



# Embroidered Mirror Frame

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**Not on display**

**Title/Description:** Embroidered Mirror Frame

**Born:** 1650 - 1675

**Measurements:** framed: h. 512 x w. 440 x d. 55 mm

**Accession Number:** 1251

**Historic Period:** 17th century

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Embroidering a mirror frame was a common domestic needlework project in England in the second half of the seventeenth century. This was perhaps because, in the 1660s, mirrors became more readily available and affordable to consumers, a result of English mirror makers improving their techniques [1]. Up until this point, mirror glass was a luxury item that needed to be imported [2]. This mirror, which is framed by imitation tortoiseshell and which has mirror glass from a later period, features a courting couple stood amongst flora and fauna in a variety of stitches and scales.

In each of the frame's four corners is a large flower in a vase. The top two are made entirely of metal purl. The bottom flowers are made of silk threads, with the viewer's left-hand flower featuring three-dimensional petal and leaves made of detached buttonhole stitches. The flower on the bottom right is flat, wrought with satin stitches. On the viewer's left side of the mirror is a fashionably dressed man doffing his hat. His cuffs and collar are made of tiny pieces of lace, likely made by the frame's stitcher instead of bought ready made from a haberdasher. To the right of the mirror is a woman smelling a flower whilst stood beneath a tree growing two large strawberries. She, too, wears a lace collar. She lifts her skilfully draped, three-dimensional skirt to reveal an underskirt made of long and short stitches. Both figures' faces are made of tent stitches, a stitch much more often used on linen than on satin. The figures' heads and necks were stitched upon linen and appliquéd onto the frame's satin ground. The inclusion of a courting couple, the man doffing his hat and the woman smelling a flower, is common on schoolgirl needlework from seventeenth-century England.

In between the top two flowers sits a castle and in between the bottom two flowers is a grotto flanked by two birds perched on tree branches. Castles, grottos, and birds appear often on domestic embroidery of the time. Peppered throughout the mirror frame are small insects including snails, caterpillars, butterflies, and moths. The variety of stitches employed and common motifs depicted on this mirror frame make it evident that this is the work of an early modern schoolgirl, one whose family was able to afford a variety of haberdashery and a formal education for their daughter.

Isabella Rosner, February 2022

[1] Melinda Watt, 'Mirror with Jael and Barak,' in Watt, M. and Morrall, A. *English Embroidery in the Metropolitan Museum, 1575-1700: 'Twixt Art and Nature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 216.

[2] Ibid.

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## 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).

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