



Raised work embroidered picture, Charles I and Henrietta Maria

Not on display

Title/Description: Raised work embroidered picture, Charles I and Henrietta Maria

Born: 1650 - 1680

Object Type: Textile

Materials: beads, metal purl, seed pearls, Silk, Silk threads

Technique: Couching, Detached buttonhole stitch, French knot, Long and short stitch, Overtwisting, Raised embroidery, Satin stitch

Measurements: h. 310 x w. 440 mm

Accession Number: 1247

Historic Period: 17th century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe

Though this embroidered picture depicts King Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria, its style suggests it was made in commemoration of the king after his death rather than made during his reign. Its production in a later period is indicated by the inclusion of raised work, which was most popular in the third quarter of the seventeenth century. This dating is buttressed by the picture's many cartouches, which may have been influenced by the workshop of professional embroidery designer John Nelham, who took over his father's business in 1654 [1]. The quality of the picture suggests it was stitched by a girl at the end of her needlework education rather than a professional. By memorialising the ill-fated king, the stitcher asserts her (and probably her family's and perhaps teacher's) allegiance to the monarchy and Royalists.

In the centre of the picture stand Charles and Henrietta Maria, each holding a shared crown of leaves with one hand. Both of the figures are wrought in raised work and are adorned with seed pearls and coral-coloured beads. Between them rests an orb and sword, items of the crown jewels. In the background is a castle and in the foreground a dog. To the viewer's left of Charles is a flowering pear tree, caterpillar, and bird perched above a grotto. To the viewer's right of Henrietta Maria is an apple tree, moth, and peacock. The sky is dotted with polychrome clouds and a sun, which is unusually poised above the queen instead of the king.

Bordering the central scene are flowers and eight cartouches. The two flowers above and below the scene are wrought in metal purl, while the three flowers and one bunch of grapes on either side are made of detached buttonhole stitches. In the four corner cartouches are the royal animals - a unicorn, spotted leopard, lion, and stag. The cartouche above and cartouche below the central scene feature a rose and a carnation. The cartouches on the viewer's left of the scene shows a young man, while the cartouche on the right side depicts a young woman. It is not known who these figures are meant to represent, but, given the central panel, perhaps they are young members of the House of Stuart. The picture is a celebration of the monarchy and its associated imagery.

Isabella Rosner, March 2022

[1] Margaret Swain, 'John Nelham's Needlework Panel,' *The Bulletin of the Needle and Bobbin Club*, vol. 65 (1982), p. 7.

Further Reading

Melinda Watt and Andrew Morrall. *English Embroidery in the Metropolitan Museum, 1575-1700: Twixt Art and Nature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

Xanthe Brooke, *The Lady Lever Art Gallery: Catalogue of Embroideries* (Liverpool, England: National Museums & Galleries on Merseyside, 1992).
