



# The Instruction Of Young Ladies

**Arts From Private Girls' Schools  
And Academies In Early America**

At The Fenimore Art Museum

By Kate Eagen Johnson

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Hannah Cogswell offers a portrait of her sister and herself as educators involved in classroom instruction. The Atkinson Academy, founded as a boys' school in 1787, admitted girls a few years later. The building constructed in 1803 still stands. "Hannah and Julia Cogswell Instructing Female Students at Atkinson Academy, Atkinson, New Hampshire" by Hannah Pearson Cogswell (1791–1869), Atkinson, N.H., 1811–12. Watercolor and pencil on paper, 11 by 15-1/8 inches. Frank and Barbara Pollack.

COOPERSTOWN, N.Y. — “It is ‘a curator’s dream.’ You don’t have to guess or speculate and that’s not true of most pieces.” Independent scholar and author Robert Shaw, the guest curator of “The Instruction of Young Ladies: Arts from Private Girls’ Schools and Academies in Early America,” held up the glorious 1769 needlework coat-of-arms by Ann Grant with its intact early history as an ideal. While many works in the exhibition do not possess such strong documentation, it is still fair to say that all qualify as “dream objects.” Employing the language of the day, these wondrous specimens of feminine accomplishment wrought in silk, wool, linen, paint, ink and watercolor will astonish visitors to the Fenimore Art Museum (FAM) in Cooperstown from September 24 through December 31.

“The Instruction of Young Ladies” offers the rare opportunity to see stars of this captivating genre assembled in one location. Gems belonging to FAM and to the collector Jane Katcher are joined by jewels from Yale University Art Gallery, Maine Historical Society, Winterthur Museum and other public and private repositories. According to organizers, this is the first sizable exhibition to consider the range of visual arts taught at



An 1800 print of Washington’s Mount Vernon by English engraver Francis Jukes was the inspiration for the painting on the top. In the academic artistic tradition which valued copywork, prints were a fruitful design resource. The Gothick motif of the ivy vine trailing up the legs of this and similar tables offers a sentimental touch. Worktable decorated by an unidentified artist, possibly Maine, 1815–25. White pine, maple, brass knob and original painted decoration, 28 by 23½ by 17 inches. Jane and Gerald Katcher.



This native of East Windsor, Conn., embroidered a coat-of-arms while attending the school run by the Cumming sisters in Boston. A similar needlework, probably executed at the same school, also graces the exhibition. It is in the collection of the Yale University Art Gallery. Embroidery of the Grant Arms by Ann Grant (1748–1838), Boston, 1769. Polychrome silk embroidery, metallic thread, black satin weave silk ground; framed 29-5/8 by 29-5/8 inches. Historic Deerfield, Inc.

female seminaries and related schools. It is accompanied by a nearly 80-page, full-color catalog.

The ornamental arts objects on display include needlework pictures of the mourning, literary, religious and fanciful varieties. There are maps, still lifes, calligraphic exercises, historical depictions and moralistic scenes among the works on paper. Ladies' reticules, fire fans and even a pretty pillow are embellished with theorem painting. Federal-era tables and boxes decorated by girls and women are also offered for viewers' delight and edification.

Some objects can be tied to specific makers and/or schools of instruction, while other items partake of the pervasive spirit of "schoolgirl art." Those with known origins hail...

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