

# ART MUSEUMS of Colonial Williamsburg

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## HISTORIC TEXTILES ARE THE FOCUS OF TWO EXHIBITIONS OPENING IN DECEMBER 2022 AT THE ART MUSEUMS OF COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG



Williamsburg, Va. (Oct. 25, 2022)—Two new textile exhibitions will open at the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg, on Dec. 3, 2022 and are sure to delight museum visitors. *Stitched in Time: American Needlework*, an exhibition of nearly 60 examples of bedrugs, whitework, embroidered hand towels, quilted petticoats, samplers, mourning and commemorative needlework, crewelwork, needlework with religious and geographical influences as well as sewing accessories, will remain on view through Jan. 2, 2025 at the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum. Additionally, an entirely new rotation of objects in the popular exhibition *The Art of the Quilter* that opened in 2021 will feature 15 pieces, 12 of which are recent acquisitions that have never before been displayed. This configuration of the exhibition, which will remain on view through August 2023 at the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, will include eleven large quilts, one woven coverlet and three doll-size quilts that tell stories about people from America’s past and the societies in which they lived.

“For decades The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation has collected textiles from a broad and highly diverse array of ethnic, cultural, and regional communities,” said Ronald L. Hurst, senior vice president for education

and historic resources. “These new exhibitions allow us to share these beautiful and story-laden documents of early American society with the visiting public.”

Needlework and sewing were common threads in the lives of most 18th- and 19th-century females across social, economic and geographical boundaries. Early American women—whether poor, enslaved, indigenous, middle class or wealthy—contributed to their family’s household furnishings and enriched their homes and clothing by embellishing textiles with decorative stitches. Sewing and mending everyday household textiles, such as bed and table linens and clothing, was another way for women to contribute economically to their family. Stitching needlework projects was not only a creative outlet for many housewives, but was also an educational tool for young schoolgirls. These themes are the basis for *Stitched in Time: American Needlework*, which will be on view in the Len and Cyndy Alaimo Gallery. The exhibition will also highlight the diversity and regional variations of American needlework that can be traced through the ethnic origins of the makers, trade and migration patterns, influential teachers and artists, current fashions, religious affiliations, geography and even climate.

“We are excited to share The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation’s regionally and ethnically diverse needlework collection with our museum visitors,” said Kimberly Smith Ivey, senior curator of textiles. “Over 50 textiles for comparison have been selected from regions of New England, the Mid-Atlantic, the South and the Western Frontier. Highlights of the exhibition include a schoolgirl sampler created by a young Jewish girl who inscribed her work with her hometown of Chicago. Another extraordinary embroidery was created by an Irish immigrant in Frenchtown, Michigan, at the Oblate Sisters of Providence School, which was cofounded by Mother Theresa Maxi Duchermin, a Catholic of color.”



Among the many other highlights of *Stitched in Time* is a rare bed rug made probably in Norwich, Connecticut, in 1785 by an unknown maker who signed the rug “RD.” The rug relates to a group of embroidered rugs created in the Connecticut River Valley. It was made by darning, or stitching, closely spaced rows of heavy wool yarn through a woolen ground, leaving most of the stitches visible on the surface. The side and bottom borders consist of abstract scalloped and peaked lines similar in appearance to Irish stitch needlework, but worked with darning stitches. This bed rug is especially attractive because of its remarkable condition.



Among the many examples of extraordinary samplers in the exhibition is one made in 1827 by Mary Rees, a student of Elizabeth Robinson (1778-1865), in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. Robinson, an unmarried woman who lived with her five unmarried sisters in their family homestead left to them by their

father, worked as a schoolmistress to help support the family. At least eight samplers or pictures have been identified from Elizabeth Robinson's school. Mary Rees' cross-stitched verse and her pictorial composition made of silk and wool embroidery threads on a linen ground are perfectly suited to each other. The verse implores all living things to praise their Maker, while the imagery shows some of the plants and animals requested to pay such tribute. Rees' careful selection of thread color and the direction and type of stitching makes the scene both decorative and naturalistic. The embroidered scene bordered in black stitches to imitate a reverse painted glass mat and the title, date, and signature worked in bright threads to mimic a more expensive gold leaf inscription are characteristics found on other embroideries worked under the instruction of Elizabeth Robinson.



A highly sophisticated embroidered picture attributed by family history to Orra Sears (1798-1872) of Bloomfield, New York, is another highlight of *Stitched in Time*. It is believed that Orra created the picture in 1816, when she was a boarding student at the Litchfield Female Academy in Connecticut. School records indicate that Orra attended the school that year; she was one of at least 2,000 girls from nearly every state who attended the academy from 1792 through 1833 when the school operated. Students from out of town, such as Orra, boarded with Litchfield families. American educational goals of the period stressed the proficient duplication in embroidery of idealized themes that were widely recognized and approved of, rather than the development of individual creativity. Needlework compositions were taken from existing illustrations, usually English engravings or other printed images. Here, at least four different prints depicting views of Chiswick, an English country house, were used to create the scene on Orra's embroidered and painted picture.

In its second year of a three-year exhibition, *The Art of the Quilter's* latest rotation in the Foster and Muriel McCarl Gallery promises to continue delighting quilt aficionados with its new selection of quilts from The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's heralded collection from the early 19th century to present day. These diverse quilts allowed women to express artistic instincts while also creating a warm and practical bedcover for their loved ones. Making quilts was often a community activity, in which neighbors and relatives enjoyed the pleasures of joint work and socializing.

Ivey said of the exhibition, "We are literally covering America with this exhibition. The bed coverings display a variety of techniques, colors and materials, and demonstrate America's multicultural society with examples from the Anglo-American, German, Amish and Mennonite communities."



Among the highlights of *The Art of the Quilter* is this log cabin show quilt made by Geneva Luella Richards Graves (1862-1915) in Hampshire County, Massachusetts, ca. 1890.

During the last quarter of the 19th century, when home decoration and beautification were a primary duty of Victorian housewives, the interest in show quilts reached its pinnacle. Most of these ornamental quilts were smaller than bed-size quilts and were usually made of silks and other fine fabrics with decorative stitches. Geneva's small throw, made of rich-colored silk solids, plaids, stripes, textured weaves and velvets has the additional embellishments of metal bangles and wool, silk and metallic fringe. She worked from the center out to the edges of each smaller unit, building up the design with carefully chosen rectangles of fabric that represent logs of the cabin and purposely selected and assembled her fabrics to create bands of color in a concentric diamond shape. This is the first time this quilt will be on display at the Art Museums since it was acquired in 2020.



Album quilts, so called because their blocks were like pages from a book and comprised of individual appliquéd or pieced blocks, became fashionable in the mid-1840s. While they could be worked entirely by one person, they are best known as the product of group efforts, with each maker contributing one or more of the blocks. The appliquéd album quilt at left is another featured object in the

exhibition. Made solely by Sarah Doub (1805-1878) in Frederick, Maryland, in 1857 for her youngest son, Valentine David Doub, it is not known if he ever received the exquisite quilt as he immigrated to California in 1849 as a member of a mining company, and there is no evidence that he ever returned home. On the back of the quilt in the center is the handwritten inked inscription: "Made by/ Sarah Doub/ in the 52nd year of her/ age/ for her son/ Valentine David Doub/ Frederick City/ July 1857/ Maryland." Twenty of the 25 blocks of the quilt have an appliquéd fleur-de-lis motif, which is known by a number of different names; in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, it is called the "Apple Pie Ridge Star," named for a nine-mile stretch of road in Frederic County, Virginia. This quilt also makes its exhibition debut at the Art Museums having also been acquired in 2020.



Another piece recently acquired in 2021 is a third highlight of *The Art of the Quilter* and is a remarkable and prize-winning example of pieced, or patchwork, quilting. A pieced and appliquéd "Sunburst" quilt made by Mary Ann McPherson (1809-1901) in Charles County, Maryland between 1840 and 1850, is skillfully made with finely quilted intricate florals, vines and diagonal lines. Each pieced "sunburst" contains 288 individually

pieced diamonds. Adding to the quilt's beauty and extravagance is a five-inch handwoven linen fringe attached to all four sides. The combined color schemes of red and green and blue, brown and pink is found on other Maryland quilts created in the 1840s and 1850s. The quilt descended through her brother's family line to his granddaughter, Jane Virginia McPherson Burton, who was a school teacher. She stitched a label in

the left corner of the quilt that reads: "Sunburst quilt / Made one hundred and / fifty years ago by / Mrs. Mary MacPherson / 1st prize 50c C. M. C." Mary Ann was raised at Greenway, a tobacco plantation near Pomonkey, Maryland. Enslaved people worked in the home and fields to provide Mary and her six siblings a comfortable lifestyle, which enabled her leisure time to create quilts. A second quilt created by Mary Ann is a Mariner's Compass pattern that also survives and is in this exhibition as well.

*Stitched in Time* is funded by the Leonard J. and Cynthia L. Alaimo Endowment for Colonial Williamsburg's Art Museums, the Jeanne L. Asplundh Textile Exhibitions Endowment and the George Cromwell Trust. *The Art of the Quilter* is generously funded by the June G. Horsman Family Trust.

*Stitched in Time* and *The Art of the Quilter* promise to engage and delight the passionate needleworker of today, anyone who has received a special hand-stitched gift from a family member or friend, and all museum visitors of diverse ethnicities from different regions.

Additional information about the Art Museums and Colonial Williamsburg as well as tickets are available online at [colonialwilliamsburg.org](http://colonialwilliamsburg.org), by calling (855) 296-6627 and by following Colonial Williamsburg on [Facebook](#) and [@colonialwmsburg](#) on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

#### *About the Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg*

*The Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg include the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum and the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum, both of which are housed in their newly expanded building that offers an additional 65,000-square-feet of space, 25-percent more gallery space and numerous enhancements to the visitor experience. The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum is home to the nation's premier collection of American folk art, with more than 7,000 folk art objects made up to the present day. The DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum exhibits the best in British and American fine and decorative arts from 1670–1840. The Art Museums of Colonial Williamsburg are located at 301 South Nassau Street in Williamsburg, Va. Open daily from 10:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M.*

#### *About The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation*

*Colonial Williamsburg operates the world's largest American history museum, preserving Virginia's 18th-century capital as a fully functioning city. Fun, engaging experiences transport guests back in time and highlight the relevance of America's founding era to contemporary life. The Colonial Williamsburg experience includes more than 600 restored or reconstructed buildings, historic trade shops, renowned museums of decorative arts and folk art, extensive educational outreach programs for students and teachers, lodging, culinary options from historic taverns to casual or elegant dining, the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club featuring 45 holes designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr. and his son Rees Jones, a full-service spa and fitness center managed by Trilogy Spa, pools, retail stores and gardens. Philanthropic support and revenue from admissions, products and hospitality operations sustain Colonial Williamsburg's educational programs and preservation initiatives. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation is a 501*

*(c)(3) nonprofit organization; philanthropic support and revenue from admissions, products and operations sustain its educational programs and preservation initiatives.*

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Images: Embroidered Bed Rug, "RD" unidentified maker, probably Norwich, Connecticut, 1785, wool embroidery on a wool ground, Museum Purchase, Dr. and Mrs. T. Marshall Hahn Jr. Fund, 2014.609.6; Sampler, Mary Rees, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, 1827, silk and wool embroidery threads on a linen ground of 27 x 36 threads per inch in an original veneered maple frame, Museum Purchase, 1957.602.1; *View of the Rt Honble the Earl of BURLINGTON'S HOUse at CHISWICK*, Orra Sears (1798-1872), Litchfield, Connecticut, 1816, silk, chenille, metallic, and crinkled silk threads with paint and ink on a silk ground backed with linen, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Allen W. Rider, 2000-51; Log Cabin Show Quilt, Geneva Luella Richards Graves (1862-1915), Hampshire County, Massachusetts, ca. 1890, silks, metal bangles, wool, silk and metallic fringe and cotton foundation, Gift of Karen W. Cox, 2020.609.5; Appliquéd Album Quilt, Sarah Doub (1805-1878), Frederick, Maryland, 1857, plain and printed cottons, Museum Purchase with funds provided by Linda Baumgarten, 2020.609.1; Pieced and Appliquéd Sunburst Quilt, Mary Ann McPherson (1809-1901), Charles County, Maryland, 1840-1850, plain and printed cottons, linen fringe, with paper and ink label, Museum Purchase, The Friends of Colonial Williamsburg Collections Fund, 2021.609.3.