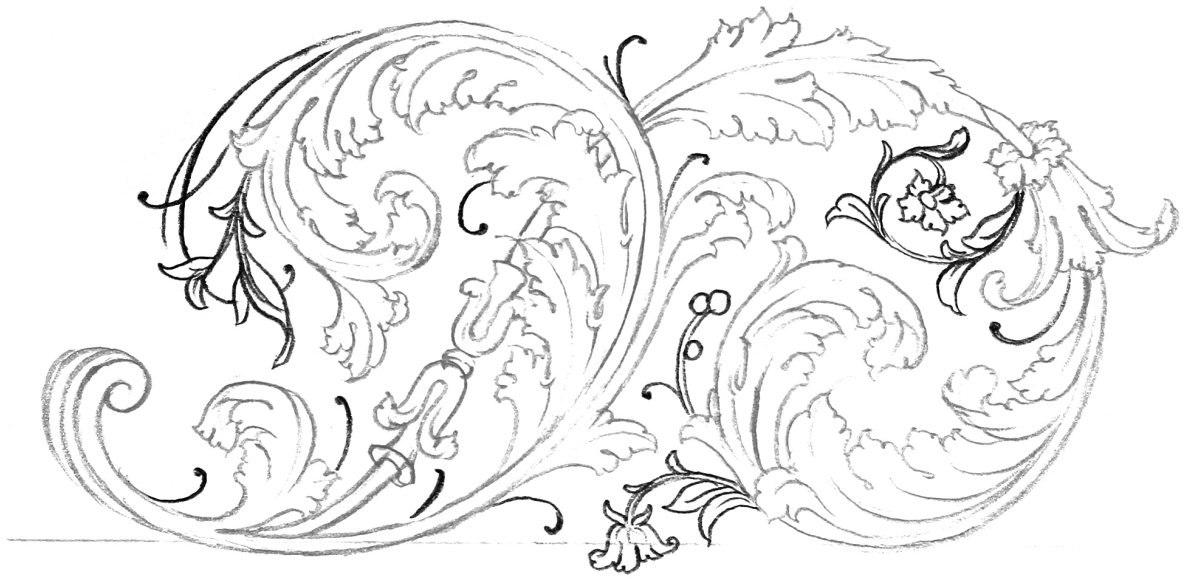




Add flowery details.



Add grain-shaped details.

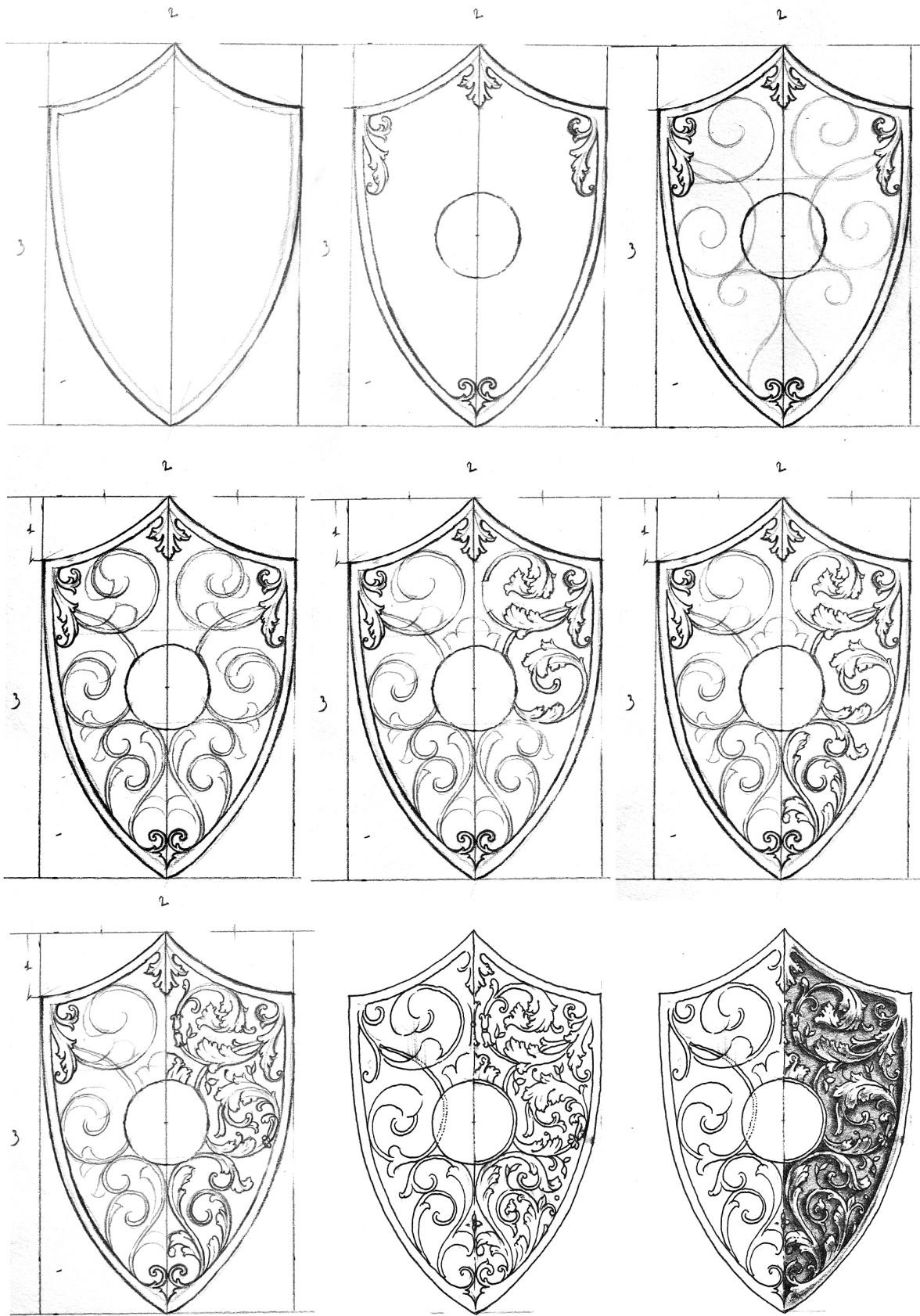


Add other single leaf details.



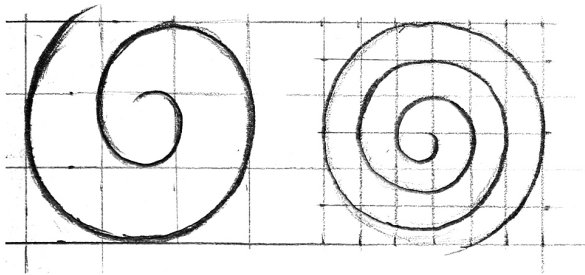
Finish the drawing.

Exercise: Design on the shield.

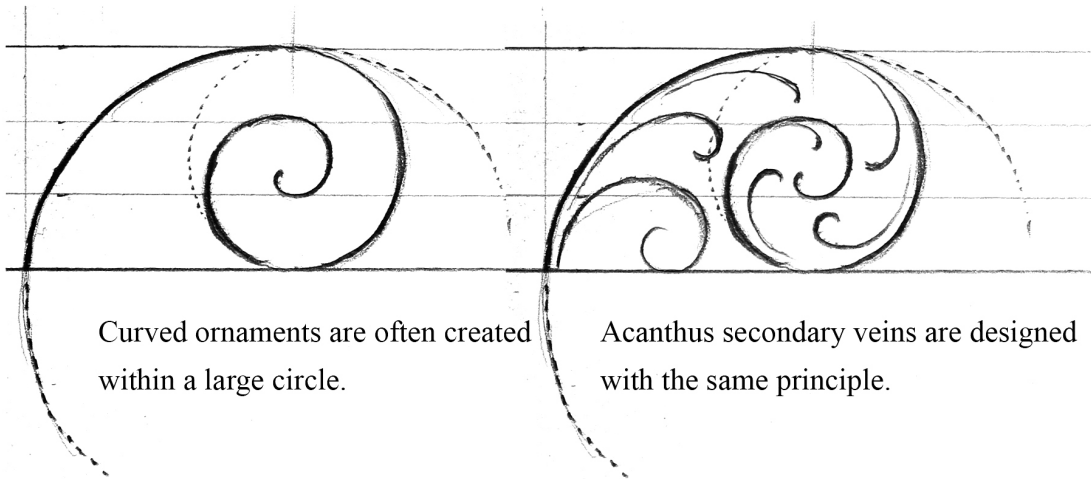


Review: Ornament Design Principles

Before moving on to the new section which can bring a lot of inspiration - shading, we will briefly talk about the ornament design principles mentioned in Acanthus vol.1.

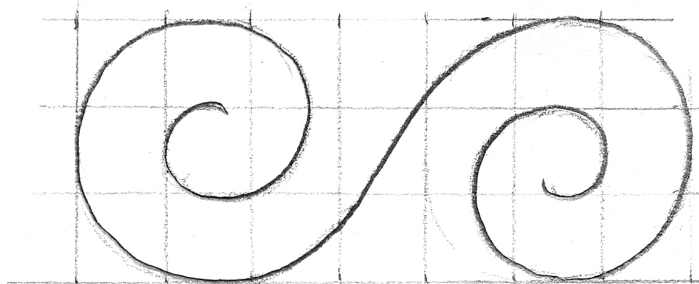


Basically, main veins follow the spiral principle and have even distances to each other.



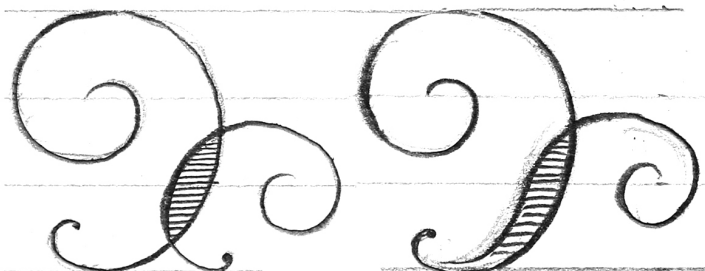
Curved ornaments are often created within a large circle.

Acanthus secondary veins are designed with the same principle.



When linking two spirals together with a stroke, we will get the infinity ornament.

When overlapping ornaments, the interference will have an elliptical shape with two pointed ends.



PART 2 | SHADING DETAILS



A brief introduction to ornament shading

Shading not only is a paramount concept in fine arts generally and ornamental drawing particularly, but also a fundamental technique to perfect any type of visual art. Simply put, shading is 'making sculpture' on paper by creating three-dimensional effects by using different techniques. But overall, no matter what technique is used (*from lead, charcoal to watercolor and oil painting*), the main purpose of shading technique is to **visually separate light and dark sides of the object**.



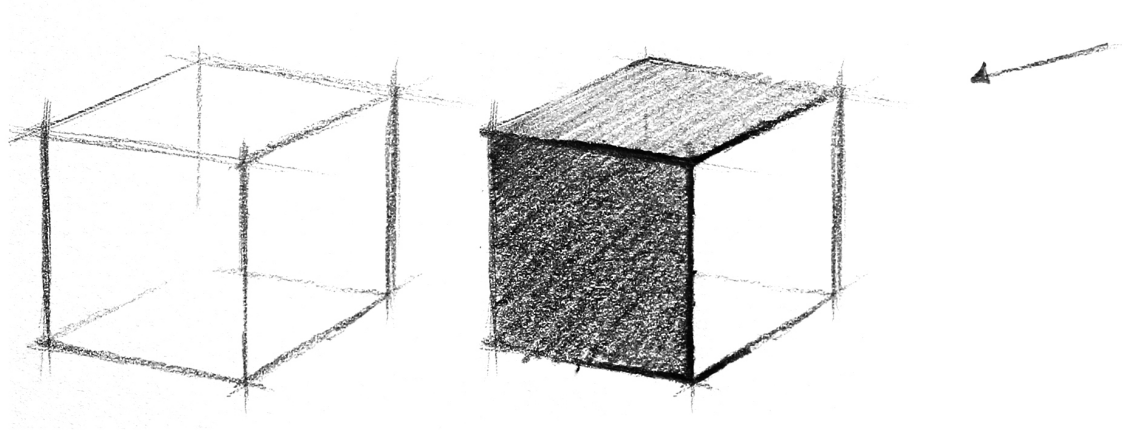
Digging deeper into shadow analysis, most physical objects (touchable, visible and sensible) have their own space and structure. From small objects like a pencil, a petal, to larger things like the ocean or clouds; from motionless objects like a tea cup or a chair to moving things like animals and people - all have space. However, that space will become undetectable and meaningless without light. Thanks to light that helps differentiate light and dark areas, an object can be seen.

Shading is surely no longer a stranger to those who have learned graphics. This technique is acknowledged within two perceptions: difficult and easy. Needless to say, shadowing is difficult since it takes a great deal of time to fully understand its effects on objects as well as master drawing tools. However, especially for those who have never learned about graphics, shading can become simpler if we only focus on analyzing object space instead of technical practices. No matter how complex an object is, it is always made of basic shapes: a table is made of a box, a cup is made of a prism, even complex objects like the human body or animal can also be simplified by spheres and pyramids. Similarly, with Acanthus, simplifying the ornament shape is the most important technique for a well-done design.

Basic shapes and light directions

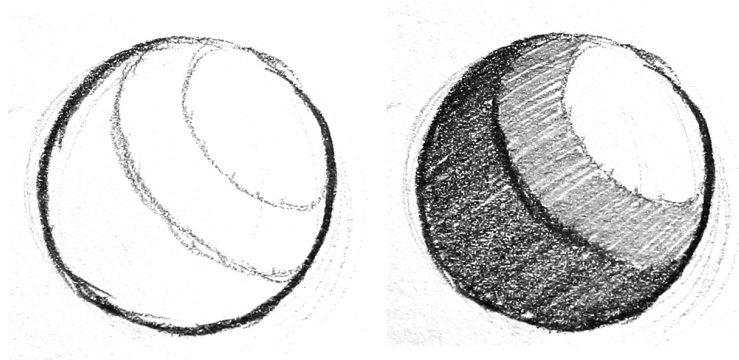
Basically, although there are countless numbers of geometric shapes, we can start by getting to know four fundamentals: Cube, sphere, cylinder and prism.

Cube



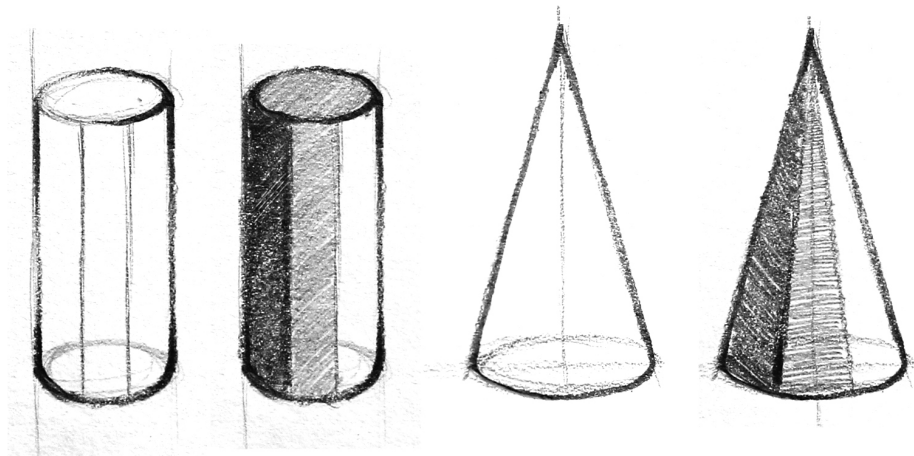
Cubes and similar shapes are formed based on planes perpendicular to each other (*as illustrated*). In the illustration above, we choose a certain light direction (*for example, from right to left*) to divide the light and dark areas: The right side receives direct light, so it has the largest value. Meanwhile, since the left side is shadowed, it should have the lowest value. Although the top does not receive direct light, it is still not completely underexposed, so there will be a neutral value.

Sphere



Even though the sphere does not have any specific terminator to visually separate the light and dark areas like the cube, there is still a way. First, halve the sphere and determine its left side as the lowest value area. Then, do the same with half of the right side so that it will have the highest value while the rest remains neutral.

Prism and pyramid



In these two shapes, the lighted side is divided by vertical lines: The prism is trisected as illustrated and its upper base will have neutral value. Meanwhile, the pyramid is segmented by lines that connect the apex to the base, with value as illustrated.

Simplify the shape of the object

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, no matter how complex an object seems, it can always be simplified into basic shapes. With the example below, I will analyze the leaf shape with different values.

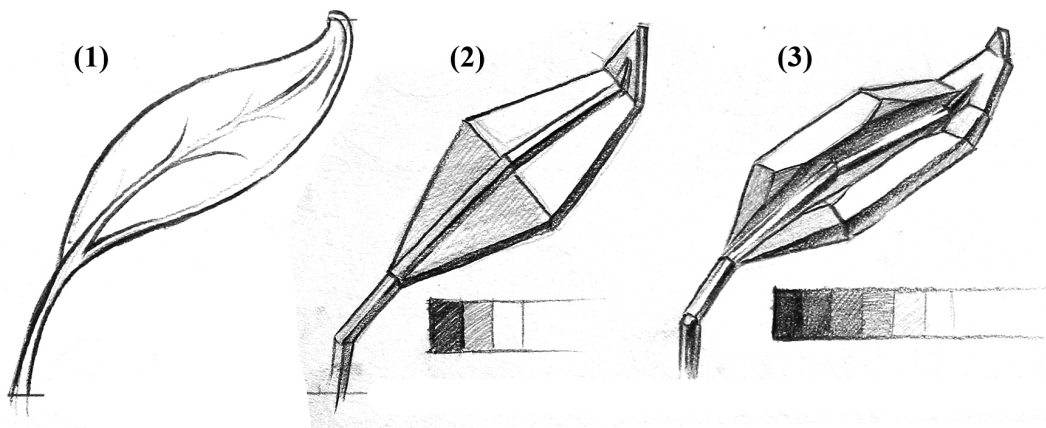
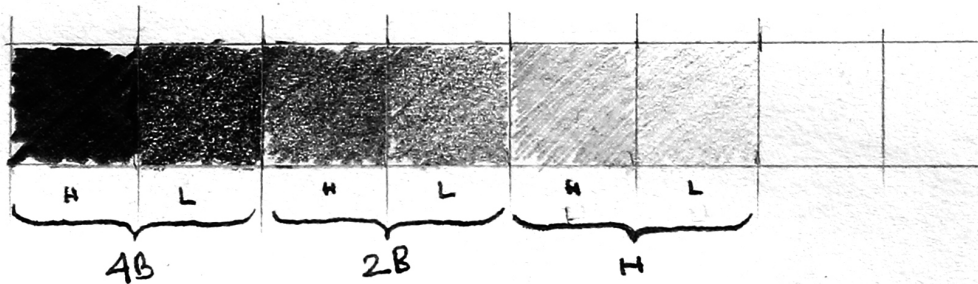


Image (1) is the rough sketch of a leaf. Image (2) is its simplified shape. With downward light direction, the value will be divided into 3 levels. Focus on visualizing the leaf shape to identify the lighted and shadowed side before applying these 3 values. Image (3) is another simplified shape, but with more details, so that its value will increase (*6 levels.*)

Portray tonal values with pencil

Pencils are a popular and easy-to-use implement for sketching or shading. Below are some preliminary factors when choosing pencil grades or mastering basic tonal value techniques.

There are several pencil values, since manufacturers offer a wide range of choices to please different needs. Pencils are categorized and marked with 3 symbols: **H (Hard)**, **F (Fine)** and **B (Black)**. Besides, its prefix numbers represent the amount of graphite inside. For example, the letter “H” is used to indicate a hard, light pencil. Also, the higher the number, the lighter and harder the pencil. An “F” pencil with no prefix is moderately hard and break-resistant (therefore, I often use it for thin-stroke stretching). Meanwhile, for the “B”, the higher the prefix number, the darker and softer its core.



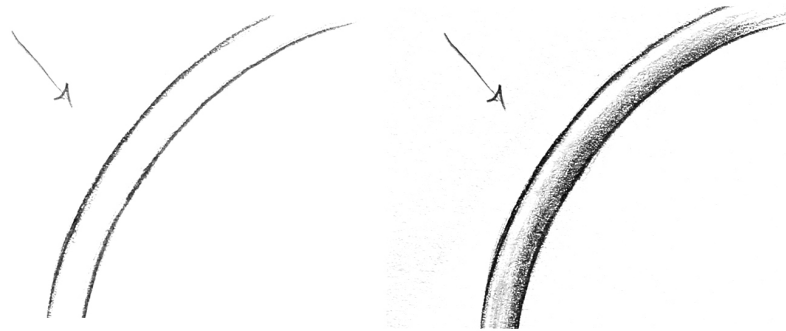
Although there are several choices in pencil grades, based on personal experiences, I recommend 4 types: F, H, 2B and 4B. F is separated as a different type because I only use F to sketch. H is used to portray low value while 2B and 4B represent neutral and high value.

Following the illustration above, we will have another concept for each grade called pencil pressure. Strokes can be lighter or darker depending on the pencil pressure exerting on paper. I divided that pressure into two types - L (light) and H (hard). So with 3 types (H, 2B and 4B), we can categorize pencils into 6 different values.

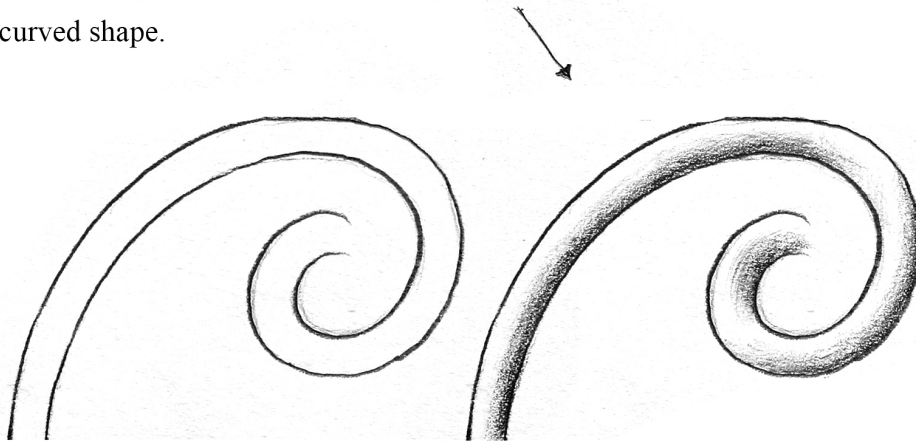


To these types, not only can we categorize pencils into separated segments, but also blend to create smoothness and visual coherence between light and dark areas. Blending can be created by placing different layers with an appropriate pencil pressure.

Basic shading technique: Acanthus stem



In the first example, draw a simple Acanthus stem and identify its light direction. The tonal value is high on the lighted side and gradually decreases its intensity towards the shadow. The lighted and shadowed sides shall be divided to fit with the Acanthus stem's curved shape.

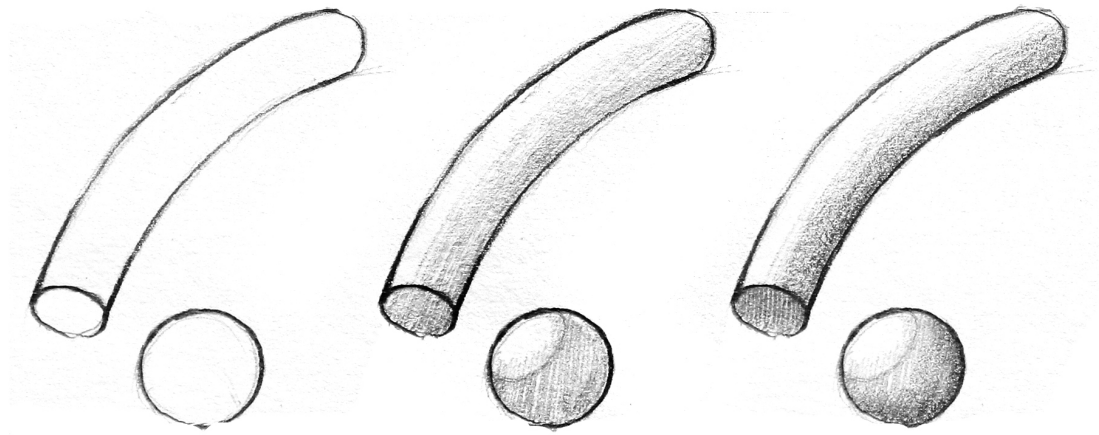


In the second example, when the Acanthus branch is shaped into a spiral, its tonal value will be accordingly transformed. Here, the light direction is at an angle, so we will be able to imagine that: the left and upper part of the Acanthus branch will catch the light, whereas its right and lower part will be shadowed.

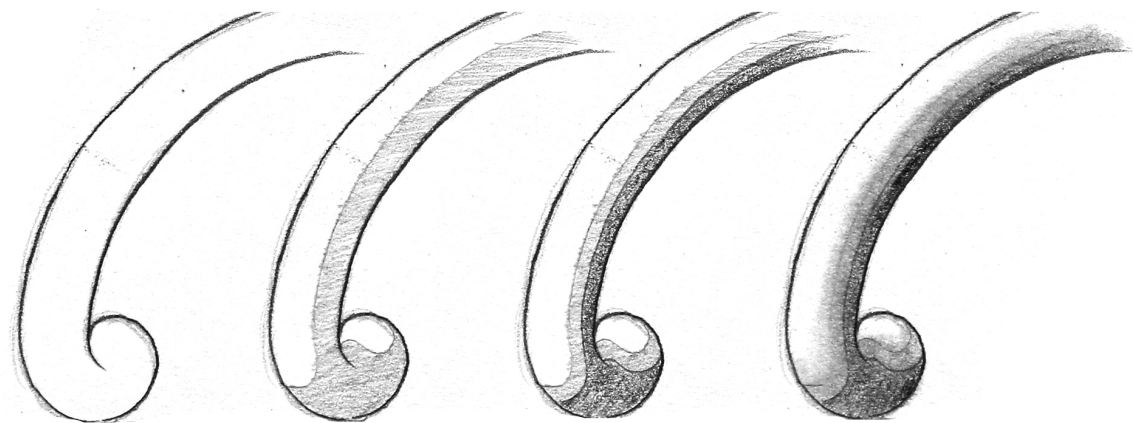


In the third example, when two Acanthus branches overlap each other, the upper part will cast a shadow on the lower one right at their intersection, which helps breathe life into your drawing.

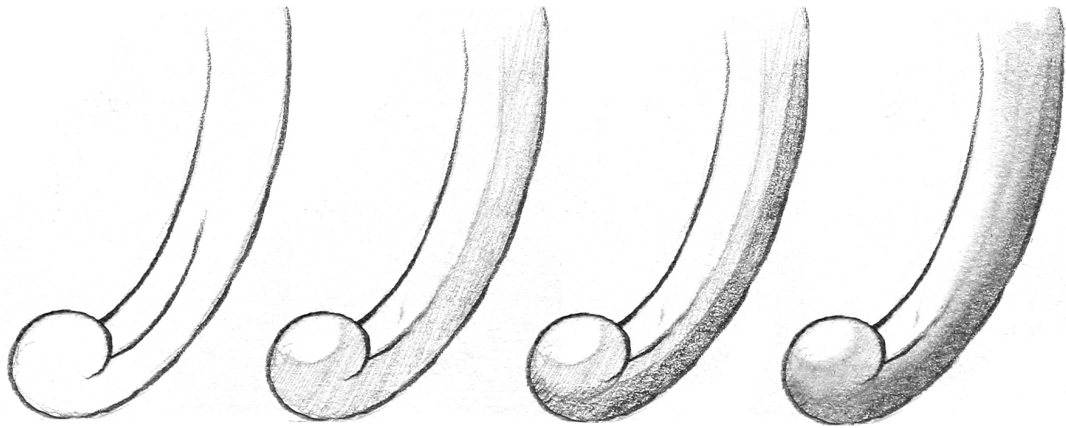
Basic shading techniques: Acanthus spherical stump



A basic Acanthus's stump is created from the combination of a curved cylinder and a sphere. Step 1 is sketching. Step 2 is using a light pencil (e.g. H, HB) to visually identify dark and light areas. Step 3 is using a dark pencil (e.g. 2B, 4B) to emphasize the highlights.

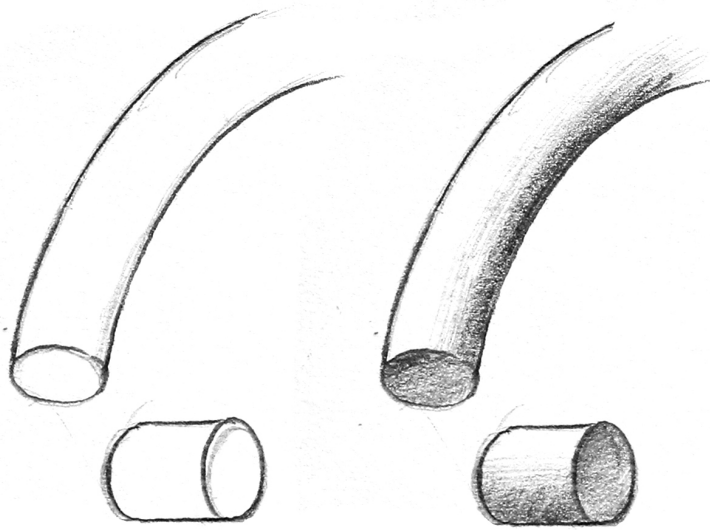


Once finished shading each shape, we will combine them to create an original Acanthus shape. This time, the light is directed downward from the left, so the left and upper part of the drawing will be highlighted. On the other hand, the right and lower part will be obscured. Based on that theory, we divide the light and dark areas with a light pencil. Then, use a dark pencil to reduce the value of the shadowed side. In the last step, we can blend to smoothen the drawing (*this step is optional and will be discussed later in detail.*)

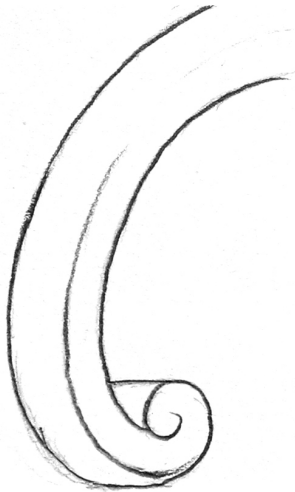


The second example is another point of view on the spherical Acanthus stump. Following the same technique and principle discussed in previous sections, we do shading step by step to divide the light and dark areas properly with single shapes.

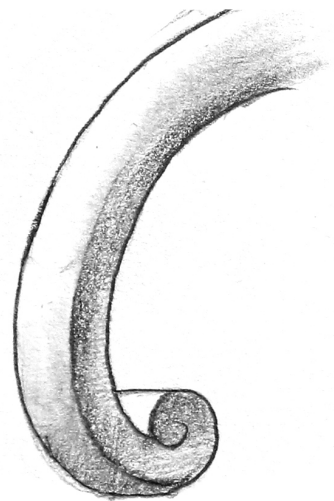
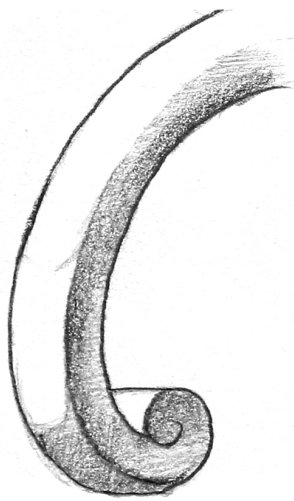
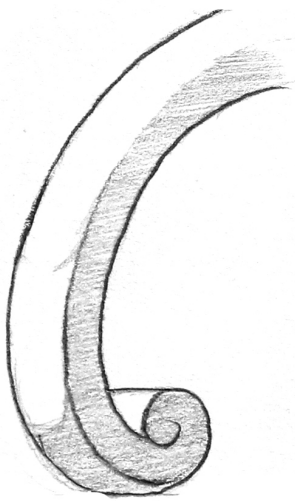
Basic shading technique: The cylindrical Acanthus stump



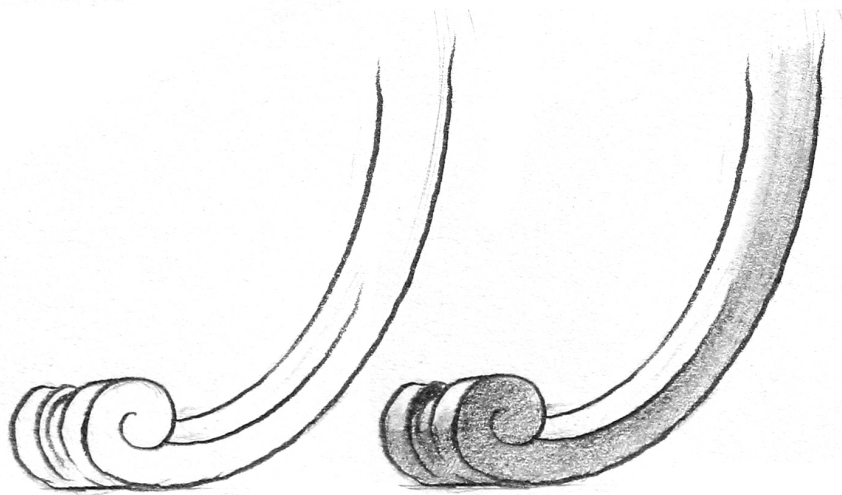
The second Acanthus stump is a combination of two cylinders. It is worth noting that they are placed perpendicularly to each other. Thus, when connecting these shapes, the sharp edge of the horizontal cylinder will affect the rounded part of the upper cylinder. To put that theory in perspective, let's move on to the next step.



As mentioned in the previous section, let's have a look at the illustration on the left. When linking two cylinders, the flat edge (also known as the bottom) of the lower cylinder will partially affect the Acanthus stem. At this point, I will illustrate that element by using a curve following the stem for a short while. This part will not last till the end of the stem but stop at a certain point, from which the stem returns to its normal cylindrical shape.



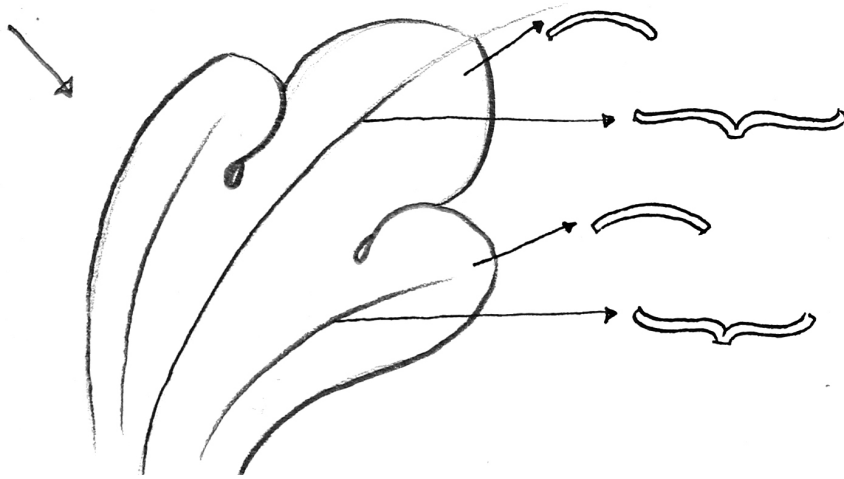
Follow each shading step to visualize the space of the second Acanthus stem. We will still go step-by-step: Begin by dividing the basic light-dark areas with light pencil, then use a dark pencil to emphasize the highlights and then blend them for a natural finish.



Redo these steps but from another angles of the second Acanthus stump.

Basic Shading Techniques: Simple Acanthus leaves

After going through basic shading theories, we will apply them into Acanthus ornaments. Let's begin with a simple three-lobe Acanthus blade: 1 main and 2 secondary lobes. To make our shading easier and more accurate, the first thing we need to do is analyzing the cross-section of these Acanthus leaves to identify the lighted and shadowed side.



The illustration above is an example for a typical Acanthus leaf blade. We can see that every single blade has a midrib. However, it ends on the way instead of reaching the apex. Thus, the structure of the blade and apex will be different.

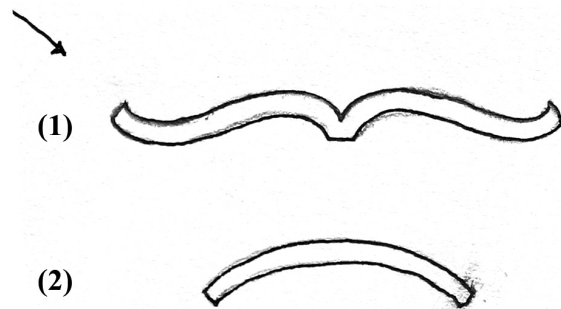
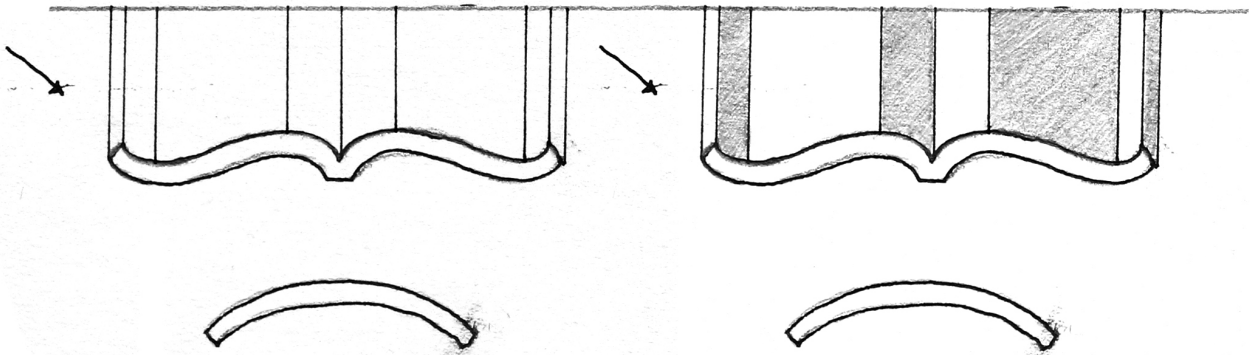
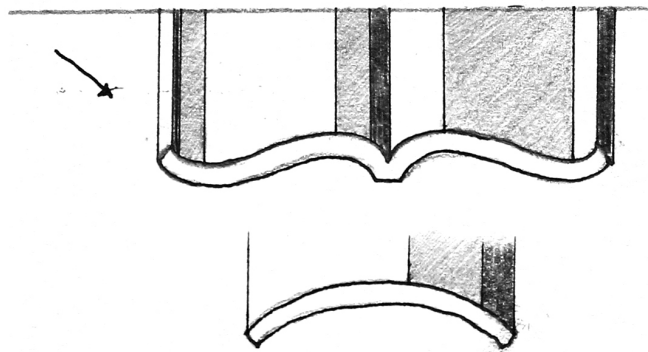


Image (1) is the cross-section of a single leaf stem. Image (2) is the cross-section of its apex. The stem (1) will have the shape of a book with a fold at the central (*the vein position*) and curves on both sides. As illustrated, the single leaf apex (2) will have the structure of a curved stroke.

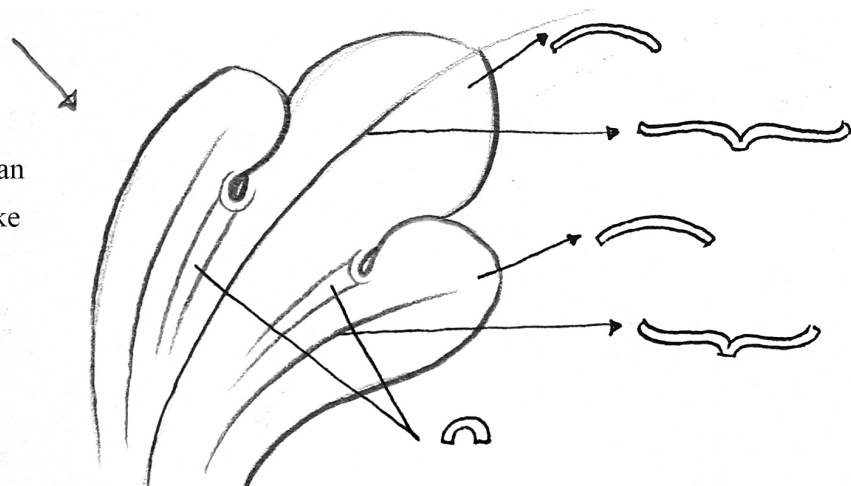
Before jumping to shading the Acanthus leaf, let's analyze the light and dark areas as well as how to place the shadow on its cross-section.

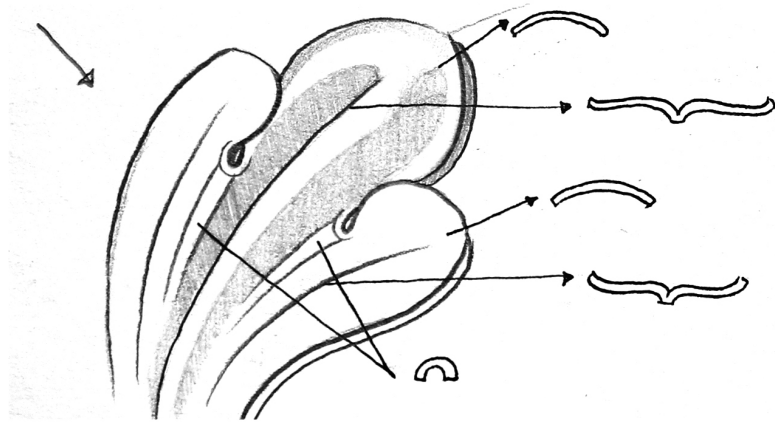


Given the light direction is 45° , based on the cut-section, we can divide it into three segments: Light, Neutral and Dark. Following the theory discussed before: The top and left sides are lighted while the bottom and right sides are shadowed. The leaf cross-section can be valued as illustrated below.

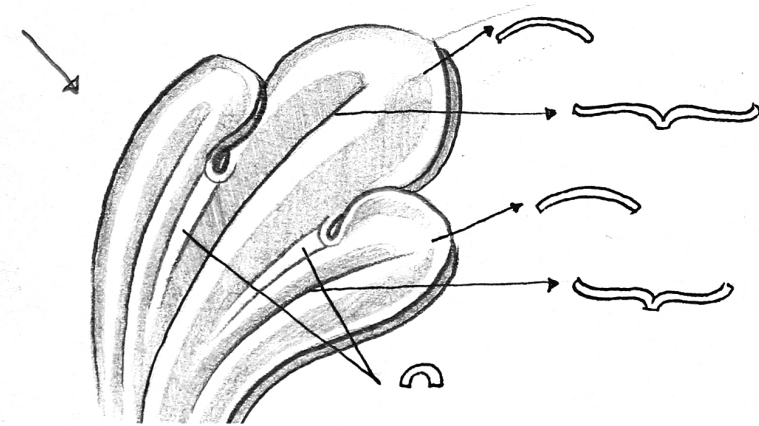


Before applying the light-dark division into an Acanthus blade, let's take a moment to highlight terminators including veins and overlapping leaf folds.

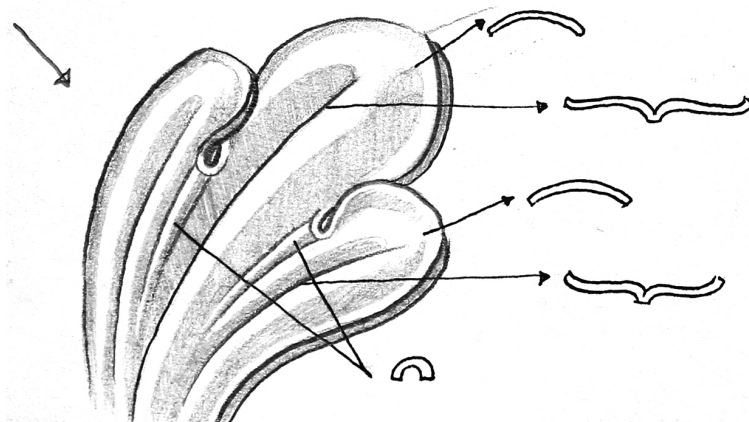




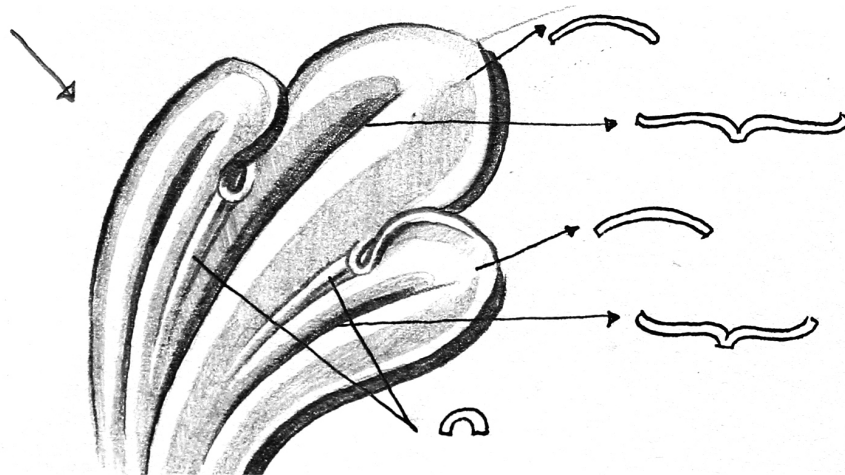
Start with the central leaf with light lead (H, HB) and then visually separate the overall light and dark areas (*Mind the transfer point where the vein ends.*)



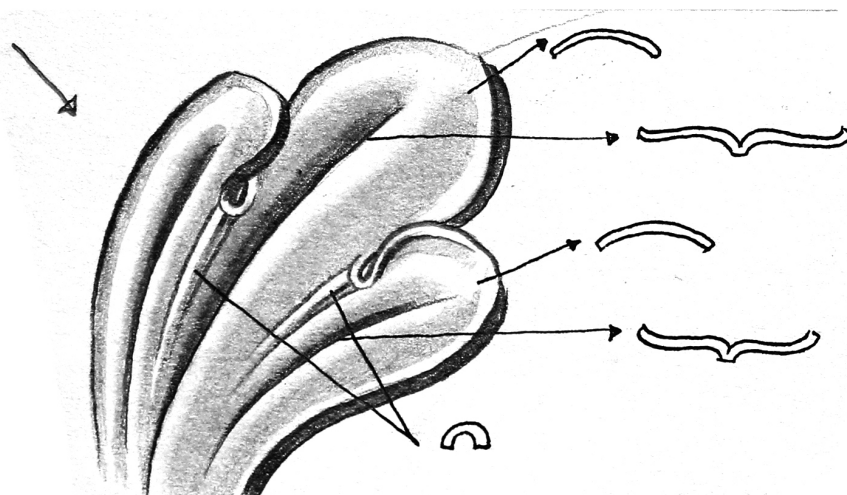
Do the same for the secondary leaves. Now, the Acanthus blade is basically shadowed.



Continue dividing the overall light-dark areas with the overlapping leaf folds.

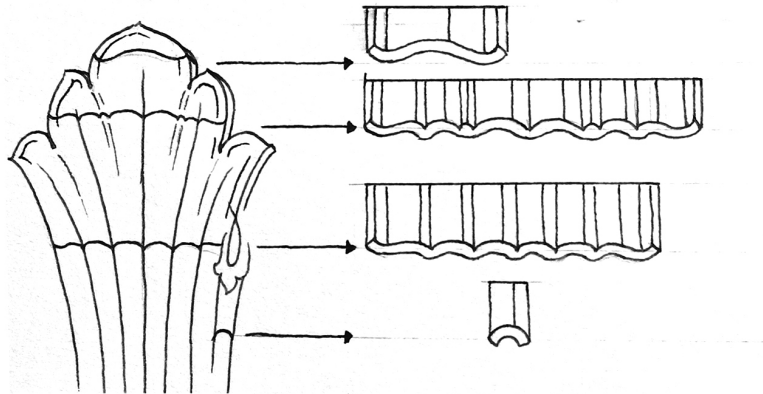


Use a dark pencil (2B, 4B) to emphasize shadowed areas. In this example, the shadow is at the margin, veins, as well as the areas depicting the leaf thickness.

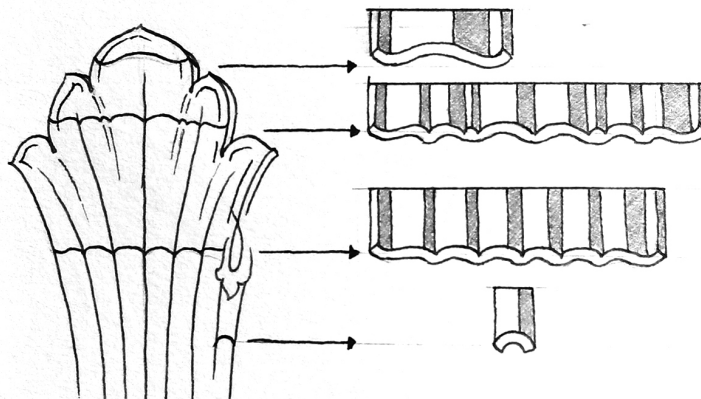


Finish the drawing by blending the leaf-blade.

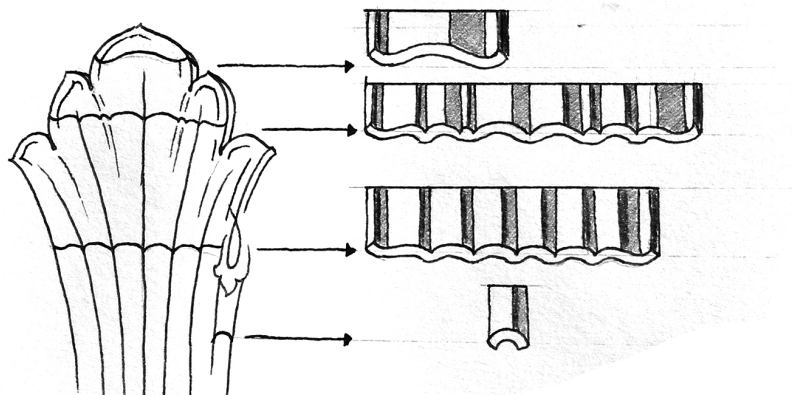
Example 2



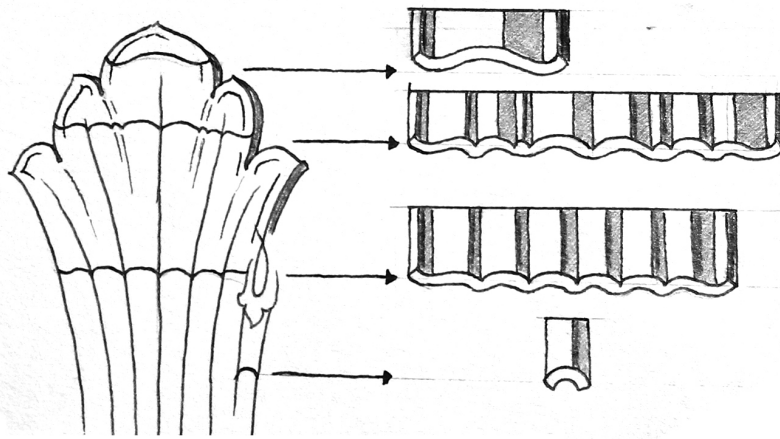
The second example shows an Acanthus leaf with a more complex cut section. Please follow the sections illustrated below for their tonal analysis.



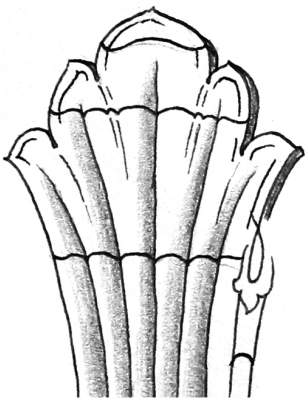
Use a light pencil (H, HB) to visually separate basic highlight areas.



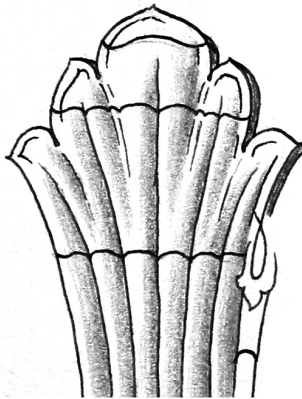
Use a hard pencil (H, HB) to emphasize the shadow.



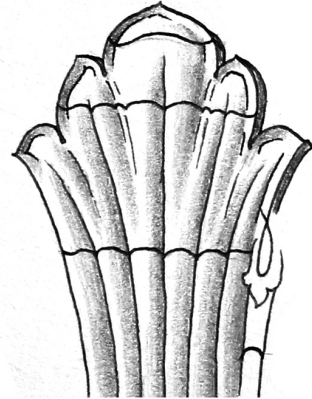
To apply shading techniques to the Acanthus leaf, we will create the first layer to thicken the leaf blade.



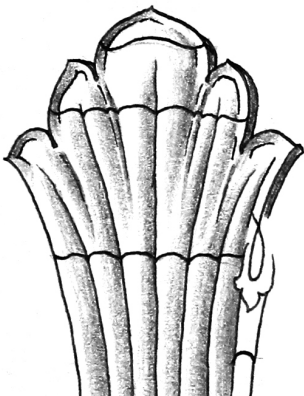
Use a light pencil for shading the dark areas on the left veins.



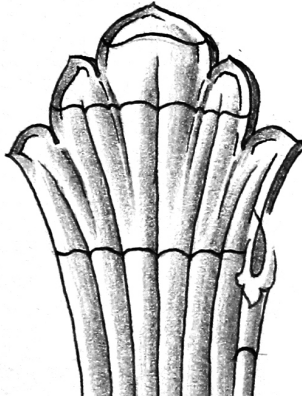
Use a light pencil for shading the dark areas on the right side of each lobes.



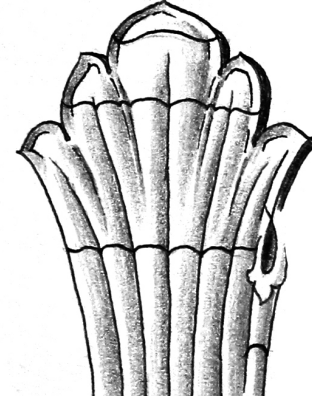
Shade over the shadowed margins of each lobe.



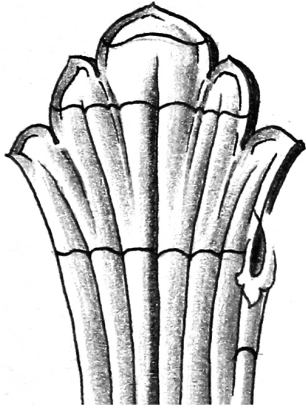
Pay attention to small folds among lobes before shading.



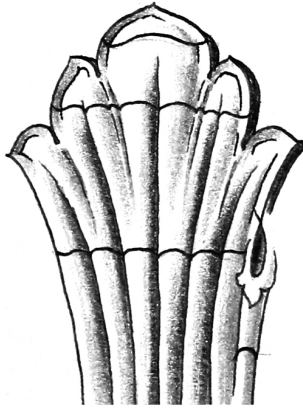
Shade over large folds (curled folds) while increasing the pencil pressure more on shadowed areas.



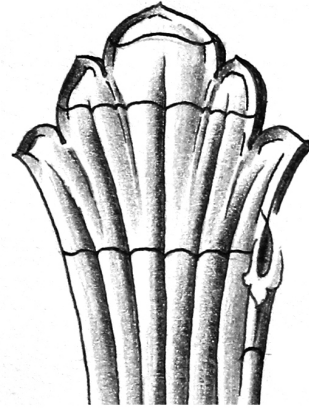
Press the pencil more on dark spots of large folds and the areas depicting the leaf thickness.



Press the pencil more on the darkest spots near the midrib.

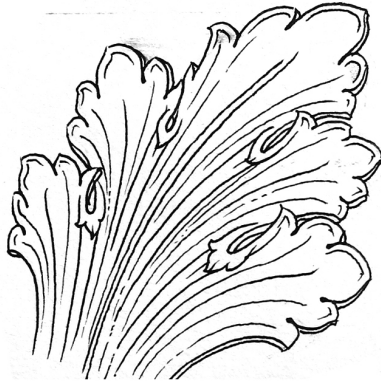


Do the same with veins of the second leaf.

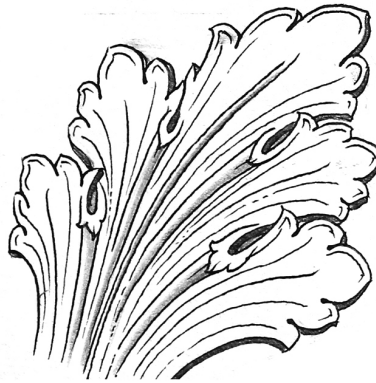


Finish the drawing by emphasizing the darkest points of the ornament.

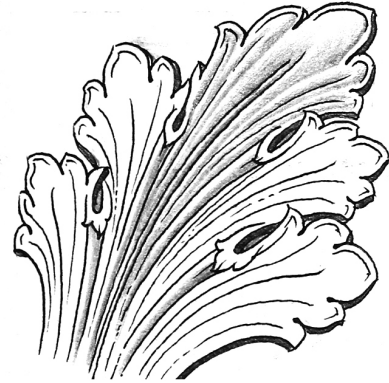
Example 3



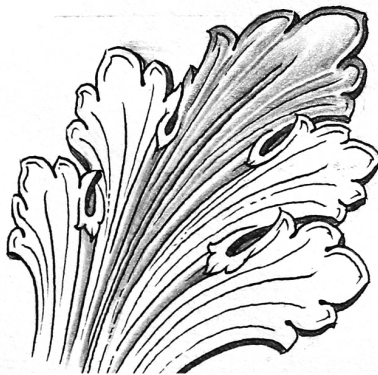
Advanced Acanthus leaf sketch with full strokes.



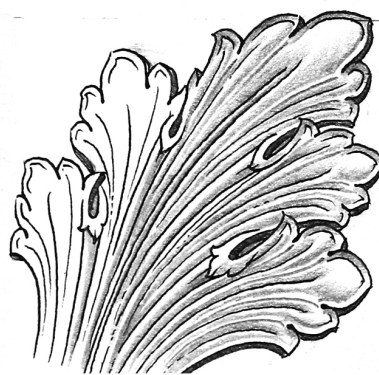
Shade over mid-leaf folds, main veins and the areas depicting the leaf thickness.



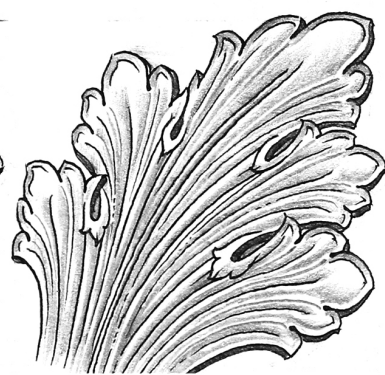
Shade dark areas of the central leaf.

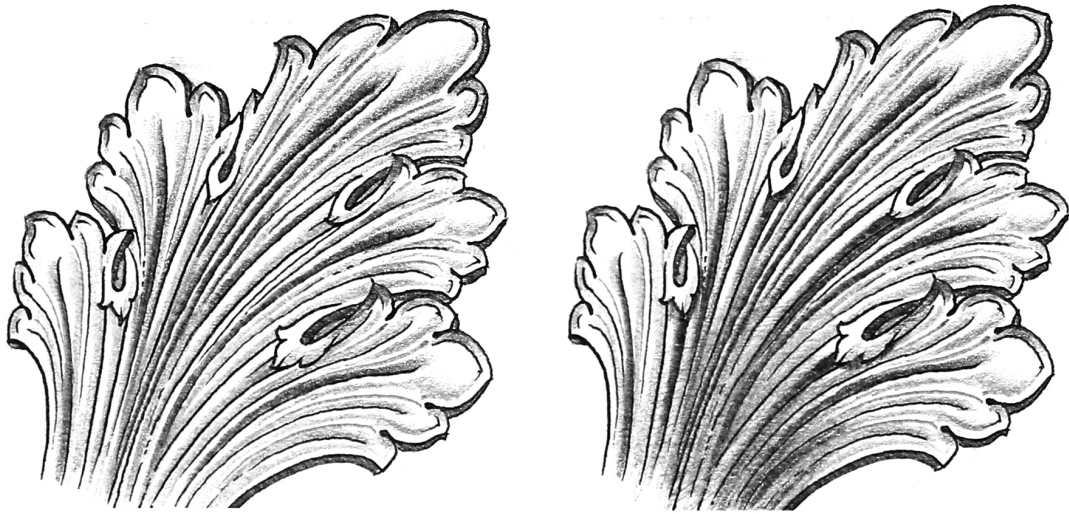


Shade dark areas of the margin of the central leaf.

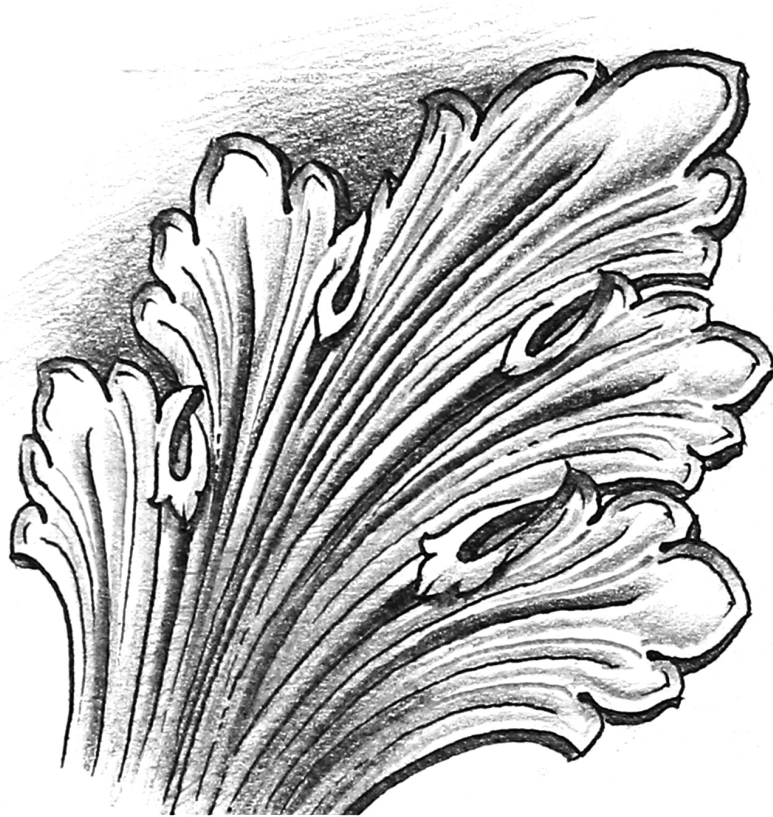


Do the same for other leaves. Please note that we still use a light pencil, except for the areas depicting the leaf thickness.



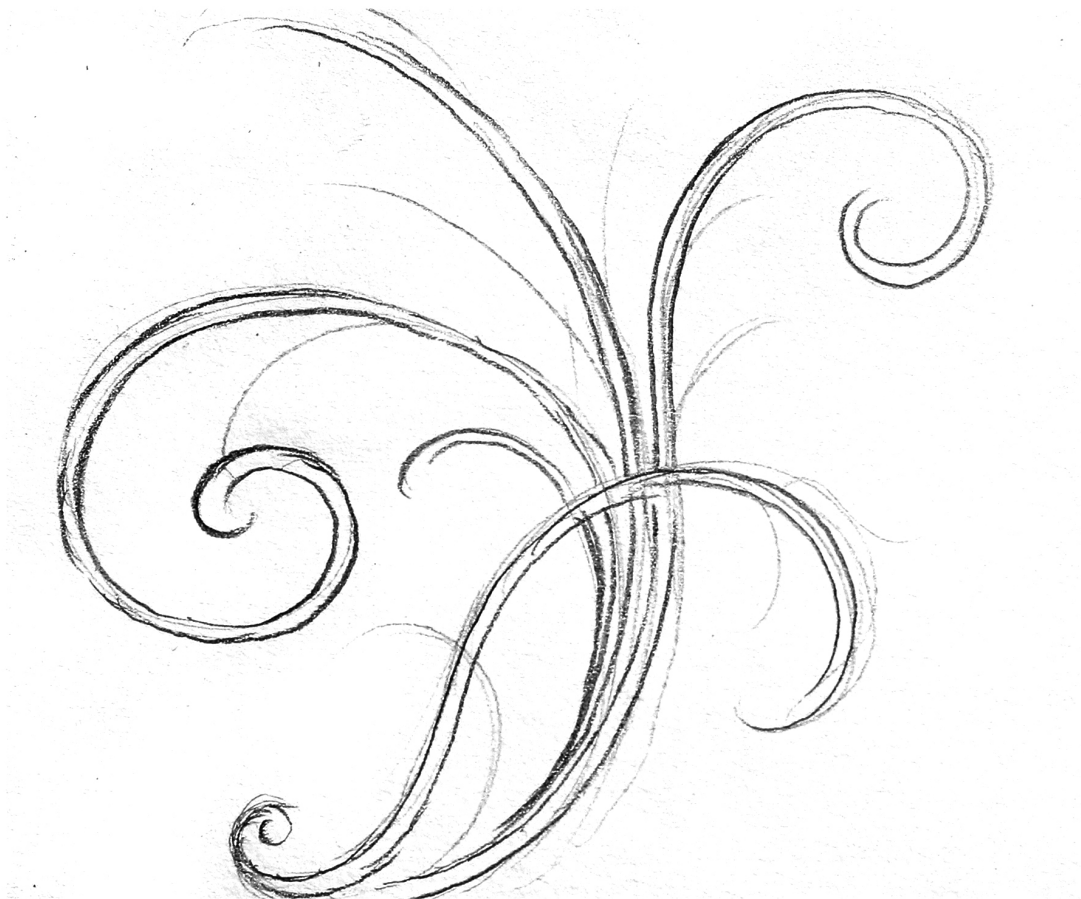


In the next steps, use a hard pencil to emphasize the best points which are primarily on the main veins and folds between the leaves.



Shading exercise number 1

After understanding Acanthus shading technique, let's practice on a completed Acanthus ornament drawing.



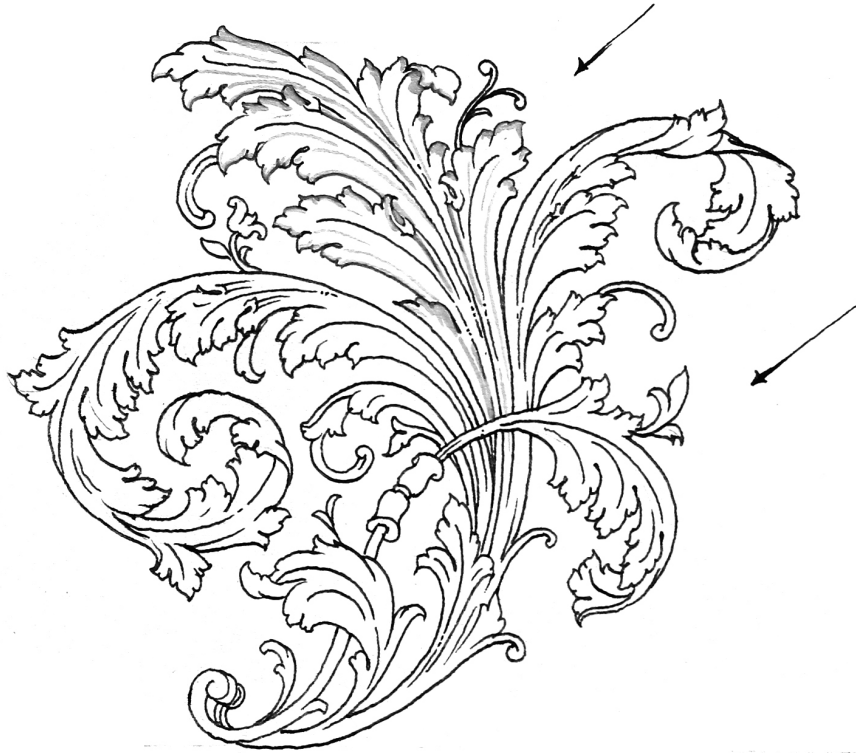
The first and most important step is to outline the ornament shape. Start from the midrib, draw parallel lines to shape the Acanthus branch. Note: The size of the stem should be created in harmony, neither too thick nor too thin.



Complete the sketch with all the main - sub elements, blades, connection knots as well as other minor details to align the composition.



Elaborate details to finish shaping the ornament.



Start with the main Acanthus blade, which is also the main element of the drawing. Its light direction is at 45° from the right. Use light grade to apply on dark areas of the leaf blade (such as vein position, leaf edge, fold, etc.)



Continue to cast light shadows on the shaded areas of the blade edge (*the edge is on the lower left side, opposite to the light direction*).



Create darker shading on the main veins of the central blade.



Create a darker shadow on the rest of the shaded parts of the central blade, including the lower left part and bottom edges as well as where folds are positioned.



In the next step, add a light shadow to the curled Acanthus blade on the left side. Don't forget that we need to visualize the space of the leaf to identify the shadowed areas (left and below), before shading these positions.



Create dark shading on obscured areas. At this point, the light shadow will have a neutral value and become transition between light and dark areas, or the shadowed areas but with low contrast (*take veins as an example.*)



Apply the same shading technique to the curved Acanthus blade on the right side.



Create light shadows on the secondary blades as well as other minor details.

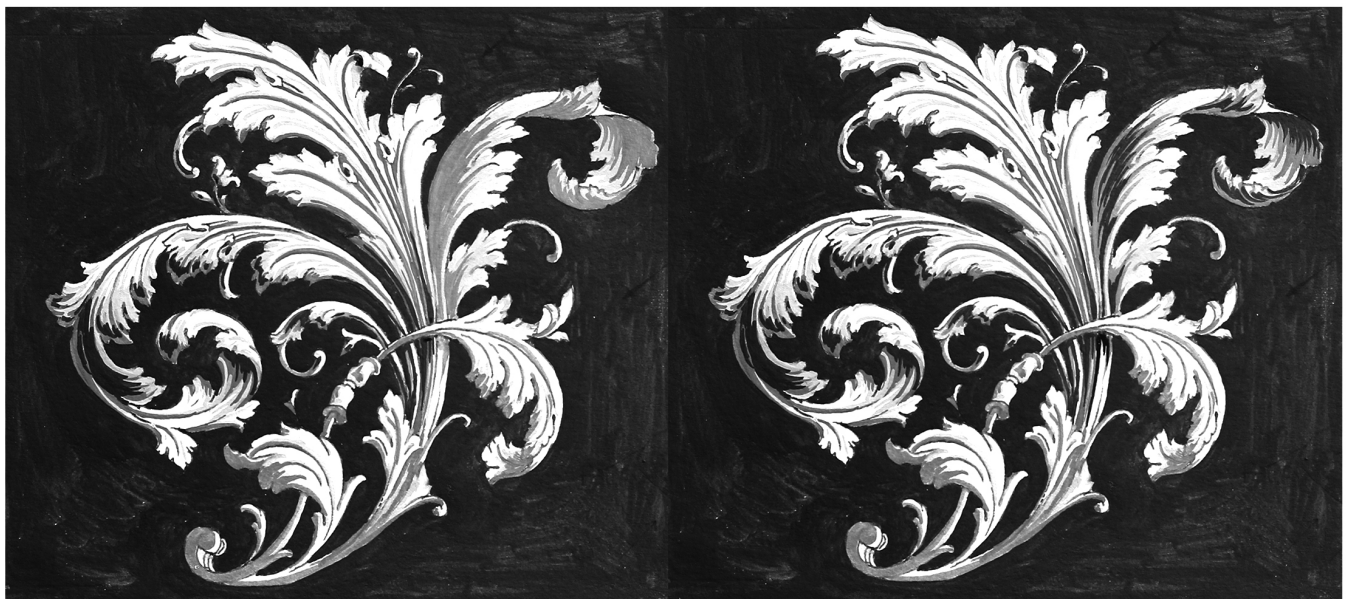


Complete the light-dark areas with 2 values: highlights, half-shaded areas, and dark areas.
(The drawing is not completed yet.)



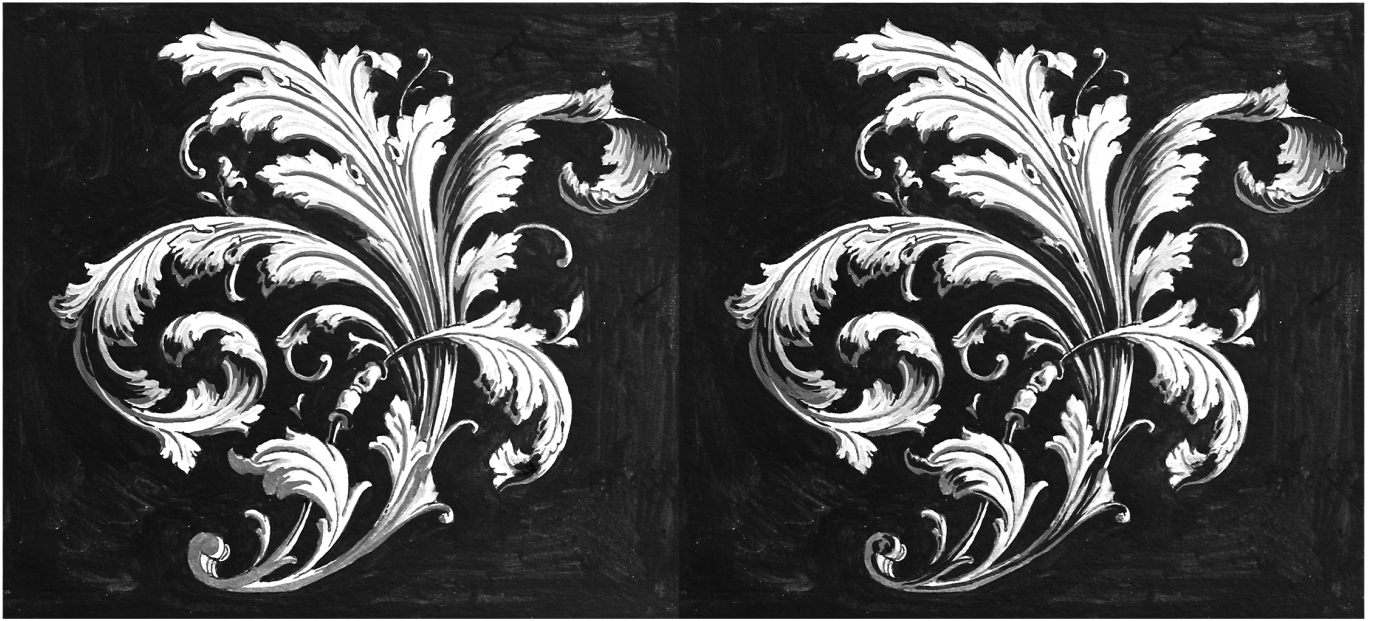
To feel the light correlation, we can cast a shadow to the ground by using dark shading skills.

As the theory about distance and reflection, start with the Acanthus branch on the left then create dark shadows with the highlights. However, do not overlap the leftmost edges of the blade.



Do the same for all the highlights of the left blade.

Use the same technique with a curved Acanthus blade on the right.



Apply the same technique into other Acanthus branches. One more factor to keep in mind:
The details that overlap others will cast a shadow over the underneath.



Finish an advanced Acanthus drawing with a basic shading technique.

SUMMARY

So, we have completed a certain fundamental stage in learning and practicing Acanthus drawing. But we will not stop there, ornamental design is very open, containing many things for us, those who love visual arts in general, to explore. I hope that this second material about Acanthus can inspire you. And, with persistent practice, anyone will be able to create drawings that fully express their enthusiasm and unique style.



Upcoming Acanthus Ornament manual: **Acanthus Vol. 3 - Coloring: techniques & Harmony**

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