

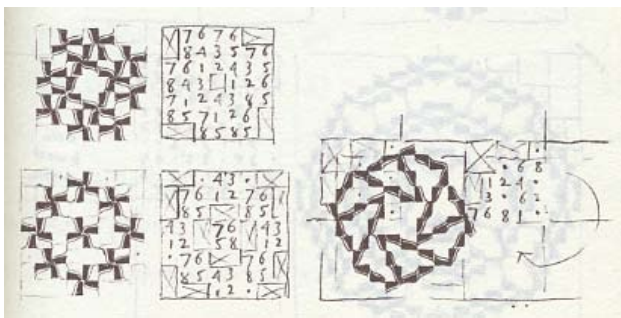
Bram de Does / Het Kaba ornament

By **Charlie Bakker** of group *B* - You may already know **Bram de Does** as the maker of the two typefaces *Trinité* and *Lexicon*. For that reason I am not going to tell you about that. I am mainly going to focus on his **book** 'Kaba ornament' and his general vision.

This all started in the sixties after his making of the two typefaces. Bram was asked to design a series of ornaments to be used by the company Enschedé (where he worked at the time) as security printing. But because such things as the credit card were introduced he never finished this project.

Out of a sort of 'protest' to digitalism he decided to cast the ornaments and proceed in working with them himself. He always wanted to do something with decoration, because in fact he did not like **decoration**. He designed an **ornament** and called it the **Kaba ornament**. He chose to call it this because Kaba is the Arabic word for cube. It is also the name of the **holy cube** in Mecca. He did not choose the name out of sympathy for the Islam, but because he admires Arabic decoration and because the basic unit of the kaba ornament is the square.

He worked on the Kaba ornament for about two years, making sketches etc. The ornament could be placed in four different ways and it could also be mirrored and then also be placed in four different ways. So in total he could use the ornament in eight different ways. So he numbered the different ornaments and used these numbers to create grids for him to use as references. You can imagine Bram was also quite good at mathematics.

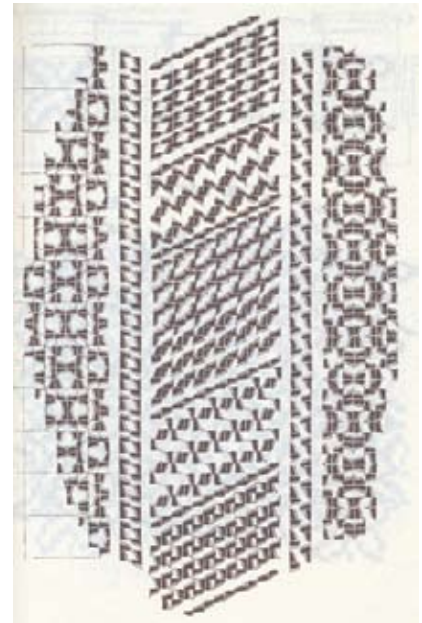


He found working on the Kaba ornament a kind of meditation. Different from designing the typefaces, he was now free to play with the ornament without it having to serve a useful purpose. He did not want to give in to this urge regarding to type. These will always remain sacred.

The **first edition** of the Kaba ornament he decided to print himself. He preferred the traditional way of printing and craftsmanship. I think it is also nice how he compares his way of working to his love of gardening. He was one of the first biological gardeners in the time. *'The difference between handwork and computer*

work can hardly be noticed, but I am not only concerned by what is visible. It's like the difference between a manually, organically grown head of lettuce and a sprayed vegetable produced in a large scale. On the outside you see little difference. But the biologically grown vegetable tastes better, is more wholesome and it spares the environment. It gives you a better feeling.'

Bram also played the violin, but not in the traditional way, he chose to play the songs a little off key, which he also uses as a good comparison. *'As false notes in folk music can be charming now and then, in the same way little irregularities do the trick in ornamentation.'* He thought that the more production takes place in a mechanical way the less feeling can be expressed spontaneously.



Bram wanted to make a whole series of books with titles such as 2. *vignettes*, 3. *borders*, 4. *patterns*, 5. *borders of the Kaba ornament in combination with full tiles*, 6. *patterns with the Kaba ornament and full tiles*, 7. *vignettes in two colours*, and so on. But he sadly got an eye disease and could not proceed. So he decided to have it printed by **Jan de Jong**. (Who also printed other books by Bram, such as *Tristan* and **BdD letter ontwerper & typograaf**) Soon they decided to make just one book combining all of this. What I find nice is that they used Bram's font *Lexicon*. Making the book took a really long time, having to scan all the sketches and remove the grids etc. Finally it was finished and the first print was handed to Bram on the 8th of September 2006 by *Wim Crouwel*.

To many artists and designers Bram and his Kaba ornament are a great **inspiration**.

As said by Jan de Jong: *'Bram is traditional but also innovative. He looks for harmony but does not stand in the way of conflict. He wants certainty but chooses for uncertainty. He has been a vegetarian for 25 years but still enjoys a good steak once in a while. He doesn't really drink but once found himself waking up at an unknown station. All of this in one man.'*