



Needlework picture

Margratt Jaffray

Not on display

Title/Description: Needlework picture

Artist/Maker: Margratt Jaffray

Born: 1756 1756 - 1756

Object Type: Textile

Materials: Linen, Silk threads

Technique: Tent stitch

Measurements: h. 440 x w. 900 mm

Accession Number: 1244

Historic Period: 18th century

Production Place: England, Europe, Massachusetts, The Americas, United States of America

This large tent stitch picture, showing a shepherd and shepherdess in a pastoral landscape, was stitched by a girl named Margratt Jaffray in 1756. The size and detail of the piece suggest the maker

stitched it when she was a teenager, although it is not possible to determine when Jaffray was born or where she worked her picture. The subject of the picture is typical of eighteenth-century schoolgirl needlework. Depicting shepherding couples in pastoral landscapes gave girls the opportunity to practise rendering in stitch not only people, but also animals and vegetation. Lighter thread colours on the figures' faces, shepherdess' chest and arms, and various sheep hint at a later stitcher attempting to fix portions of the picture that experienced thread loss.

Margratt Jaffray worked her name and 1756, the year she stitched her work, at the top of the piece. This inscription, wrought in pink thread, sits below a sun with a face and pink, blue, and white clouds. Below the sun and clouds is a tree from which four bunches of grapes - red, pink, and white - grow. Flanking the tree is a fashionably dressed shepherding couple. The shepherdess wears a pink dress with a decorated stomacher and holds flowers in her right hand and a staff in her left. The shepherd, wearing a blue coat, red breeches, and a brown pouch, rests a staff between his knees and holds a flute. Next to the shepherdess lies a spotted dog and a furry sheep. Next to the man sits another dog and a diminutive sheep.

The picture's foreground is rich with flora and fauna. In the middle, below the grape tree, blossoms a sprig of flowers. To the viewer's left of the flowers are three sheep, a running stag, an owl, and a snake. To the viewer's right of the flowers are two goats, a horned sheep, and a butterfly. Oddly, the horned sheep's body has disappeared behind the tree, but one of its legs appears in front of it. In the two corners of the picture are leafy trees. On one of the left-hand tree's branches perches a multicoloured bird pursued by a clawed animal, perhaps a spotted leopard, who jumps up the tree's trunk. On the right-hand tree's branches sit another multicoloured bird and what may be a turkey.

Jaffray's needlework is one of three nearly identical tent stitch pictures known to survive. All three exhibit the same design and similar combinations of thread colours (for example, pink and blue threads for the clouds). The other two examples are in private collections and lack makers' names and dates. It has been asserted that one of the examples, which features a dark background instead of the blue background seen in Jaffray's work, was stitched in Boston, Massachusetts, USA, though the object itself does not contain any information regarding the maker and where she may have lived [1]. The fact that it is not possible to say conclusively whether Margratt Jaffray lived and stitched in England or colonial America illustrates the similarities between some types of English and American needlework produced during this time.

Isabella Rosner, January 2022

[1] "Shepherd and Shepherdess Courting Scene," Stephen & Carol Huber, <https://www.antiquesamplers.com/canvas/shepard-ess-dk-background.htm>.

Further Reading

Thomasina Beck, *Gardening with Silk and Gold, A History of Gardens in Embroidery* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1997)

