

Nest

Danica Maier

2014

WALL DRAWING, JACOBAN CREWEL EMBROIDERED BEDSPREAD
LCNUG: 1927/30, & *BLUE TIT* PENCIL DRAWING ON SERITRACE

COURTESY THE ARTIST

This installation focuses on the 17th Century bedspread that was the starting point for the *Stitch & Peacock* exhibition. Maier's wall drawing, similar to wallpaper, and an almost hidden small drawing purposely put her own laborious work to the background therefore hosting the historical object.

The highly patterned historical bedspread is created using a repeat pattern, however while the outline of the imagery is repeated the details within are each different and unique. Looking from left to right you can see similar birds and leaves but the decorative detail of each is different. The idea of disrupting or working with the singular, within a repeat pattern, is something the artist is very interested in and can be seen in different elements of the exhibition.

In this large installation Maier creates what appears as a line of stitch, yet on closer inspection you will see that this repetition is created from 17th century slang terms for female genitalia. As we consider this work the social and political environment that surrounds the historic work and its production comes into focus. Bringing up questions about the link between the three works making up the installation and how the artist allows us to approach a historical item anew.

Many of the designs are similar to those found in crewel embroidery from collections such as the V&A and are thought to come from Richard Shorleyker's pattern book of 1624, A 'schole-house, for the needle'. The bedspread was heavily restored in 1857 and has been placed onto a new backing at which time a cord was added to hide the edge of original fabric that was cut away.

Flock

Danica Maier

2014

COLOURED PENCIL ON SERITRACE, MOUNTED ON ALUMINIUM

COURTESY THE ARTIST

A flock of birds is seen swooping over the gallery walls as if they have escaped from the rigid structure of the samplers and freed themselves from the harsh backing that houses their smaller stitched siblings. All of the birds in this work are taken from the collection of samplers and stitch work on the accompanying walls.

These samplers, which were produced by young girls as practice or teaching aids, are both visually and idealistically stiff and constricting. Made in an atmosphere of strict rules they can be seen as a visual representation of the uniform and ordered daily life of young women of the time.

The title and presentation of *Flock* plays with the notion of a flock of birds while also hinting at flock wallpaper as decoration and pattern as a key interest in Maier's work. Textiles, wall papers and groups of birds share the visual trick of being read by the eye as one entire image but containing individual stitches, birds and patterns.

Maier has utilised the height and breadth of the gallery to produce one entire image. This forced distance from the work causes the hours of labour that has gone into the production to sink into the background as we initially see the images of the birds and not the details.

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Brace

Danica Maier

2014

FABRIC, SCREEN PRINT AND SILK EMBROIDERY THREAD

COURTESY THE ARTIST

As found within Maier's other titles, *Brace* has multiple meanings and readings: to support, to balance, a pair, a connector.

Each element of this work displays an identical printed pattern that has been individually embroidered to highlight different elements, thereby making each piece unique. It combines many elements Maier has encountered during her time working with the textile collection. She makes references to an unfinished work from the collection where the printed guideline is still visible, yet to be followed and stitched over. As well as ideas of repetition and her interest in broken repeat patterns as seen in the Jacobean bedspread. The differences in each line of stitch show the artist's hand and reminds us that however uniform the original line each individual follows their own path.

A brace is also the name for a pair of birds or mammals killed in hunting. Paired and bunched together but still separate and distinct, they are joined together in death. Within this work there is a hint of the romantic, the dreamlike view we often have of country life or the homeliness of stitch is contrasted by multiple meanings.

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Happy Hunting Ground

Danica Maier

2014

CONSISTS OF STAG, COCK, TEIRCEL ALL WORKS, PENCIL ON SERITRACE

COURTESY THE ARTIST

Stag, Cock, Stud, Bull, Fox, Dog – Male

Bird, Chicken, Cow, Vixen, Bitch – Female

Maier uses word play in her titles and carefully chooses the images and text she works with to gently disrupt our expectations. The words that society chooses to describe the sexes are stacked with meaning; they undermine or prop up notions of power or status related to gender. The drawings here depict male animals found within the samplers. The titles of the drawings (*Stag, Cock*) relate to slang terms for male sexual prowess or genitals. The peacock's feathers and stags horns are designed to visually entice the female and display power.

Stitch was historically a female past time as noted through the creation of domestic items such as quilts and samplers. The repetitive nature of stitch and embroidery mirrors the repetitive nature of much of the work done by women in this period. The act of stitching is seen as a state between meditation and oppression. Maier takes these histories and the methods in which these objects are produced and creates new works from them, performing this repetition within her drawing as a modern take on female labour. She takes back ownership and instills within the artwork a political bite.

Skein

Danica Maier

2014

EMBROIDERED WORKS FROM THE USHER COLLECTION, PENCIL ON
SERITRACE, MOUNTED ON ALUMINIUM, SIZES VARIABLE

COURTESY THE ARTIST

This work is directly using the collection of embroidered and cross-stitch samplers from the Usher Collection interrupted with Maier's own pieces.

The title *Skein* has a double meaning relating to thread or yarn that is coiled and knotted to produce part of a complex whole, while also used to describe a flock of geese or swans in flight. The formation allows all of the works to support each other; they can be seen singularly or as a group.

Maier uses the visual traits of textile works such as the line of stitch, pattern and repetition to free and transform the images from their original meanings and settings. By playfully inserting hidden phrases and words in the drawings, allowing animals to escape their frames to find new territories, Maier encourages us to reassess our approach to the original historic objects.

Samplers were often created by young girls, some as young as eight, as preparation for womanhood or a means to keep hands and minds busy. These girls becoming young women were often seen as inferior to their male counterparts restricted by their corsets and status, unable to vote or take part in political life. The lives of the women who produced these samplers could be seen to mirror production methods of the samplers, constrained, strict and set within a structured background.

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Untitled

Danica Maier

2014

THE ARTIST'S COLLECTION OF QUILTS MADE BY HER GREAT GRANDMOTHERS, MUSEUM CASE WHICH ONCE HELD THE MAGNA CARTA

COURTESY THE ARTIST

In this work the artist, who was born in the U.S.A., displays a collection of quilts hand sewn by her great grandmothers on both sides of the family tree. A family ancestry which can be traced back to the local area around Burton Joyce, Norfolk and Rippon. The quilts are displayed within a Museum case which was designed especially for and, up until recently, was used to hold the Lincoln Magna Carta.

The work was made during the installation of the show and therefore the associations and ideas in the work are still fresh and fluid. The artist is reluctant to pin down the exact meaning and the work functions more as an object for consideration, rather than having a set view point or subject matter.

A few of the ideas that this work allows us to consider include:

The Magna Carta's role and its importance in American history; the pioneering and resilient spirit of the generation of European immigrants to the U.S.A. who produced these quilts which went on to become a key part of American cultural history; the mixing of family history with the display of nationally important objects and how and why we archive and display artefacts; the protections we give to objects we deem culturally important and how family history and personal memories are dealt with by heritage institutions.

Sampler

A (needlework) sampler is a piece of embroidery produced as a demonstration or test of skill in needlework. It often includes the alphabet, figures, motifs, decorative borders and sometimes the name of the person who embroidered it and the date. The word sampler is derived from the Latin 'exemplum' – an example.

The oldest surviving samplers were constructed in the 15th and 16th centuries.

The works on show here date from the 18th and 19th centuries.

The first printed pattern book was produced in 1523, but they were not easily obtainable and a sampler was the most common form of reference available to many women.

Whenever a needlewoman saw a new and interesting example of a stitching pattern, she would quickly sew a small sample of it onto a piece of cloth – her 'sampler'.

As fabric was very expensive, these samplers were totally covered with stitches. These were known as band samplers and valued highly, often being mentioned in wills and passed down through the generations.

By the 18th century, samplers were a complete contrast to the scattered samples sewn earlier on. These samplers were stitched more to demonstrate knowledge than to preserve skill. The stitching of samplers was believed to be a sign of virtue, achievement and industry, and girls were taught the art from a young age.

The artist will be running a day long workshop on subversive cross stitch on 14th of November. To book a place or for more details please speak to reception or a member of staff in the gallery or visit: <http://stitchworkshop.eventbrite.co.uk>

Cross-stitch is a popular form of embroidery in which X-shaped stitches are used to form a picture.

The stitcher counts the threads in each direction so that the stitches are of uniform size and appearance.

The cross stitch sampler is so called because it was generally stitched by a young girl to learn how to stitch and to record alphabet and other patterns to be used in her household sewing. These samples of her stitching could be referred back to over the years. Often, motifs and initials were stitched on household items to identify their owner, or simply to decorate the otherwise-plain cloth.

Cross stitch is widely used in folk clothing and traditional national dress; it is especially common in traditions from central and Eastern Europe and traditional Palestinian dressmaking.

The recession has also seen a renewal of interest in home crafts. Some retailers have experienced a 17% rise in sales of haberdashery products between 2009 and 2010.

There is a current trend for more postmodern or tongue-in-cheek designs featuring retro images or contemporary sayings. This modern take on cross stitch is linked to a concept known as 'subversive cross stitch' which involves more risqué designs, often fusing the traditional sampler style with sayings designed to shock or play with the old-fashioned image of cross stitch.

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