

# Like the Seeds of a Pomegranate

Artistry from New Jersey  
Pomegranate Guild  
of Judaic Needlework

by Elinor Levy, Ph.D., Folklorist

In the Traditions of Our Ancestors

Folklife Program for New Jersey

Middlesex County Cultural & Heritage Commission

Middlesex County Board of Chosen Freeholders

funded in part with a grant from  
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## Folklife Program for New Jersey

Our numerous cultural traditions exemplify our heritage as a people and reflect the depth and richness of our civilization. Many traditions are ceremonial or rooted in religious practices. Some reflect regional influences and local celebrations, while others have evolved from occupational practices and the expressions of everyday life. The *Folklife Program for New Jersey* was begun in 1990 by the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission. It offers public programs, interactive workshops, storytelling, displays of folk practices and artifacts, residencies in the schools, and monographs such as this one – in an effort to document and preserve the traditions of our ancestors and to further cross-cultural exchange. The Folklife Program is funded by

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## The Author - Elinor Levy

Elinor Levy, Ph.D, received her doctorate in folklore from Indiana University, Bloomington. She has studied ethnic communities and traditions in Nevada, New Jersey, Indiana, and Georgia. She recently published a chapter on military language titled: *Upper Echelons and Boots on the Ground: The Case for Diglossia in the Military* in “Warrior Ways: Explorations in Modern Military Folklore.” She teaches anthropology and folklore at Fairleigh Dickinson University and Raritan Valley Community College, both in New Jersey.

The research with the Pomegranate Guild is dear to her heart as someone who was raised in a Jewish home where her mother excelled in knitting. Dr. Levy prides herself on having tried all types of needlework but at this time of her life she focuses on knitting and crocheting with yarn she has spun herself.

Dr. Levy was the folklorist/consultant for the Cultural and Heritage Commission’s *Folklife Program for New Jersey* when it produced *Joyful Rest: Shabbat in the Context of Daily Life*, an exhibition and award-winning monograph. The publication is still available without charge - call the Commission and request the monograph by name, 732.745.4489; or logon to our website, click the eMail icon found at the bottom of every page, and request the publication by name.

# The Pomegranate Guild of Judaic Needlework

Women, home, and needlework are culturally tied to one another. The *Pomegranate Guild of Judaic Needlework* recognizes this as exemplified by Rita Lipschultz, former Guild President, in the Fall 1986 Edition of the *Paper Pomegranate*, the Guild's newsletter:

*The objectives of the Guild are to: master fabric art; to learn how to use authentic Jewish symbols in order to make a positive religious statement about Jewish tradition in a contemporary world and to encourage and inspire authentic Jewish heirlooms for the home, synagogue and community because it is important to hand down a visual legacy to our children and to enhance their Judaic experience.*

The first members of the Pomegranate Guild were professional Jewish needle artists in New York. In 1977, they joined mutual interests in Jewish traditions and the creation of ceremonial items for the home and synagogue. The Guild emphasizes their pieces as being more than works of the needle. They are rekindling and perpetuating Jewish traditions through their textile work. Ranging from the creation of heirlooms for their children, to commemoration of family, to ceremonial objects, their work expresses creativity, heritage, and faith.

The Delaware Valley Chapter began in 1983 when the Executive Board decided to authorize local chapters. Four women who had been attending the meetings in New York City formed the new chapter: Fradele Feld, Naomi Stoglin, Eileen Kobrin, and Arlene Spector.

Over the years they have presented programs ranging from lectures on Jewish symbolism to the making of a needlepoint *Ketubah* (wedding certificate). As of 2013, the Delaware Valley Chapter has 18 members and meets at Congregation M'kor Shalom in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. The chapter does *zedakah* charity projects such as knitting hats for pre-mature babies at Virtua Hospital. Other projects were a *chuppah* and *Torah* mantle for Congregation M'kor Shalom and a Jewish holiday-themed wall hanging for the Jewish Community Center of Southern New Jersey in Cherry Hill.

The Pomegranate Guild of North Jersey was formed in January of 2004 by a group of women who had originally gathered to make quilts for Israeli children who are victims of terror. The group expresses their Judaism through crafts, in particular needlework. Today the chapter has 32 members and many are from the original group. The monthly meetings are a blend of artwork, Jewish culture, and ritual traditions.

# Why the Pomegranate?

The English word pomegranate is from the Medieval Latin *pōmun* for apple and *grānātum* for seeded and is in the genus *Punica*, referencing the Phoenicians who cultivated the fruit for religious purposes. Pomegranates, which thrive in dry climates, are native to Persia or modern day Iran, where it has been cultivated for centuries. It also grows in parts of the South Asia and the Mediterranean as well as California and Arizona.



Remains of pomegranates have been found in late Bronze Age archaeological sites and mentioned in Mesopotamian cuneiform records from the third millennium BC.



Pomegranate festival logo  
Courtesy, Madera California

This fruit with ancient and international origins was traded on the Silk Road and found a home in many locations including Japan where the tree is cultivated for *bonsai* due to its flowers and the twisted bark found on older trees.

Ceramic vase in the shape of a pomegranate, unearthed in the tomb of King Tutankhamen  
Courtesy, *Smithsonian Magazine*

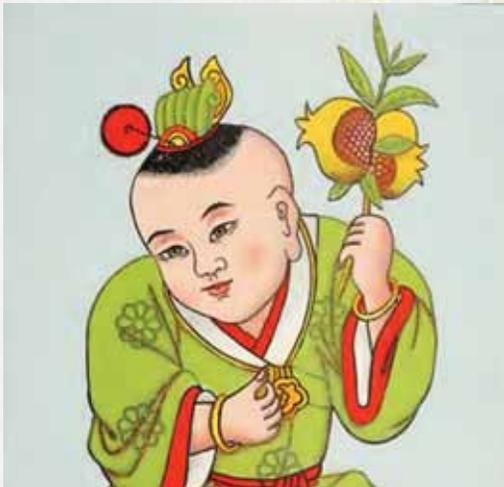


Pomegranates are eaten raw and used in cooking all around the world. Perhaps one of the most colorful uses of pomegranate seeds in cooking is found in the Mexican dish *chiles en nogada* where the seeds represent the red found in the Mexican flag (the green is represented by *poblano chiles* and the white by the *nogada* sauce). In addition to culinary use, the pomegranate has a myriad of uses in *Ayurvedic* and other natural based health regimens.

# Symbolism

The pomegranate is a fruit steeped in the mythology and folklore of many cultures and religions, including Greece, China, and Christianity. Not surprisingly it is a symbol of both fertility (for its myriad seeds) and death (the transformation of life symbolized by its blood red color).

The Ancient Egyptians found the pomegranate to be a versatile fruit doing dual duty as a symbol for prosperity and treatment for tapeworm. With its seemingly infinite amount of seeds, the pomegranate symbolizes fertility in Chinese and Persian cultures as well as religions such as Hinduism.

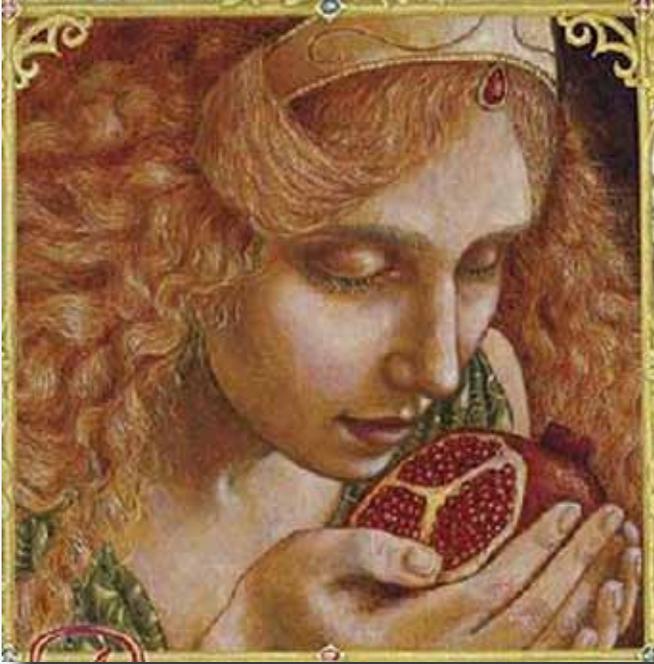


Christian religious decoration often features pomegranates and in Islam, the *Koran* states that pomegranates are grown in the gardens of paradise.



Armenian basket of pomegranates  
Courtesy, Armenian Tourism

The pomegranate figures prominently in the Greek myth about Demeter and Persephone. Persephone was taken by Hades to be his bride in the underworld causing her mother, Demeter, to go into mourning.



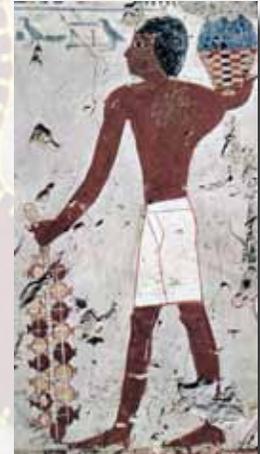
Persephone with a pomegranate  
Courtesy, author and illustrator Kris Walderr

A compromise was struck the result of which condemned Persephone to spend six months a year in the underworld. During that time Demeter mourns and the earth shows her suffering, which is how Greek mythology accounted for the winter season.

The pomegranate holds a special place in the cultural activities of modern Greek culture, specifically in the Greek Orthodox Church where pomegranates are featured on the dinner table during the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Christmas Day. A Greek housewarming gift is traditionally a pomegranate placed near the altar of the new house to symbolize luck and abundance in its many forms.

Hades tricked Persephone into eating six pomegranate seeds (known as the fruit of the dead in Greek mythology).

Zeus, the father of the Gods, commanded Hades to return Persephone to prevent Demeter's mourning from killing the earth. However, there was a rule that anyone who ate or drank while in the underworld was doomed to remain there for all eternity.



Crest of Catherine of Aragon, left;  
Figure with pomegranates from Egyptian tomb, right  
Courtesy, Smithsonian Magazine

# Judaism and the Pomegranate

The pomegranate, known as *rimmon* (רִמּוֹן) in Hebrew, is one of the seven species listed in the *Torah* (*Deuteronomy 8:8*) as coming from the Land of Israel, although there is little empirical proof. The other species are wheat, barley, grapes, figs, olives and dates. Wheat and barley represent our inner make-up; grapes are associated with joy; figs with knowledge; olives with the part of humans that thrive on struggle; and dates represent humanity's capacity for peace, tranquility, and perfection.

The pomegranate, interestingly, is attributed with human's capacity for hypocrisy – acting in ways that are incompatible with who we really are. Just as the pomegranate contains many seeds compartmentalized in their own casing, so too do humans compartmentalize themselves. We can be bad but still contain good within us. (*Chabad.org*)

Given that the pomegranate represents the complexity of human interaction, it is not surprising that many believe it was the fruit that tempted Eve and Adam, not the apple.

The pomegranate is mentioned several times in the *Torah*, first in *Exodus 39:24*:

*And they made upon the hem of the robe pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet and twined linen. And they made bells of pure gold and put the bells between the pomegranates upon the hem of the robe, round about the pomegranates.*

It is said that King Solomon fashioned his coronet based on the crown of the pomegranate, called the calyx (Ellen Frankel and Betsy Platkin Teutsch, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols*, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1992, 128). In Jewish lore, the pomegranate is said to contain 613 seeds which corresponds to the 613 commandments in the *Torah* (the actual number of seeds in a pomegranate varies).



Girl with a pomegranate, by William Bouguereau, 1875  
Sotheby Auctions, Inc., image in the public domain

The members of the *Pomegranate Guild of Judaic Needlework* use the pomegranate in a variety of ways in their works. For instance, it is the focus of these pieces by Adrienne Segal-Kuperberg and Arlene Spector. Adrienne's piece is felt applique with blanket-stitch and beadwork.

The pomegranate piece by Arlene features machine-quilting applique highlighted with beadwork seeds.

Adrienne Segal-Kuperberg  
Pomegranate, seen below and used as the background for the pages of this monograph

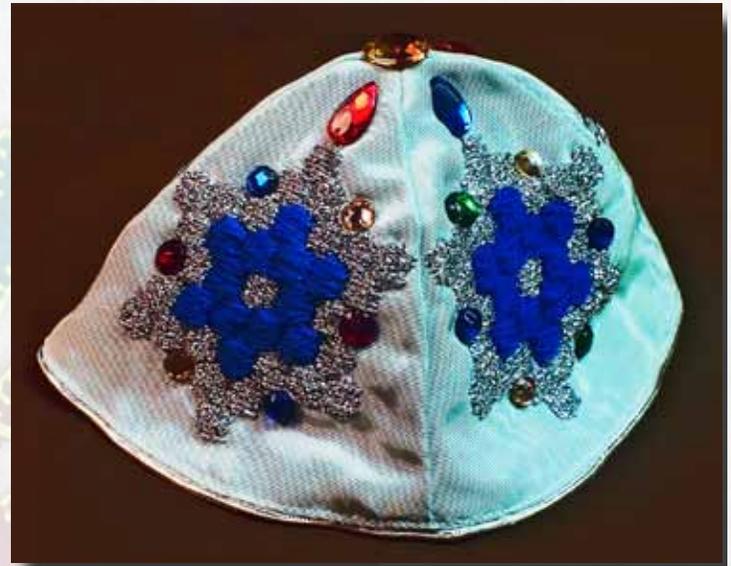


Arlene Spector  
Pomegranates decorative piece, machine-quilting with beads

Jewish life is largely centered in the home, from the first rituals of *brit milah* (circumcision) or *simchat bat* (naming) at the beginning of life to sitting *shiva* at the end, and all stages in between. Even the wedding ceremony, which takes place outside of the home, features a *chuppah* representing the Jewish home. Given its associations with the birth, life, and death, it is not surprising that the pomegranate is featured in works related to these events.



Karen Kissileff  
Embroidered piece embellished with beads and buttons, made in honor of her grand-daughter  
Used to cover the *Torah*, between readings, while it is open on the altar



In between birth and death are daily practices of prayer, the weekly celebrations of *Shabbat* (the Sabbath), and the once-in-a-life-time ceremonies of marriage. All of these celebrations and practices are bound, not just by the food that is central to Jewish life, but also by the threads of the needlework that highlight hearth, home, and celebration.

Fradele Feld, *kippah* worn for special occasions, made with embroidery and beadwork, above

Constance Pallas  
Test swatch for knitted *challah* cover right



## The Artists' Work

Pomegranate Guild members' artistry in these pages represents the theme of Judaica. While this work focuses on the pieces used in the home or for daily use (such as *tallit*), it is important to also acknowledge the work that the women do to adorn their synagogues with *parokhet* (the curtain over the ark where the *Torah* is kept), mantels and *gartels* (dressings) for the *Torah*.

The members of the *Pomegranate Guild of Judaic Needlework* do not limit themselves in terms of style and materials. Any type of needlework or materials found around the world becomes part of their cache of tools and information that they can draw upon for their creative endeavors. From Italian and Hungarian styles of *bargello* needlepoint to Japanese *sashiko* stitching, members are always eager to learn new techniques to enhance their work.

Fradele Feld, *mezuzah* from beadwork using the Peyote Stitch, left

Arlene Spector, 12 Tribes of Jacob, needlepoint *Tallit* bag right, top,



The *Torah* provides evidence not so much for the domestication of needlework, but for the work of women in the home as being separate, if not more important than men. Women are not only keepers of the home in terms of *kashrut* and cleanliness, but are the ones who make sure that the home is prepared for the Sabbath and that the weekly holiday is one of joyful rest.

Constance Pallas, test swatch for knitted *challah* cover, below



Throughout a Jewish home one can find evidence of the role of women in making the home an everyday palace for the coming of the Sabbath every Friday night. From *challah* covers to works decorating the wall, to the *chuppah* representing the home during the wedding ceremony, the craftswomen of the *Pomegranate Guild of Judaic Needlework*, make their homes palaces indeed.

The first evidence of a Jewish home is the *mezuzah* that hangs on the front door jamb. The *mezuzah* is actually the parchment inscribed with two portions of the *Torah* (the *Shema* in *Deuteronomy 6:4-9* and *Veyhaya in Deuteronomy 11:13-21*) placed in a case and then hung on the jamb. The casings can range from plain to fancy, as we can see in the decorative cases here.



Arlene Spector, *mezuzah* in needlepoint



Fradele Feld, *mezuzah* in beadwork using the Peyote stitch

In the work of Arlene Spector and Fradele Feld, we see a variety of styles, including a *mezuzah* with a cross-stitch rose on paper with the word *Shadai*, and a needlepoint *mezuzah* in a Mogen David (Star of David) pattern on canvas using a variety of colors including metallic silver.

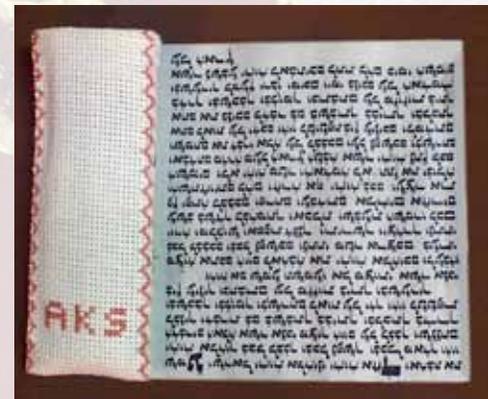
Fradele Feld employs the Peyote stitch to create her beadwork *mezuzah* with the traditional  $\psi$  or *Shin* for the *Shema* (one of the prayer passages inscribed on the *mezuzah's* parchment).

Upon entering a Jewish home you might see Judaic needlework hanging on the walls as decorative items. Some serve as *Mizrachs* which refers to a decorative plaque on the wall that faces East, to orient prayer towards Jerusalem. While Joyce Needleman's piece was not specifically made for that purpose, it would certainly suit. Made as part of a class by Adrienne Segal-Kuperberg, this work utilizes buttons, felt and gold lame to create the skyline of Jerusalem.

Joyce Needleman, felt, gold lame, button work



שִׁמְעוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד וְאַהֲבַת אֵת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ כָּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּכְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּכְכָל מַאֲדָךְ וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אִשְׁרֵי אֲנֹכִי מַצִּיחַ הַיּוֹם עַל לְבָבְךָ וּשְׁנֹנֶתְךָ לְבָבְךָ וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָּם בְּשׂוֹבְתְךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִכְתְּךָ בְּדַרְדָּר וּבְשׂוֹכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ וְקִשְׁרַתָּם לְאוֹת עַל יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְשֵׁפֶטַת בֵּינְךָ עֵינֶיךָ וּכְתַבְתֶּם עַל מַזּוֹזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעֲרֶיךָ וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמַעְתָּ תִּשְׁמַעְנֵנוּ אֵל מִצִּיּוֹתֵינוּ אִשְׁרֵי אֲנֹכִי מַצִּיחַ אִתְּכֶם הַיּוֹם לֵאמֹר אֵת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעַלְדוֹ כָּכָל לְבַבְכֶם וּכְכָל נַפְשְׁכֶם וְזַתְּתִי מִשַּׁר אֲרַצְכֶם בְּעִירְנוּ יוֹרָה וּמִלְקָשׁ וְאִסְפַּת דְּגָנְךָ וּרְתִירֶשֶׁתְךָ וּצְדִירְךָ וְצִתְתִּי עֵשֶׂב שָׂדֶדְךָ לְבַהֲמֹתֶיךָ וְאִכְלֹתִי וְשִׂבְעֹתֶיךָ הַשְׂמִירוֹ לָכֶם פֶּן יִפְתָּה לְבַבְכֶם וּסְרַתֶם וְעַבַּדְתֶּם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם לָהֶם וְזָרָה אִתָּהּ יְהוָה לָכֶם וְעִצְרָה אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכִּי יְהִי מִשַּׁר וְהִאֲדַמְתָּ לֹא תִתֵּן אֵת יְבִילָהּ וְאֲבַדְתָּ מִהֲרָה מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ הַשְּׂבֹלָה אִשְׁרֵי יְהוָה תֵּן לָכֶם וְשִׁמַּתֶּם אֵת דְּבָרֵי אֱלֹהִים עַל לְבַבְכֶם וְעַל נַפְשְׁכֶם וְקִשְׁרַתֶּם אֵת לְאוֹת עַל יָדְכֶם וְהָיוּ לְשֵׁפֶטַת בֵּינְךָ עֵינֵיכֶם וּלְמַדְרֹתֶם אִתְּכֶם אֵת בְּלוֹסֶם לְדַבַּר בָּם בְּשׂוֹבְתְךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלִכְתְּךָ בְּדַרְדָּר וּבְשׂוֹכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ וּכְתַבְתֶּם עַל מַזּוֹזוֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעֲרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יִרְבּוּ יְמֵיכֶם וְיָמֵי בְּלוֹסֶם עַל הָאֲדָמָה אִשְׁרֵי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי יְהוָה לְאַבְרָם לֵאמֹר לָתֵת לָךְ כִּימֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם עַל הָאָרֶץ



Arlene Spector, prayer parchment for *mezuzah* made from cross-stitch on paper backing, top

Arlene Spector, back of the *mezuzah* and prayer parchment

Marian Kugelmass  
*Seven Days of Creation*,  
decorative felting



Marian Kugelmass's *Seven Days of Creation*, wall piece, was fashioned using two popular felting techniques; the first is wet-felting and the second is needle-felting.

In Marian Kugelmass's own words:

*"In the Beginning" is a set of wall hangings depicting the seven days of creation.*

*The medium used for the series is 100% wool, knitted, then felted, using water and/or needle-felting.*

*Wet-felting combines hot water, agitation and detergent, to cause the scales on the wool fibers to lift and adhere to each other. This adherence causes the fabric to contract, and that contraction causes the wool to shrink and become thick and fuzzy.*

*Needle-felting agitates the fibers using a needle board (hand-felting) or a machine called an embellisher. The process produces interesting effects, since you do not have control of the felting process once you set it in motion.*

*The felt's percentage of shrinkage is not set in stone. Some wool yarns shrink more and shrink faster than other wool yarns. As a general rule, knitted felt loses 15-20 % in width and 25-40 % in height during the felting process.*

*This reaction must be taken into consideration when designing and knitting a particular piece of work.*

While wearing a *kippah* (also called a *yarmulke*) is not a commandment from the *Torah*, orthodox Jewish men (and many of the other sects of Judaism) cover their heads as a sign of *Yirat Shamayim* which translates as reverence for God.

Stemming from writings in the *Talmud*, covering the head is associated with respecting God and men of higher status. This example of a *kippah* by Fradele Feld is more likely to be worn in the synagogue on festival occasions rather than for daily wear.

An *atarah*, which means crown, is laid on the *tallis* so that it is worn around the neck. The *atarah* may or may not feature the prayer for donning the *tallit*, there may not be an *atarah* or it may be decorated as the creator or wearer prefers. Helena Bramnick's *atarah* features a *bargello* stitched skyline of Jerusalem. *Bargello* is a style of needlepoint, whose name and style originates from the Bargello Palace in Florence, Italy. The pattern, also known as a flame-stitch, is made by carrying the stitches over two or more threads.

Fradele Feld  
*Kippah* beadwork  
and embroidery  
right



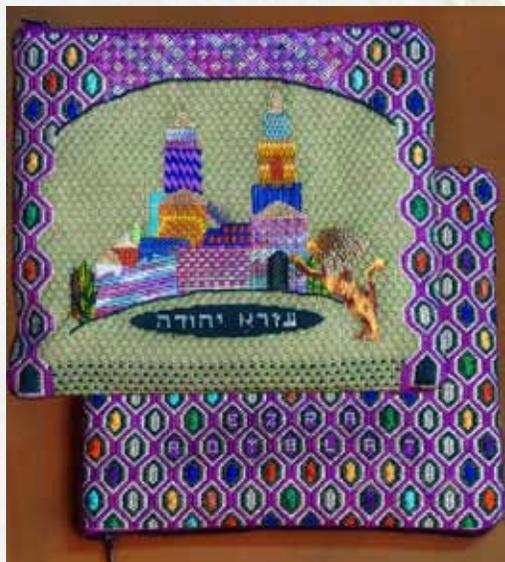
Helena Bramnick  
Embroidery  
*Tallis* unfolded, with  
stitching enhanced to show detail, below

Helena Bramnick  
Embroidery, *Tallis* folded, bottom



Most *tallit* or *tallitot* (plurals for *tallis*) are kept in a bag that can be as individualized as the *tallit* themselves. The women of the Pomegranate Guild have created a wide variety of *tallit* bags exhibiting several different needlework techniques. Sylvia Rottblat designs and creates *tallit* bags in canvas using cotton, wool and metallic threads. They are highly personalized with initials of the owner. The reverse sides are as ornate as the front. In this example, the lion represents Judah and Jerusalem beneath a skyline of Jerusalem.

Sylvia Rottblat  
Needlepoint, *Tallit* bag



In contrast Arlene Spector quilted a *tallit* bag using the “Jacob’s Ladder” pattern, a traditional early American quilting pattern. This is an example of mixing a medium not generally used in Judaic needlework with a traditional piece of Judaica.

Arlene Spector  
*Tallit* bag  
Jacob’s Ladder quilt pattern  
right



Karen Kissileff  
*Tallit* bag,  
Star of David in embroidery  
middle



Karen Kissileff  
*Tallit* bag, embroidered dove  
left

Upon awakening, a Jewish man is expected to pray. He dons his *tallit* (prayer shawl) and wraps his arm and head with *tefillin*. *Tefillin* are two black boxes with straps, the boxes contain verses from *Exodus* and *Deuteronomy*. *Tefillin* are often stored in a bag such as the one made by Sylvia Rottblat. The description of the bag in her own words: *The design Jerusalem scene is incorporated into the Ayin, the first letter of the person's name, Ezra. It also represents his middle name Yehuda.*



Sylvia Rottblat, *Tefillin* bag, embroidery

The lions represent Jerusalem. Ezra and Yehuda also mean Jerusalem. The border around the letter is a window through which we see the rebirth of Jerusalem. The design on the back represents jewels. It is embroidered on 18 count canvas with cotton, silk, wool and metallic threads. The oval contains the owner's name.

Moving from the daily to the weekly, the crowning moment of each week is the Sabbath, a time to rest and spend in contemplation with loved ones with no distractions from the outside world. The Sabbath is welcomed with the lighting of candles by the wife and mother, the blessing of the wine by the husband and father, and lastly the blessing of the *challah*, which has been covered by a cloth.



Constance Pallas  
*Challah* cover  
Crochet

There are several stories related to why the *challah* is covered, some taken from folklore, others associated with the Sabbath meal, to references in the Bible. Some say the reason it is covered — so the *challah* won't be jealous when it is blessed last, after the candles and the wine. Others say it is related to the fact that *challah* represents *manna* that was provided to the Jewish people in the desert. The tablecloth beneath the *challah* and the *challah* cover represent the dew that enveloped the *manna* (J. Simcha Cohen, *How Does Jewish Law Work: a Rabbi Analyzes 95 Contemporary Halachic Questions*, Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson 2000, 128-129).

*Challah* cloths can be as plain as a white napkin or as fancy as the creator wishes. The examples here include Constance Pallas's knitted and crocheted versions, each her own design. All have the word *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת) incorporated into the work. The white knitted piece with a blue crocheted edge features a pomegranate in the middle between the words *Shabbat Shalom* (שַׁבָּת שְׁלוֹמִים) and has a diamond motif to the right and left. The crocheted version was designed and completed while waiting for her son during his orthodontist visits.



Constance Pallas  
*Challah* cover  
Filet crochet, left

Constance Pallas  
Pomegranate on  
*Challah* cover  
Knitted, below



Constance Pallas  
*Challah* cover  
Counted cross-stitch

Many people use cross-stitch as a medium for creating *challah* covers. Constance Pallas stitched this *challah* cover featuring variations on the cross-stitch. She created a tree with the word *Shabbat* in Hebrew forming the branches. Fradele Feld employs two different techniques in her *challah* covers. The first is Assisi work in which the design provides the background for the *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת) rendered as negative space. The *challah* bread in her counted piece is illustrated in browns and rendered in blackwork, a stitch style made popular in the Renaissance.



Fradele Feld, above,  
Blackwork, *challah* cloth



Fradele Feld, above  
Assisi work, *challah* cover

Each year on the anniversary of the death of a loved one, Jewish people light a candle in remembrance. Called a *Yahrzeit* candle, this is representative of the soul of the departed which is always present in our life. The flame of the candle is always rising upward, just as the soul rises to god. But what happens if you live in a place (such as a dorm) where open flame is not allowed. How can you observe these important anniversaries? Adrienne Segal-Kuperberg created this quilted version of the *Yahrzeit* candle with a clear pocket in which one can insert a picture of the departed loved one.



Adrienne Segal-Kuperberg, *Yahrzeit*, quilting

There are events that only happen once-in-a-lifetime such as weddings and some needleworks are specific to marriages. The first is Adrienne Segal-Kuperberg's *Tana'im* bag. The *Tana'im* is actually the engagement contract and ceremony that can take place anytime from a year before the wedding to a few minutes before. The contract stipulates the penalties for breaking the engagement. To symbolize its importance a porcelain or clay plate is smashed by the mothers of the bride and groom after the contract is signed. It is said that the plate signifies that if the contract is broken it cannot be fixed. Adrienne designed the bag using the traditional American quilting pattern "Broken Dishes" to hold the pieces of the shattered plate. She created a framed tableau incorporating the *Tana'im* bag, the plate and the engagement contract.

Adrienne Segal-Kuperberg, *Tana'im* bag, broken plate tableau



Between the *Tana'im* and the wedding ceremony is the *bedeken*, the veiling ceremony in which the bride (with her mother and mother-in-law by her side) is approached by the groom, the fathers, the rabbi, and the wedding entourage. While reciting the blessing given to Rebecca before her marriage to Isaac, the groom places the veil over the bride's face. The rabbi and parents then offer prayers and words of hope for the marriage. There are many possible reasons for the *bedeken* ceremony. It is said that this custom arises from the marriage of Jacob to Leah. He thought he was marrying Rachel but was tricked into marrying Leah. The *bedeken* allows the groom to make sure he is getting the correct bride.

Another interpretation is that the veil is the symbol of the married woman (there was a time when women wore veils daily). The veiling by the groom signifies the change of station from single to married. Historically, the veil (and now the wearing of a wig, scarf or hat) by the married woman signifies that she is unapproachable by men other than family members and she is only available to her husband, intimately. (Richard Seigel, Michael Strassfeld, and Sharon Strassfeld, *The First Jewish Catalog: a Do-it-Yourself Kit*, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America. 1973, 162-163).



Marian Kugelmass  
Bridal veil, lace applique

Finally, the wedding ceremony itself takes place under the *chuppah* which represents the home, thus bringing the home motif full circle. The *chuppah* is a canopy sitting atop four poles which can be held by family or friends during the ceremony or it can stand alone. It represents the tent of Abraham and Sarah.

*Chuppahs* may be as simple as a *tallit* held up on four poles, to ones made especially for the bride and groom to display as a wall hanging or quilt, a reminder of their wedding.



Karen Kissileff, quilt, embroidery, bead work  
Used to cover the *Torah*, between readings, when open on the altar

## Stitches and Materials

### Needlepoint

Needlepoint is work that is done on a canvas using embroidery floss or yarn. There are two types of canvas: monoweave and Penelope. Monoweave, the most common, is a single mesh canvas that comes in a variety of sizes, designated by the number of holes per inch. Penelope is a double-mesh canvas, meaning the threads lay closely side-by-side so that the stitcher can count the threads together or separately. Penelope allows for finer work than monoweave.

Karen Kissileff made these two remarkable pieces to honor her grand-daughter, Yael Daniella Perlman: Goat or Ibex in Hebrew is Yael; the scales refer to her middle name Daniella and the fact that Yael was born on the eve of *Yom Kippur*; the structure depicted is built each year for the holiday of *Sukkot* or Feast of Booths, celebrating harvest and the 40 years the Jewish people spent in the desert after fleeing Egypt, according to the *Torah*. Yael was named on *Sukkot*.

### Embroidery

Embroidery is stitched on fabric using a variety of stitches to create form and texture. In addition to applying an assortment of stitches to fabric, one can incorporate beads and other trinkets.

### Cross-Stitch

Similar to needlepoint and embroidery, cross-stitch is done on a background fabric. Cross-stitch appears to have originated as an embellishment on clothing in Central Asia and the Middle East with the oldest existing example dated around 850 C.E. (Leslie Catherine Amoroso, *Needlework Through History*, Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press 2007) It spread throughout Europe during the Crusades and developed regional variations.

Karen Kissileff, needlepoint, *Tallit* bag



Cross-stitching can be found on clothing, household and decorative items across the globe. Cross-stitch, which is literally a stitch that looks like an “x” (and variations including “/” or “\”) is done on even-weave fabric, which has the same number of threads running east to west as north to south. Stitchers use embroidery floss of varying widths depending on the thread count of the fabric which can run from 6 threads per inch to 32 threads per inch.



Constance Pallas, all images this page  
Detail top, knitted piece middle, test swatch for larger piece, bottom

## Knitting and Crocheting

The origins of knitting and crocheting are somewhat of a mystery. Many theories abound but none can be conclusively designated as the point of origin. Early knitting did not stand the test of time, as it was composed of natural, degradable fibers. It is also possible that garments no longer needed or wanted were *frogged* (unraveled) so the yarn could be used and reused until it was no longer viable.

The age and origin of knitting is somewhat of a mystery. We think that it started with *nalbinding* a form of stitching with yarn using one needle. The earliest examples of this are “Coptic Socks” (socks knitted from a single needle yet with a color-pattern. These were used by the Coptic Christians of Egypt when wearing sandals).

Knit socks date from around 1,000 CE. This leads one to assume that knitting began in the Middle East and moved through Spain, where we find the first European knitted artifacts. The most common materials used for early knitting were silk and cotton, both of which would have been easier to come by than wool in the Middle East. A popular “folk” reasoning for knitting developing in the Middle East is the fact that we knit from right to left, the way Arabic and Hebrew are written and read, rather than left to right.



Constance Pallas  
Hebrew letters  
right



Constance Pallas, pomegranate, knitting, top  
Arlene Spector, *mezuzah* and prayer scroll, bottom



## Quilting

The origins of quilting go as far back as ancient Egypt in the Middle East and garments worn by knights beginning in 11<sup>th</sup> century Europe. The first reference to quilting in colonial America was in the household inventory of a Salem, Massachusetts sea captain. Not surprisingly, few early colonial quilts exist as they were made from salvaged fabric and most likely were turned into other pieces as they wore out. While popularity ebbs and flows, quilting never completely goes out of style. The craft shifts from merely utilitarian pieces such as bed covers, to works of art, expanding the quilter's repertoire of patterns and materials. Arlene Spector's *tallit* bag is pieced using the "Jacob's Ladder" pattern. Fradele Feld's miniature *chuppah* features a stained glass technique for outlining the design.

Fast forward to the 14<sup>th</sup> century we have the next innovation in knitting: the purl stitch. All knitting today is based on variations of the knit and purl stitches. Knitting has moved back and forth between luxury items and folk crafts. It has been men's work, women's work, a cottage industry, factory work, and a leisure-time activity. It moves from a hand-work industry to a hand-work hobby, at times, occupying both worlds.

The filet crochet, such as the work of Constance Pallas in this monograph, refers to the creation of a lace-like material and is done by crocheting both a background and a pattern simultaneously.



Joyce Needleman  
Button felt seen here, left,  
and on the cover

Fradele Feld  
Stained glass quilt technique  
used to make a  
miniature representation of a  
*Chuppah* for  
Congregation M'kor Shalom  
right



## Beadwork

Beadwork is another form of needlework whose origins are almost impossible to trace. Early work included the use of shells and bones to adorn fabric. Beadwork can be done either as an application to fabric or to make a fabric of beads. In Arlene Spector's pomegranates (page 8) the beads are applied as seeds of the pomegranate. In Fradele Feld's *mezuzah* (page 11) the beads are worked in a fabric technique known as the Peyote stitch.



Karen Kissileff  
*Tallit* bag, embroidery

## Felting

When you think of sheep, rain, and time, it is not hard to imagine the invention of felting; or when fur, mixes with heat and perspiration and is rubbed against skin Matting happens and felting is created. Felting is the rubbing together of natural fibers (predominantly animal fibers such as wool) with liquid (usually water and in modern times a little bit of soap). The resulting friction creates a matted fabric that can be used in a variety of ways. Felting is the method used to make fabric hats, from top hats to Stetsons. The additional technique of needle-felting takes felting from two-dimensional to three-dimensional by creating shape and texture. Felting has seen a resurgence in recent years as needleworkers discover its versatility, from creating fabrics to creating three-dimensional objects. Marian Kugelmass's felted *Seven Days of Creation* combines fabric and needle-felting to express texture and meaning.

This is just a small sampling of the work of Guild members. Not surprisingly, many of their pieces are given as gifts to friends and family. The joys are in the act of creation and in the act of giving.



Constance Pallas  
Blue table runner for *Shabbat*,  
Filet crochet

Middlesex County  
Cultural and Heritage Commission  
703 Jersey Avenue  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-3605



732.745.4489 voice tel#  
732.745.3888 TTY for persons with hearing disabilities

web <http://co.middlesex.nj.us/culturalandheritage>  
eMail [culturalheritage@co.middlesex.nj.us](mailto:culturalheritage@co.middlesex.nj.us)

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Pomegranate Guilds  
of Judaic Needlework**

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