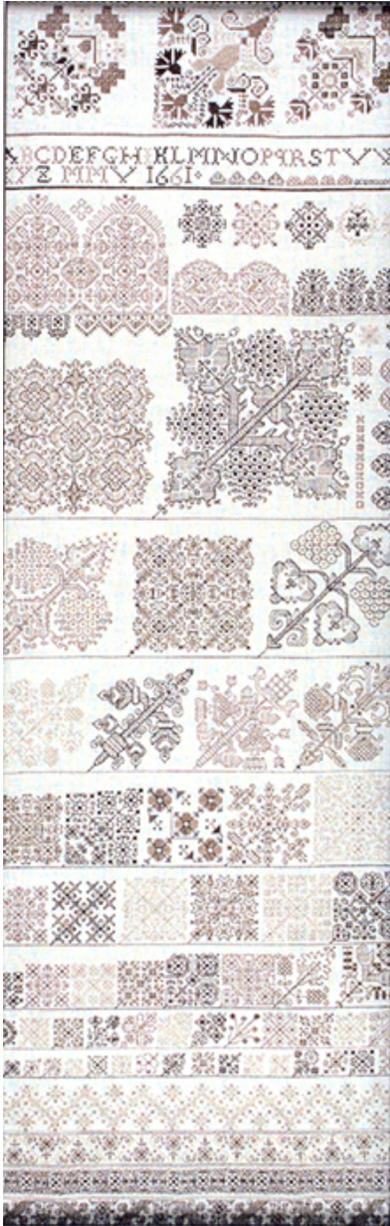


## 1661 REPRODUCTION SAMPLER EAC- 2002-5



**Description:** This exceptionally beautiful and intriguing band sampler is an exact copy of a 1661 sampler, and was embroidered by Regina stitcher, Helen Rowe. Mrs Rowe executed this piece while she was enrolled in an 18-month international embroidery correspondence course in the 1980s. (See history.) Certainly considered one of the most treasured objects in the Heritage Collection of the Embroiderers' Association of Canada, this masterpiece is worked in single strands of black and antique gold silk thread that shades from medium dark to light and pale gold; some gold metal threads are also used. The sampler is stitched on Glenshee linen, 29 threads to the inch. Some 84 motifs that include the alphabet embellish 15 horizontal spaces or bands and are primarily worked in double running stitch with some satin, long arm cross and Algerian Eye techniques, all worked over two threads. (It should be noted that many of these motifs actually comprise numerous parts or smaller patterns, which add to the overall complexity of the work.) Completely reversible and framed so that both sides are visible, this embroidery measures 30.5 cm by 14.5 cm. The narrow width of this sampler, typical of 17<sup>th</sup> Century needlework, reflects the width of most looms at this time (Bolton & Coe, p. 1).

Needless to say, each motif and certainly each band is a work of art. All prompt careful study and understanding of the technique and design but some invite additional consideration. For example, the very first band comprises three large motifs, which have been identified by the instructor of the course (see history) as ambitious and among the most difficult in the entire sampler, especially in view of the fact that they were supposedly stitched upside down. Techniques

featured in these motifs include the long arm cross stitch or Slav, double running stitch and Algerian Eye, which are worked in all four colours, black to pale gold in single strands of silk, thereby further complicating the work. Placed upside down or not, all three motifs appear to be designed on diagonal grids, as are many other motifs in the sampler. While several of the patterns in the centre motif are remindful of carnation or tulip shapes, geometric designs highlight the motifs on either side. All of the individual elements are highly decorative, with many little curlicues adding to complexity of the

designs that are characteristic of 17<sup>th</sup> Century band samplers (*Sampler & Antique Needlework*, Vol. 26, pp. 6, 11; Huber, p. 42).

The second band features an upper case alphabet with the letters “J” and “U” missing, as was the custom at that time (*Sampler & Antique Needlework*, Vol. 20, page 33). It is also noteworthy that the letter k is included in such an early sampler, as this denotes Germanic roots – German, Dutch and English. Romance languages such as Spanish would simply rely on the letter c, regarding k as a mere variation (*Sampler & Antique Needlework*, Vol. 20, page 34). All of the letters are stitched in cross stitch, seven stitches high over two threads. The letters A to W fill the first row and X, Y, and Z are embroidered on the second row, which also contains the initials MMV, the date of 1661 and numerous little motifs that complete the band. The entire band is stitched in black and two shades of gold silk.

One large and two small motifs, all of which exhibit floral designs with tiny leaves, heart shaped images and bits of curled vines, fill the lower portion of the third band. Situated above the small motifs are five even smaller ones, three of which have symmetrical designs featuring diagonal lines enhanced with various flower shapes.

Undoubtedly the fourth band, comprised of the two largest motifs in the entire sampler plus several smaller patterns, presents major challenges. The largest motif is basically a square with symmetrical designs on either side of a diagonal line that runs from the lower left corner to the upper right. The four corners appear to be embellished with leaves and four clusters of Algerian Eye stitches that may represent anything from fruit, such as grapes, to flowers. All spaces are completely filled with delicate stitching worked entirely in black, other than the Algerian Eye, which are embroidered in gold. The first motif on the band, noticeably smaller than the above-mentioned, features the same intricate flower pattern in each of its four corners as well as the centre. Two diagonal lines cross the central flower and other tiny floral designs indicate the half way mark on each side as well as the top and bottom of this motif. It is all worked in medium gold. The complexity of the designs in these motifs are indicative of the outstanding skills of the embroiderer. Completing the band are two very small motifs in a half row above the first motif and seven others approximately the same size in two vertical lines at the end of the band.

While the fourth band really marks the beginning of diagonal grids, it also marks the end of large motifs. From hereon the bands diminish in height, which automatically means smaller motifs, but interestingly, also means there are progressively more motifs on each subsequent band. Accordingly three motifs, noticeably smaller than the main motifs in the fourth band decorate the fifth band. All three motifs feature diagonal grids and both the first motif and the last exhibit the same clusters of gold metallic Algerian eye as those in the previous row. Perhaps the most difficult motif is the one in the centre, completely worked in medium dark gold silk and readily identified with several complex diagonal lines, crossing through the central flower. The four main diagonals are worked in geometric satin stitch. Resting midway on the diagonals are groups of

four gold metallic Algerian eye stitches that form floral shapes. Still other individual dots in Algerian eye technique are located throughout the motif.

The four motifs on band six are relatively small and somewhat different, although they are all fashioned on diagonals that run from the lower left to the upper right corners. Flowers to somewhat angular heart shapes can be identified, but among the most intriguing patterns are two sets of hands in the third motif. The instructor has suggested that these may well be the “aggressive fist of warring”, but the human hand has been a source of inspiration on many works of art dating back to at least the paleolithic era, with its cave art treasures that have never been totally explained (Perecot-Garcia, p.94). Perhaps the hands on this sampler are meant to reflect the creative hands of the original embroiderer.

Even though band seven has five noticeably smaller motifs, the complexity of the work is not lessened. At least four motifs exhibit the complicated, exquisite details that enhance advanced blackwork. However, the third motif in the band is designed with a diagonal from the lower left corner to the upper right that supports three relatively simplistic central floral patterns. These flowers are repeated in the opposite corners, where they rest on smaller, individual diagonals. Each flower has four rounded petals embroidered in satin stitch in the medium dark gold silk with the square centres in pale silk. Completing the motif are bits of vine and triangular forms all in black silk: a more open, lighter image than some of the more sophisticated groupings in this fascinating sampler.

The remaining eight bands continue to decrease in height and contain more motifs. For instance while the eighth band has six motifs, all diagonally designed and requiring expertise to execute, the ninth band has eight motifs, the last of which is highlighted by another pair of hands. Even though twelve little motifs decorate the tenth band, each one is indicative of the many intricacies and segments that makeup this extraordinary embroidery.

The twelfth band veers off the above plan somewhat in that it consists of a repeat pattern of tiny geometric designs that make a “V” shape, or chevron-like line, up and down across the band. This geometric star design is also repeated in the open spaces above and below the “V” line. The entire band is worked in light gold with strategically placed Algerian Eye and cross stitch bits of embroidery accenting the band.

The last three bands, thirteen, fourteen and fifteen, also exhibit tiny repeat patterns across their respective spaces. Although the designs are small, the embroidery is far from simple. Two diagonal lines that are embroidered in running stitch over two threads alternatively meet at the top and then the bottom of the band, dividing band thirteen into clearly defined spaces. Repeat tiny geometric flowers with Algerian Eye centres fill the open spaces both above and below the diagonals. Creating additional interest is the fact that these geometric patterns are placed upside down in every second space. Both the above diagonal joining lines and the upside down motifs are characteristics of 17<sup>th</sup> Century samplers (*Sampler & Antique Needlework*, Vol. 26, p. 6-9; Vol. 28, page 12).

Band fourteen has no spaces at all, as a very small repeat flower with a diagonal design and heart shaped petals, stitched in black, absolutely fills the area, petal upon petal. Similarly, an organized repeat pattern of tiny geometric designs and diagonal lines, also worked in black silk, fills band fifteen, the last band in this blackwork sampler that is truly a masterpiece, no matter the era.



Sampler Front



Sampler Back



**History:** This is a unique and magnificent sampler with a history that is every bit as captivating and unusual as the actual embroidery. Helen Rowe, a long time member of the Regina Stitchery Guild, embroidered this remarkable, reversible sampler in the mid 1980s. She donated it to the Heritage Collection of the Embroiderers' Association of Canada in 2002.

In 1985, Mrs Rowe enrolled in the correspondence course which involved embroidering this 1661 sampler. Offered through a U.S. outlet known as The World In Stitches, the 18-month course was presented by Kay Montclare who actually charted this sampler from a picture in a German book (Rowe). Ms Montclare had, apparently, admired the sampler in the book for sometime, studying each little detail and then finally deciding that if she paid strict attention to the picture, she could in fact duplicate it on graph paper. This she did after many hours of painstaking concentration and "many a ripped stitch", she acknowledges in her notes at the beginning of the course. The course was advertised and Mrs Rowe and numerous other women were the first embroiderers to accept the challenge of, copying this masterpiece of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century embroidery. In

addition, it is thought that Mrs Rowe is likely the only Canadian to have embroidered this sampler.

However, the history continues. Midway through the teaching of the piece, Ms Montclare came upon a picture of this 1661 sampler in one of her own library books. Much to her amazement and concern, the original embroidery was identified as being in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which does not permit copying. She phoned the museum to explain that she had copied this sampler, not knowing that it was located in the V & A Museum. The museum expert was understanding on the basis that she did not believe that the sampler could be exactly copied in this manner. For verification, Ms Montclare was asked to send her embroidery to the museum. It was indeed accurate! The bottom line was that instead of Kay Montclare selling kits out of the US outlet which she had planned to do, the Victoria and Albert purchased Ms Montclare's graph and sold kits out of the V & A museum shop (Correspondence notes, Helen Rowe).

Montclare's notes allude to the difficulty of charting this very complex embroidery from a picture. After many problems, she apparently finally realized that the original sampler was in all likelihood worked on a homespun rather than evenweave fabric. Accordingly this EAC sampler is slightly wider than the one worked in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

Quick to praise the original embroiderer for her exceptional expertise in the choice of designs and her stitching abilities, Montclare suggested that because the patterns fit so well on the bands, it is likely that the German embroiderer designed the motifs herself. As further evidence, the instructor emphasizes that there were no patterns at this time, which of course is not true. In fact, it was a German printer, Johannes Schonsperger, who in 1523 displayed double-running technique in his first embroidery book (*Sampler & Antique Needlework*, Vol. 27, page 47). In the next few years, subsequent books were published by this printer, whose influence was soon seen in Italian works, followed quickly by the English. Meanwhile, the double running stitch is well documented in English clothing by the artist Hans Holbein the Younger, as well as other painters of this period (*Sampler & Antique Needlework*, Vol. 27, page 47). While the earlier spot sampler had proven to be a worthwhile reference for young stitchers without access to books, the design oriented band samplers that followed were most often created in classrooms or certainly with the aid of printed instructions (Huber, page 42; Milne, p. 11).

Whether the motifs in the first band are upside down or not is perhaps debatable. Montclare based her thinking on the premise that originally they were stitched on the bottom of the fabric. One of the main techniques in these motifs is the long arm cross, which she believes may have been planned for the entire embroidery. However, Monclare says that it may be that by the time the embroiderer finished these motifs she had second thoughts about all the work involved, and so turned her fabric around to begin less arduous stitches (Correspondence notes). But, are the motifs upside down and, if they are, is there a very simple reason, such as the stitcher choosing to have these motifs at the top of her work after she had completed them, instead of the

bottom? Whatever the answer, the dilemma brings to mind the talented 17<sup>th</sup> century embroiderer contemplating her exceptional work!

**Materials:** Linen, approximately 33.75 cm by 100cm, silk floss in black, medium dark, light and pale tones of gold, metallic gold embroidery thread and sewing thread.

**Condition:** This exquisite sampler, which is framed so that both sides may be viewed, is in absolutely excellent condition.