

(sewing = naaien in Dutch, but also a vulgar verb for making love).
Approximate translation of the poem by Jacob Cats, *Proteus* 38-I

*I talked to a Rosemouth
While she was sewing.
I complained about my sorrow,
Hear how she was appeasing me:
"Come on," she said, "come along
And look at my seam,
Observe this maiden work
And what happens to it.
Here a steel point is sent forward
The thread comes after that
To heal the wounds.
See, friend, there is no joy but after pain suffered.
He who wants sweetness without bitterness
does not make a lover."*

Translated by Mrs. M.G.A. Schipper-Van Lottum

A WORK-BASKET WITH A SEWING-CUSHION

M. G. A. Schipper-Van Lottum

When visiting the Gerard Ter Borch exposition in the Mauristshuis at The Hague¹, my attention was drawn to some objects of a domestic nature to which Ter Borch gave a rather important place in several of his paintings. In the painting, "The Apple-paring Woman" (Fig. 1), part of a work-basket with linen, with a sewing-cushion, is just visible, to the right of the seated woman. How such a cushion was used is shown on the canvas, "A Woman Doing Needlework near a Cradle" (Fig. 2). The woman is doing needlework with intense concentration on the linen on the cushion which is lying on her lap. This exhibition also included "Girl in Rural Costume"². On the table by her side there is also a sewing-cushion. A piece of linen has been casually put away on it. This arrangement, where needlework and cushion just for a moment are pushed aside together, is also to be seen in "The Woman Reading a Letter"³ of the same painter. Just as in "The Apple-paring Woman" the cushion here is placed on the work-basket. The attention of these three women is for the moment elsewhere, but the needlework accessories remain near at hand so that the useful occupations can be taken up again immediately.

Ter Borch and many painters with him liked to show their models while doing something. This tended to make the picture less static; besides, the sitting was less tiring for the model. In the art of painting and engraving, one frequently encounters next to women making music and reading, women who are occupying themselves with needlework and who are using a work-basket or a sewing-cushion, these objects sometimes containing a small box in which sewing-things can be kept. A woman doing needlework was the symbol of virtue as opposed to the woman who idled away her time in vanity and idleness.

Already as early as the end of the 14th century Maria has been painted while knitting, weaving and embroidering, in miniatures, in glass - and in wall-paintings. A Bruges miniature of about 1520 represents Maria with the child Jesus (Fig. 3). Maria is sewing linen and in the work-basket by her side she finds scissors and a ball of yarn ready at hand. The following example is found in an engraving by Hendrik Goltzius, "The Annunciation," of 1594 (Fig. 4). In this print of his own design, one sees toward the front a wide shallow basket provided with two handles. On the linen, scissors are lying. The oldest example so far is a print by P. Furnius (1540-1625) from a drawing by J. Stradanus (1523-1605) (Fig. 5). The engraving is dated 1573 and shows an episode from the life of Tiberius and Cornelia Gracchus. Here too, virtue is symbolized by the women doing

needlework. Cornelia is working on an embroidery strung in an embroidery-frame. She is sticking a needle with yarn into the work with her right hand, which needle will be stuck back by her left hand. The older woman is spinning with the help of a distaff, which is held to her waist by the belt. The woman to the left of Cornelia is sewing on a piece of fabric, while supporting her left hand on a cushion. The cushion is decorated with tassels at the corners and ornamental ribbons on all sides. In front of her a wide shallow sewing-box is standing on the carpet, in which a ball of yarn and scissors are lying on the linen. From this print it can already clearly be seen that the sewing-cushion and the work-or sewing-basket belong together. Because of this, the drawing by Willem Buytewech of 1617, "Interior with Family near the Fireplace," puzzles the attentive observer. The shape of the cushion, which the woman to the right is holding on her lap, makes one think of the upper part of a lace-pillow, but the pins and especially the bobbins are missing. Also the gesture of the hands is indicative of sewing, rather than of the flinging back and forth of bobbins. One is inclined to think of needlework on a lace-pillow, the more so since the work-basket by the woman's side is in such an important place (Fig. 6).

It is not quite so long ago that people were of the opinion that it was not becoming to a girl or a woman to spend her time in idleness. If a female member of a family was not interested in literature, music or the fine arts, nothing much was left to the mother and the daughters but doing needlework. Linen, of which people possessed enormous quantities in earlier centuries, had to be made, marked, decorated and mended by hand. Countless hours were spent on this task. Not only Ter Borch, but also other Dutch interior and genre painters have made use of this specific subject: a woman occupying herself with her needlework, lying either loosely on, or pinned to a sewing-cushion on her lap. Although there have been many artists in other countries who have pictured women under the same circumstances, that is to say doing needlework with a sewing-cushion on their laps, for practical reasons this article seeks to give an impression of the author's own country only.

As could be expected, both the cushion and the basket can frequently be seen as a design on the very first testing cloths of girls who had to learn embroidering, namely on the sampler. On these cloths the girls have embroidered small squares or oblong objects which are provided with decorations at the corners (Fig. 7). If these are placed near the name of the embroideress, then probably a sewing-cushion is meant. In certain situations, for example, when this design has been embroidered together with household effects like a chair, a table or a chest, one could think of seat cushions. As we know, nearly all chairs without upholstery were provided with a loose seat cushion. For example, one finds them in great numbers in 17th-century inventories. However, if this design is seen above a basket

or exactly near to it, it is certain that a sewing-cushion is meant (Fig. 8). The combination work-basket and scissors occurs several times on samplers (Fig. 9).

Although Ter Borch did not show scissors in the afore-mentioned paintings, many Dutch painters of the 17th century have given this utensil a clearly visible place in the vicinity of the woman doing needlework. More than once scissors lie on the linen in the basket; once in a while scissors are hanging at the corner of a cushion or are lying near to it on the lap. It also happens that the woman has scissors in her hand or that they are on the table next to which she is sitting. Scissors and knife point to the finiteness of life: they can cut the thread of life⁴. In this connection one could perhaps see the two feminine needlework attributes, the cushion and the basket, as an exhortation to spend the available time as virtuously as possible.

In addition to appearing in paintings and engravings (Fig. 10), on Delft blue tablets (after the engraving of Geertruydt Roghman), on *Chine de Com-mande* porcelain (cup and saucer in Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen, Rotterdam) and on samplers, cushion and basket are also mentioned in inventories. So far the oldest data is of the year 1613, and it contains the inventory of the estate of Sara Berwijns (Antwerp about 1575-Amsterdam 1617). This inventory was drawn up in connection with her remarriage⁵. On folio 4 one reads among other things:

One matchchair with a sewing-shelf (board) f 3:10

One sewing-basket with two sewing-cushions f 3,-

A sewing shelf is a wooden, rather wide shelf, which the woman sitting in an armchair placed before her on the arm rests. The middle part of the shelf was sawn out in a half circle at the height of the waist and close to the body. On this shelf various needlework occupations were performed, among other things cutting and measuring. The Museum of Antiquities at Zaandam possesses some sewing-shelves on which a tape-measure and scissors are painted (oldest 1780). The second inventory with regard to this subject is of the year 1615 and is that of Michiel van der Straten, merchant at Haarlem, who died on January 29th, 1615. The inventory was drawn up by the Haarlem notary, Egbert van Bosvelt. On page 24 verso, third line from the bottom (Fig. 11): A work-basket with a sewing-cushion and lengths of cloth. Elsewhere in this inventory a small pin-cushion and a work-basket are mentioned.

Unfortunately, the research into inventories did not reveal all particulars of the work-baskets and the sewing-cushions described therein, so that nothing could be learned about the material or the form. An exception is found in the references of the years 1635-1636-1637 in the archives of Antwerp⁶, in which the cushions are described as follows: "Sewing-

cushions up to 20 guilders ⁷ - velvet cushions with wide laces on the cushion and all around its sides, without open work or embroideries, also 4 small boxes or cases, 3 flat ones and a round one trimmed with laces, very rich ⁸ - velvet sewing-cushions with lace and decorations of silver with chased plates at 54 guilders, - 2 velvet cushions with lace with leather cases or chests - damask gilt cushions - double cushions with tassels ⁹". In case it is not quite clear that a sewing-cushion is meant, one can consider the other cushions as being seat cushions, with the exception of the 2 velvet cushions with lace and leather cases. As it does not seem likely that seat cushions were put away in leather cases, perhaps a sewing-cushion with a leather case or chest in the interior is meant.

In this connection one is reminded of the two cushions with richly finished interiors which can be opened, from the first half of the 17th century in the possession of the Rijksmuseum at Amsterdam (Figs. 12a and 12b). In both, compartments have been fitted inside the lid as well as in the 'box-part', which compartments can be closed by small lids. In one cushion the compartments have been made of wood with painted illustrations and in the other one they are of leather with an imprinted and gold painted design. In the middle of the lids, between the compartments, is a small mirror. Because of those small mirrors one would think first of boxes for jewels or toilet requisites, but on further consideration it would not seem appropriate to fit such valuable boxes inside a cushion, if the function of the cushion were not of paramount importance, namely that of a sewing-cushion. This is supported by the absence of such cushions with boxes in engravings and paintings of women at their toilets. One also looks in vain for these cushions with richly finished interiors ¹⁰ in illustrations of 'Sight', one of the Five Senses.

Pin-cushions, on the contrary, are occasionally found with women at their toilets in engravings by Abraham Bosse (1602-1676). But the two exquisite cushions in the Rijksmuseum are certainly too large to be pin-cushions. They have both been fitted with a clasp so that valuable things like lace and pins could also be put away in them. Indeed, pins, in our eyes very insignificant objects, were at that time expensive things of great value with which one had to be economical. People received pins as a present, for example as wedding gifts ¹¹. The mirror in the lid of the sewing-cushion was a luxury but also a practical object; the woman, when doing needlework, could cast a glance at the mirror, for example, to fasten an unstuck pin of her bonnet or collar.

Form and material of the Dutch cushions will now be discussed in the light of paintings of the 17th century. The painted specimens are not as richly finished as the Antwerp cushions described above or the two cushions in the Rijksmuseum. Yet a certain luxury in the way of finishing is

clear in the sewing-cushion that Eva Wittewael (Fig. 13) is holding flung open on her lap. This portrait of 1628 is the oldest known painted example concerning this subject. On the lower part of the cushion a small box is lying, of which more than half is hidden from view by a frill of lace, which the subject is holding between thumb and forefinger. On the small lid lies a green ribbon with which the box can be pulled open. In the right hand, scissors ready for cutting part of the lace are visible. The upper part of the cushion is folded completely open and is lying on the knees. In contrast to the glossy green satin skirt, the covering of the sewing-cushion seems to be green baize or velvet. It is decorated with three double borders in a lighter green shade, and at the four corners tassels are fitted. Women must have preferred to do needlework on the snapped-shut cushion, so that their hands could be supported on a softer underground. For other actions like cutting lace and textiles the cushion was also used in open position.

The work-basket to the left of Eva is divided into bands of spaced sticks alternating with closely plaited bands. The basket is provided with two handles and stands on a foot-ring. Across it, hang garments, among other things linens trimmed with lace, possibly bonnets and cuffs. Garments and all objects in this painting point to the prosperity of the family Wittewael. Yet it looks as if the painter has wanted to draw the attention to the relativity of earthly riches. The onlooker can ask himself if Bible, scissors, sewing-cushion and work-basket are meant here as an exhortation: one should spend one's time as virtuously as possible by reading the Bible or practising needlework. However, both the objects from the title of this article are not mentioned in emblem books, with the exception of the poem by Jacob Cats, at the top of this article in which they have a double meaning. One does find the distaff as an attribute of virtue¹². The distaff and the improvement on this appliance, the spinning-wheel, have been reproduced by painters of the seventeenth century less frequently than in earlier centuries and even then are seen principally with poor women. Have these objects been replaced by the, at that time, more fashionable sewing-cushion? It would appear so.

The second beautifully finished cushion discussed here is the one in the painting "The Apple-paring Woman" (Fig. 1). This cushion could also be snapped open, for one could put away sewing things and yarns, so that one always had at hand what was needed for doing needlework. The cushion is covered with green velvet and finished with gold lace and tassels. In the just-opened cushion a glimpse of red is to be seen, possibly the material of the inside lining or a small box? The padding of the bulging cushions had to be of such a material that pins could easily be stuck into it. Velvet as a covering was not only beautiful but practical as well. Rubbed against the nap, this material is rough and therefore prevented the needlework from slipping away: it more or less stuck to it. Besides, one

did not see the dents of the pin-pricks, for the needlework will mostly have been pinned. The work-basket is now only visible in very small part.

As a third example, the painting by Johannes Vermeer, "The Lace-Worker,"¹³ can be mentioned. A sewing-cushion is shown near to a lace-pillow on the table to the left. The materials can be distinguished with difficulty; the blue material could be velvet but also baize. This woolen material also has a rough grain against the nap. The decoration consists of 3 silver-coloured ribbons and at the 4 corners a tassel. If such cushions can be snapped open and are decorated with tassels, it appears that these tassels are always fitted to the lid. Out of the bulb-shaped, slightly opened cushion in this painting, small red and white bundles of yarn are hanging.

Mostly one sees the woman doing needlework, sitting in a chair with a low seat, the feet or one foot on a foot-warmer and with a sewing-cushion on their lap. Because of this position, the distance from the eyes to the work became very convenient. For women who do not do needlework, the following can perhaps be an explanation. If the work is pinned up on the cushion, one can stretch the material with the left hand so that the right hand can work more quickly and regularly. This does not only apply to needle stitches, but also to some embroidery stitches, particularly to those which one works in the direction of the pulling hand. When one has finished a certain stretch, one must move and pin up the work again. The cushion had to be reasonably heavy to resist the pull of the stretching hand. A good example of this way of working has been painted by Johannes van der Aack in 1655 (Fig. 14). The simply dressed woman is sitting on a "lady chair" with her feet on a foot-warmer. A simply finished cushion is on her lap, and on the cushion a piece of linen is pinned up. The gesture of the hands clearly indicates how one handled the sewing-cushion with the needlework on it. This cushion seems to have been made of brown and red baize or serge (woolen materials). It has no further decorations and could not be opened. The basket is somewhat tapered and is standing on a foot-ring. It is built up of three bands of spaced sticks connected by closely plaited bands. Such open bands were highly desirable, otherwise the materials of garments and linen stored therein, could mildew. One could easily move the basket by the handles. The form of this basket seems to have been customary, although once in a while other models were used for linen that had to be mended, marked or decorated. Concerning 'work-basket,' the dictionary by E.E.L. Mellema of 1589 says the following¹⁴: work-basket, *Pannier à coudre*. And in his dictionary of 1630¹⁵: work-basket, work-hamper, *pannier à coudre*. M. Noël Chomel says about this subject¹⁶: "Basket or hamper is a known domestic tool, which is plaited of peeled or unpeeled and split¹⁷ willow twigs, and according to their use they are distinguished in hand-baskets, table-baskets, panniers, sewing-baskets or work-baskets, washing-baskets, etc. In French Flanders many pretty

baskets are made which are brought in great numbers to Holland and elsewhere by the French basket sellers." From this it is clear that each kind had an identifiable form, but this does not mean that people always used one specific model for one occupation only (Figs. 15a and b).

It is perhaps appropriate to mention here that miniature sewing-cushions and miniature work-baskets have been preserved in various Dutch doll's houses of the last quarter of the 17th century and of the beginning of the 18th century. The first example is the one in the Centraal Museum at Utrecht. This model house, in a chest of inlaid olive wood, is dated about 1680¹⁸. In the nursery several objects which deserve consideration in connection with this article, are on display: two sewing-cushions, a sewing-basket with linen, and an ivory reel, a lace-pillow, a standing candle-bracket used as a source of illumination when doing needlework, and a small box of oak with a handle, between which 4 spools with yarn are attached in such a way that one can unreel the thread by pulling. The basket is of the same form as the baskets mentioned before, tapered with a foot-ring, two handles and this time with two bands of spaced sticks. The largest of the two small cushions (h. about 2 1/2 x 1. about 4 1/2 x w. about 3 cm.) is covered on the outside with green velvet and decorated with yellow-green trimmings and tassels (Fig. 16). It is lying in a partly opened position so that a small box which is standing on the lower part of the cushion is visible; the hollow lid can be closed across it. The whole box-part can very ingeniously be snapped open upwards, and then a furnished compartment shows itself, in which all sorts of things can be kept as well. A small mirror has been fitted into the lid. The inner furnishing is of salmon-pink satin; the edges are finished with narrow silk ribbons in various designs; and the seams of the small box are pasted over with gold thread. Unbelievably, this miniscule object has been finished and fitted down to the minutest details, the same applies to the smaller cushion as well (height about 2 x length about 4 x width about 2 1/2 cm). For the outside green silk damask was chosen, decorated with 4 tassels and trimmings in a yellow-green shade. To be sure, other materials have been used for the inside, but the small cushions are otherwise alike as to form and use. Both are provided with a small heart as lock-plate, although no lock is present.

The Rijksmuseum at Amsterdam also possesses doll's houses. One of these presumably has been manufactured for Petronella Oortman, wife of Jacob Brandt, about 1700¹⁹. In the library of this house, on the table to the left against the wall, is a lace-pillow and an opened case with 12 compartments in which cards of yarn are stored; scissors complete this still life. In the nursery a small sewing-cushion is found, also on a table to the left against the wall. This cushion is fully snapped open. It is clear that the lid is hollow so that it can be closed across a small box in the cushion;

as is the case with the specimens in Utrecht, the small box is standing on top of the lower part of the cushion. In the lid a small mirror is found which is pasted along the edges with silver braid. The box has two spaces closed - by means of small lids - on either side of a small open oblong tray, which is divided into two. The covering of this cushion is of green damask and the edges are finished with gold ribbed ribbon. Here too are 4 tassels at the corners of the lid. The sewing-basket is standing in the loft of this doll's house. A painting by Jacob Appel (1680-1751)²⁰ is interesting in this connection. A woman is sitting in the state-kitchen, with her feet on a foot-warmer, and she is holding a sewing-cushion on her lap. A work-basket with linen is standing next to her on the floor. Two children are looking on. A lace-pillow is lying on the table near to the woman (perhaps a governess?). In the monograph about the doll's houses in the Rijksmuseum at Amsterdam one finds an illustration (No. 10) of the state-kitchen: the work-basket is standing next to the chair and the small foot-warmer. On the table is the case with cards of yarn and the lace-pillow; unfortunately one cannot distinguish the sewing-cushion. In inventories of the 17th century more work-baskets than sewing-cushions are mentioned, but if both appear in one-inventory they are named together. In concluding these observations about the sewing-cushion in the 17th century, a few further paintings will be discussed. First, a painting that is credited to Willem van Mieris; it is not dated, but the woman's garments point to the years 1680-1690, probably 1684/85 (Fig. 17). The painter has shown here a spinning-wheel, a reel (in the woman's hand), a work-basket with linen, and on the linen a sewing-cushion with scissors: all things belong together. The second painting is by Michiel van Musscher, dated 1669 (Fig. 18). The sewing-cushion shows a detail which one finds more than once. A small bundle of threads has been fastened between two pins on the cushion, which is very practical for a woman doing needlework. If she needed a new thread, she could press with her fingers on the end of the bundle and could pull out a thread with her other hand without pulling out or upsetting the other threads. Finally, a third example of a woman doing needlework by Casper Netscher (Fig. 19). Here too we see the well-known type of basket with linen and scissors, but in this painting the cushion has been fitted with a ribbon behind which a small frill of lace has been stuck for the moment. One could also put cards of yarn there (Fig. 20).

While the sewing-cushions of the 17th century that cannot be folded back remain customary in the 18th and 19th centuries, one can also find another type in paintings of the 18th century, namely a desk-like box the lid of which was fully furnished with a cushion. This cushion was stuffed with solid material and slightly bulging. Such a box has already been found shown on the title page of a German pattern-book for the art of embroidery of 1604 (Fig. 21), but a combination like this of a sewing-cushion on a box has not so far been found, however, in the Netherlands, in paintings, or in

engravings, until after 1750. This needlework accessory is still placed upon the lap in the 18th century. Naturally, the bottom was flat and pasted with material to protect the user's garments. The lid could be raised, and the box was provided with a small drawer (Fig. 22). As soon as small legs were added, these boxes were no longer put upon the lap but on the table. The cushions on these boxes are often smaller and bulging. Yarns, tools and other requirements were put away in both types. The modified form, (in the Netherlands), namely a box with a cushion on it instead of a cushion with small boxes in it, most probably has to do with the greater luxury of feminine needlework in the course of the 18th century. Because of this, one was in more need of a wider choice in yarns, trimmings and ribbons, but especially more needlework techniques required more needlework tools. All this was also connected with the fashion in clothes. In paintings of the 17th century we see the women doing needlework mostly pictured with needlework on their cushions, but it seems that the few examples that are available of well-to-do women in the 18th century rather point towards small embroideries (Fig. 23).²¹

M. Noël Chomel writes about that greater luxury under the word 'education'¹⁶ (see page 2446): "The young ladies cause embarrassment; it used to be enough that daughters of well-to-do citizens could read, write, cipher and knew a bit of French, could sew linen and wool and make caps. Nothing more was needed when they got married and had to attend to their household duties. They learned cooking from their mothers at home. The whole education was easily done, the girls stayed at home and they went to public schools or shops in the forenoon and afternoon. But since the pomp and circumstance, the luxury and frivolity have grown, they have to know French quite well, and neither do wool or linen sewing, nor make caps, but only small embroideries serving to make small ornaments and dress themselves up. They have to dance, to play, to sing and to know all the **arts which can bewitch** a young rake rather than a level-headed and sensible young man. To this purpose the young lady is sent to a French school to stay there for a few years and when she is home again, she finds everything hopelessly middle-class in her parents' home and sniffs at things which are good and praiseworthy, things which never ought to get lost in our homes; she is of no use to her mother and seldom happy, when having married, to manage the house herself. We do not apply this to people of high birth and high rank; for them such an education is appropriate and necessary. Formerly the young ladies enjoyed themselves with drawing, embroidering, painting and quiet music; these arts were taught at home and are not being cultivated by most of them at present." Chomel mentions a 'French school' in the above text. Advertisements for such schools one often finds in the *Amsterdamsche Courant*. A nice example is in a paper of 1698²²: "It is announced that in the pleasant village of Maersen aen de Vecht, in the province of Utrecht, a boarding school has been founded by

Mrs. Souvaget and daughter, in order to teach to young ladies the French language and all kinds of needlework, such as has been done for several years. Provision is also made for practising reading, writing, ciphering and for instruction in the Christian religion. Further information. . . .". The form of the work-basket is also changing in the 18th century. In paintings we only now and then see the rather high tapered basket of the 17th century. The basket generally is not frequently shown anymore, and it is much smaller now. This is also connected with what Chomel says above about the word 'education': no real needlework or mending except fancy-work. The basket could thus be much smaller too. Unfortunately no Dutch example could be found in which both a sewing-box with cushion on the lid and a small work-basket appeared. Therefore it seems justifiable to show an Italian painting (Fig. 24).

Before rounding off this survey with data from the 19th and 20th centuries, we have to remark on the 'table-screw'. The screw was fitted to the table, and the needlework was pinned to the small cushion on top of it, or merely clamped between table and screw. This proved to be an improvement on the sewing-cushion, because very long seams could be hemmed or sewn still more comfortably. In the chapter, "An Old Acquaintance" of the *Camera Obscura*, by Hildebrande one reads: ". . . that the lady unpinned the needlework from her knee (she did not encourage the invention of screws, plombs and knee-straps) . . . ". The invention of the table-screw is placed towards the end of the 17th, the beginning of the 18th centuries. It became generally customary in well-to-do circles towards the end of the 18th century, although in England and France only. It seems that in the Netherlands this needlework tool indeed became the vogue gradually in the 19th century; the oldest known was made by a silversmith at Haarlem in 1822. Therefore, it would seem that the remark made by Hildebrande in the *Camera* of 1839, where he talks about "the invention of the screws", is justified in every respect, the more so since no illustrations can be found in Holland, as opposed to abroad.

As remarked above, we still see in paintings of the 19th century, but to a less extent, the sewing-cushion of the 17th century but without interior fittings (Fig. 20). In the second quarter of the 19th century yet another type of sewing-cushion, that is, the plomb, comes into use. This is a piece of lead covered with a small cushion, on which one could pin the needlework. This object was in fact 'heavy as lead' and not suited any more to hold on the lap. A woman put it before or next to her on the table. The bottom of the lead was pasted with a rough woolen material, not only to protect the table but also to keep the plomb against slipping away. Because of its heaviness the plomb could not be handled quite so easily, which is why it came to be provided with a handle (Figs. 25 and 26), so that moving it was considerably simplified. No original or illustration has been

discovered of the knee-strap, another aid to smoother needlework. These three needlework accessories remained in use in the 19th century and certainly still in the first quarter of the 20th century.

Less valuable sewing-cushions were employed for doing needlework in orphanages, schools and sewing-shops: the stuffing here consisted of sand or sawdust instead of lead. A nice example of simple small cushions has been painted by Max Liebermann in 1876. In his "Needlework-class in the Amsterdam Orphanage," one sees the girls with their needlework before them, pinned up on green serge cushions (Fig. 27).

When in 1920 the law on primary education comes into force, in which the subject of needlework for girls is made obligatory again, need was felt for a simple and not-too-expensive aid to which to fasten the needlework. This was found in the sewing band, which was attached to a peg of the school desk by means of an eye or a loop. One pinned the work onto the band, but the function remained the same as was the case with its predecessors. Under the work 'sewing band' in van Dale's *Great Dictionary* one finds sewing-cushion and work-basket and also sewing-shelf described. This object was explained as follows: "narrow shelf with two sewing-cushions, which closes across a school desk for needlework instruction in schools."

The sewing machine has slowly but surely superseded almost completely needlework by hand at home in factories, in schools and also in high fashion. And herewith many and particularly charming needlework accessories have disappeared too. It would be well to preserve at least one example of each period and of each type, so that we can study the objects themselves in addition to learning about them from written sources and from paintings.

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W. L. van de Watering, Government Service for Art-Historical Documentation, The Hague. (Rijksdienst voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, Den Haag).

NOTES

1. Mauritshuis, Den Haag. March 9th - April 28th, 1974.
2. Collection Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. EXPOSITION G. TER BORCH, Cat. Nr. 20.
3. Wallace Collection, London. Nr. P. 236.
4. Arthur Henkel - Albrecht Schöne, EMBLEMATA. MANUAL FOR THE ART OF SYMBOLS OF THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURY, Stuttgart 1967, page 46, see MESSER (knife).
5. These data were kindly supplied by Mr. S.A.C. Dudok van Heel out of a joint study, published in 1975 about the house 'Damrak 49' at Amsterdam. Municipal files service. Notary J.F. Bruyningh, N.A.A. Nr. 197, Fol. 600-604, 29th July 1613.
6. J. Denucé, town keeper of the files at Antwerp, ART EXPORT in THE 17TH CENTURY AT ANTWERP, Antwerp-Amsterdam, 1931, pages 21, 22 and 24.
7. In view of the amounts mentioned, these must have been quite valuably finished sewing-cushions.
8. In this letter a clear distinction is drawn between sewing-cushions and small boxes or cases. These last objects are explained as follows in LE GRAND DICTIONNAIRE FRANÇOIS FLAMEN & FLAMEN-FRANÇOIS by IAN LOUYS D'ARSY, Utrecht, 1643: "Les cabinets des femmes: The small cases in which the jewels and exquisite things of a woman are kept." CASE is an overarched case, (CASSE A COVER-TURE RONDE).
9. STOEFFWERCK = adorning, dressing up? In van Dale's GREAT DICTIONARY DUTCH LANGUAGE, 9th edition, 1970: STOEFFEN - STOFFEN = boasting, flaunting. CASSEN, CAS = case or chest. LEKENS = tassels? In the WESTFLANDERS IDIOTICON, L.L. de Boo/Joseph Samyn, Gent, 1892, under the verb LEKEN = dropping, dripping.
10. See among others: Cornelis Cort, 1552-1578; Hendrick Goltzius, 1558-1617; Jacob de Backer, 1560-1590; Crispijn de Passe the Older, 1564-

1637; Jan Pietersz Saenredam, 1565-1607; Abraham Bosse, 1602-1676, in Holstein.

11. Sylvia Groves, *THE HISTORY OF NEEDLEWORK TOOLS AND ACCESSORIES*, London 1966, page 50; Mary Andere, *OLD NEEDLEWORK BOXES AND TOOLS*, Devon 1971, page 45.
12. Henkel-Schöne, *EMBLEMATA*, see "distaff," page 1173. Guy de Tervarent, *ATTRIBUTES AND SYMBOLS IN PROFANE ART, 1450-1600*, Genève 1958-1959. See Quenouille, page 317.
13. Johannes Vermeer, "Woman Doing Lace-work," about 1665, Louvre, Paris.
14. *DICTIONNAIRE OU PROMPTUAIRE FRANCOYS-FLAMENG*, Elcie Edovard, Leon Mellema, Anvers, 1589.
15. *GRAND DICTIONNAIRE FRANCOIS-FLAMEN*, E.E.L. Mellema, Rotterdam, 1630.
16. M. Noël Chomel, *GENERAL DOMESTIC-NATURE-MORAL-ART DICTIONARY*, 2nd edition enlarged by J.A. Chalmot, Leyden 1778-79.
17. *MIDDLE-DUTCH DICTIONARY*, Dr. E. Verwijs, Dr. J. Verdam, 's-Gravenhage, 1885-1929, Volume VII, page 1791: *SPOUWEN* see *SPOUDEN* = splitting, cleaving; splitting into two the longest part.
18. Monograph, 'The 17th century doll's house, Centraal Museum, Utrecht, Nov. 1973. Adam Oortmans and Petronella de la Court, married 1640 at Amsterdam, being principals of the doll's house.
19. Monograph, 'Doll's Houses', Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 3rd edition, 1967.
20. Jacob Appel (1680-1751), "Doll's House," Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
21. Vanity bags, letter cases, shoes, slippers or mules and book-jackets.
22. Royal Library, The Hague, Magazine Department, Amsterdam Paper 1698 (portfolio 1672-1701). Paper Nr. 21, Tuesday Paper, 18th February, 1698. Those 'French' schools and boarding schools came into existence especially after the settling of the Huguenots in our country because of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685.

POST SCRIPT

Since this article was published in 1975, I learned of some remarkable sewing-cushions. I would like to give one or two particulars of these.

The first specimen I saw in a private collection at Munich, Germany. This sewing-cushion was called 'Steinkissen' (Fig. 28). It consists of an octagonal marble bottom piece in which a small round cushion is clamped. The whole is too heavy to keep it on the knees, so it had to be placed on the table by the side of which the woman who was doing needlework was seated. One could pin the linen onto this cushion. The 'Steinkissen' can be dated in the end of the 18th century.

The second specimen is dated 1763 and is kept in a Museum at Würzburg, Germany. The bottom piece of this sewing-cushion is made of porcelain and is part of a tea set, dinner service and toilette set made for a German princess. The so-called 'Plomb' (= French for lead) (Fig. 29) is made of wood, and in the wooden bottom a 1 1/2 cm.-thick piece of lead is laid. It is indeed 'heavy as lead', and this cushion can be dated 1830-1840. Steinkissen and Plomb were used in the same way. Mrs. Dr. Angela Völker, at that time (1976) Curator of the Department of Textiles of the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich, drew my attention to a certain object, which looks like a sewing-box, but was a sewing-cushion. Probably the inner-stuffing of the cushions on top and on the bottom has been removed. Furthermore the velvet lining on the outside is not the original one. (information given by Mrs. Völker and she dated it in the first quarter of the 17th century). The inside of this piece (Fig. 30a and b) is just the same as the inside of the specimen in the Rijksmuseum (see Fig. 12a), although the lids are embroidered here instead of the painted lids of the Amsterdam specimen.

In conclusion I would like to draw your attention to a catalogue of an auction at Sotheby's in July, 1978, Nr. 64: "Flemish Lady's Jewel Case in the form of a footrest covered in red velvet and with silver galon, the interior veneered with tortoise-shell, consisting of seven compartments, all lined in pink silk, on the lid of each compartment, except for one which bears a mirror, is a small painting on copper representing Pyramus and Thisbe, Hyacinthus and Apollo, Ceres and the old woman, a hunting scene, the rape of Europa and finally Narcissus looking at his reflection, 13 in. by 8 in. (33 cm. by 20 cm.) 17th century." However, this specimen is not a jewelcase at all. See pages 5-6 for my argument.

Editor's Note: First published in Dutch in ANTIEK Magazine In Holland; reprinted by permission. Translated into English by Mrs. Schipper-Van Lottum's sister, August/September, 1975.



Figure 1. G. Ter Borch, 'The Apple-paring Woman'. Collection Kunst Hist. Museum, Vienna. Exposition G. Ter Borch, Cat. Nr. 46.



Figure 2. 'A Woman Doing Needlework near a Cradle', G. Ter Borch. Exposition G. Ter Borch, Cat. Nr. 35.

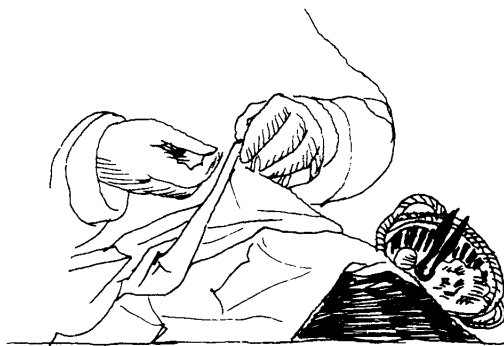


Figure 3. Bruges miniature about 1520. Walters Gallery, Baltimore, Maryland. Detail drawing. See footnote 11: Sylvia Groves, illustration 55.



Figure 4. Hendrick Goltzius, 'The Annunciation', Inv. Nr. Hi-9, B-15 1st list of the 2nd collection. Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. Hollstein part VII, H. Goltzius.



Figure 6. Willem Buytewech, 'Interior with Family near the Fireplace', 1975. Collection Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

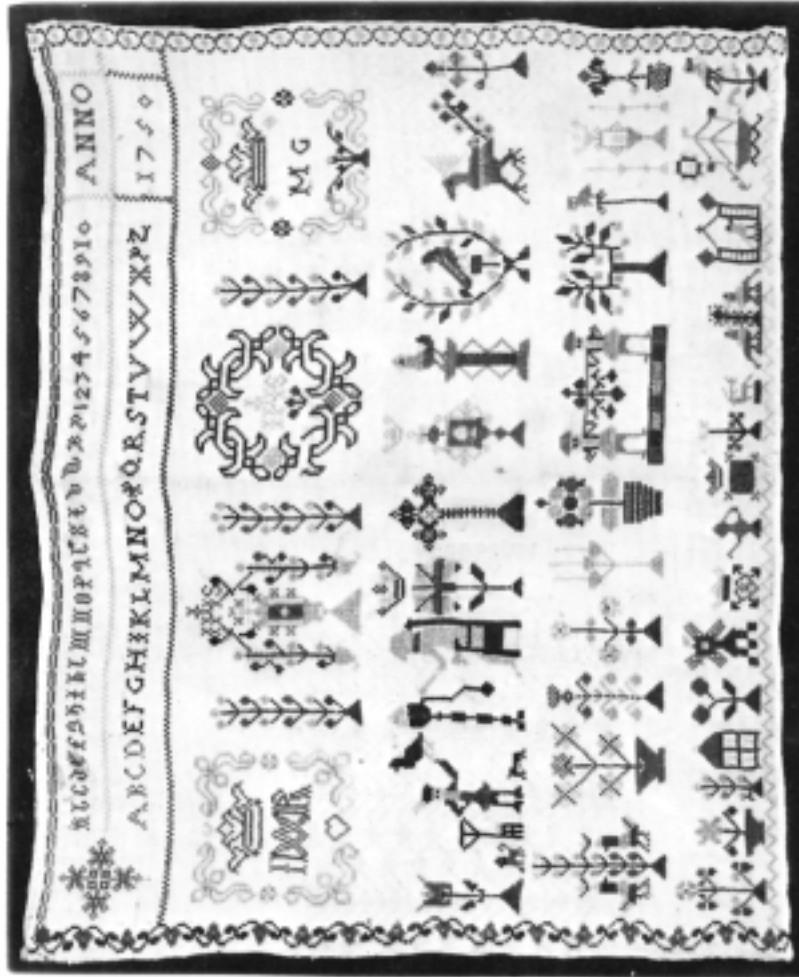


Figure 7. Sampler, 1750, private possession, Brabant. The sewing-cushion has been embroidered as a PIECE DE MILIEU and with a crown on the top, in the middle of the bottom row of figures.

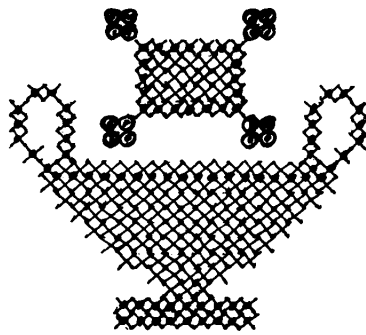


Figure 8. Detail drawing sampler, 1794.

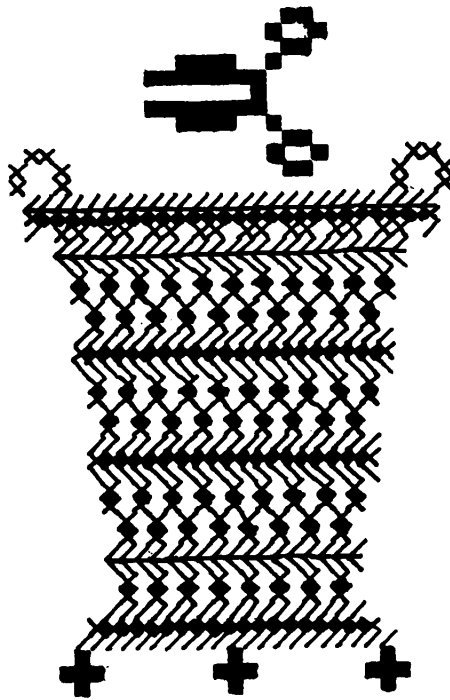


Figure 9. Detail drawing sampler, 1674.



Figure 10. Geertruydt Roghman (s). Atlas van Stolk, Rotterdam. Nr. 1031. Text in engraving: GEERTRUYDT ROGMAN INVENTIT ET SCULPSIT; I. COVENS ET C. MORTIER EXC. Woman to the right with sewing-cushion on her lap and before her on the floor a wide, shallow basket with linen.

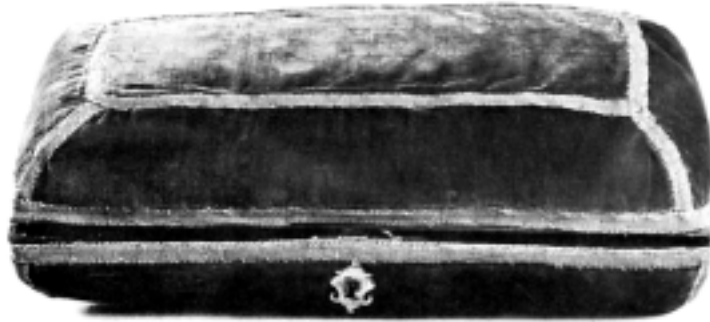


Figure 12a. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Inv. Nr. 5169. Cushion with interior, 1st half 17th century, measures: h.11 1/2, l. 36, w. 18 1/2 cm. Material outside lining: original red velvet with trimming of silver braid. Stuffing is of a very solid and hard material. Inside lining: tortoise-shell, edges of black coloured wood; the small wooden lids are painted with representations of Orpheus, Eurydice, Demeter, Apollo, Daphne. Small silver thread tassels help when opening the small lids. The hinges, the small bolts or 'sashes', the lock and the lock-clasp are of silver. The 7 small compartments are all fitted and set into the cushion, 3 in the lid, of which the middle one has a mirror on the lid of the small compartment. The key of the lock was already missing when the cushion was purchased in 1881.

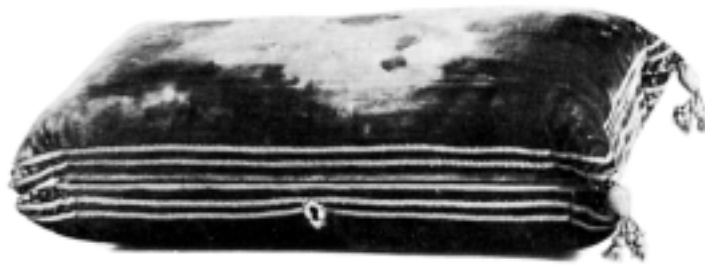


Figure 12b. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Inv. Nr. 3582. Cushion with interior, 1st half of 17th century. Measures: h. about 12, l. 34 1/2, w. 19 cm. Material outside lining: original green velvet with trimming of 2 narrow, lighter green braids. Three light green interlaced silk tassels are fitted to the lid (one tassel is missing). Stuffing of the cushion is of a very solid and hard material. Lining: wood covered with crimson satin of silk with linen weft. The leather lids of the 7 set-in compartments are adorned with stamped gilt ornament: a feminine figure with the text DIALECTICA (one of the 7 free arts), grape vines and squirrels, 3 grotesques, the middle one holding 2 rearing horses by the reins. A coat of arms with a double-headed eagle and the initials P.G. On the smallest lid 2 medallions. One can pull the lids open by 2 small green silk tassels. The hinges, the small bolts or 'sashes', the lock and the lock-clasp are of copper. The inside of the small boxes is lined with the same crimson material. In the lid of the cushion a mirror has been fitted on the middle small box. The key and 1 tassel were missing when purchased in 1877. Possibly a bridal gift, because 2 small bridal bouquets of gold thread have been found in this cushion. (See: Phillis Cunnington & Catherine Lucas, *COSTUME FOR BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS*, London 1972, page 67-68).



Figure 13. Joachim Wtewael, Portrait of his Daughter Eva, 1628. Centraal Museum, Utrecht.



Figure 14. Johannes van der Aack, 'A Seated Old Woman Doing Needlework'. National Gallery, London. Nr. 1397.

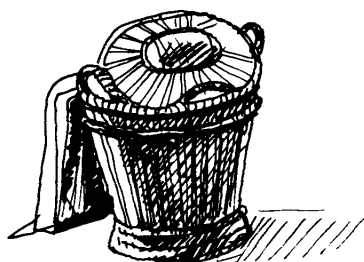


Figure 15a. Gerard Dou, 'The Young Mother'. Mauritshuis, Den Haag. Detail drawing, a closely plaited basket with 4 handles and a lid, an exception to the open type of basket.



Figure 15b. Jacob Duck, 'The Woman Ironing Laundry'. Centraal Museum, Utrecht. A wide and rather high, closely plaited basket with linen and sewing-cushion. Judging from the pair of bands on the table, one can date this painting in the 3rd quarter of the 17th century.

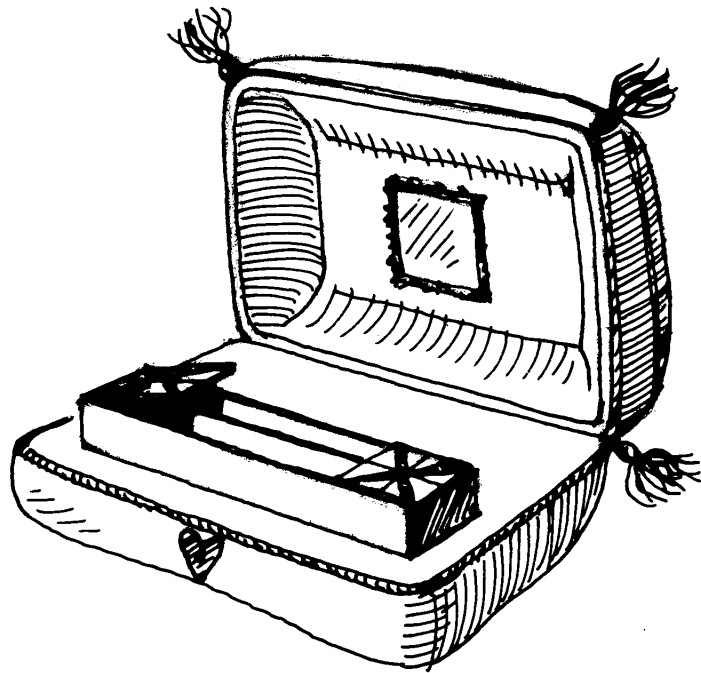
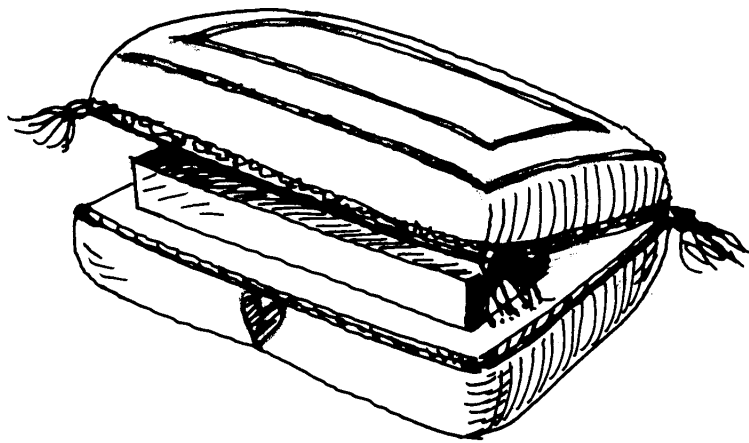


Figure.16. Drawing of a miniature sewing-cushion. Collection Centraal Museum, Utrecht.



Figure 17. Willem van Mieris, 'Interior with Man, Woman and Child'. National Museum, Prague.



Figure 18. Michiel van Musscher, portrait detail of Michiel Comans and his wife, 1699. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.



Figure 19. Detail drawing after an engraving of a painting by Caspar Netscher. Gemäldegalerie, Dresden. Nr. 1353.



Figure 20. Wijbrand Hendriks, 'A Sleeping Man in Interior', 19th century. Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem. On the table a sewing-cushion is lying. A small card with yarn is stuck behind the ribbon attached to it.



Figure 21. By courtesy of Mrs. C.M. Kutttschrütter. Title page of a pattern book for embroidery. Johan Sibmacher designed and engraved this booklet with examples for various embroidery techniques; it was published at Nuremberg in 1604. Text: 'She who loves the art of embroidery and wishes to practise this art has to learn it studiously, and she will earn praise, credit and prize'. 'Nehkunnst' = embroidery art. The Dutch word 'naaien' is another word for embroidering. 'Naaien' = 'To sew or to embroider. The middle woman is sitting under a tree. She has put her shoulder cape next to her on the grass so that it will not bother her while she is doing needlework. A carved wooden box on which a sewing-cushion has been adjusted, is standing on her lap. Across the cushion a piece of cloth is lying which the woman is holding with her left hand, ready for further embroidering. A low sewing-basket is within reach and one reads below the skirt seam of this 'diligent' woman, the word "Industria" (Latin for diligence). Near to the woman to the left is the word "Sophia" (Latin for wisdom), and the woman to the right is given the word "Ignavia" (Latin for indolence).

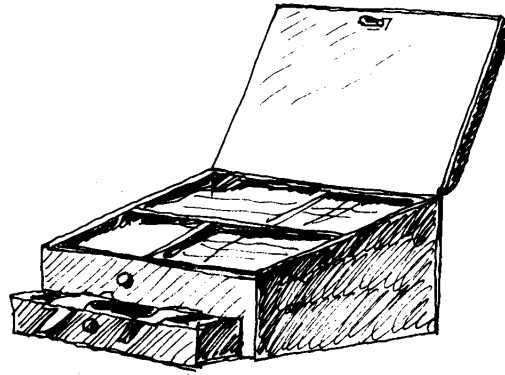


Figure 22. Detail drawing from the portrait of Mrs. van Collen-Mogge, 1776. Hermanus Numan. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. (See: A. Staring, THE DUTCH AT HOME, 's-Gravenhage, 1956.)



Figure 23. Detail drawing from the portrait "The family Cornelis Verbrugge," 1773. Hieronymus G. Lapis. (See: A. Staring, THE DUTCH AT HOME, 's-Gravenhage 1956.)



Figure 24. Pietro Longhi, "Venetian Family," after 1760. Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona.



Figure 25. Schweizerisches Landesmuseum, Zürich. Plomb, about 1880. Inv. Nr. LM 51540. Measures: 15 x 11 x 11 cm. A leaded plate in an oval, tublike, leather-covered container on which a wide leather handle has been fitted. On top of the plomb on one side is a pincushion of violet velvet (this part was also used for pinning up the needlework) and on the other side a small tray for needlework tools. This plomb is shown here because it forms the transitional stage between the sewing-box with small cushion of the 2nd half of the 18th century and the plomb which serves for merely pinning up the needlework, see figure 26.

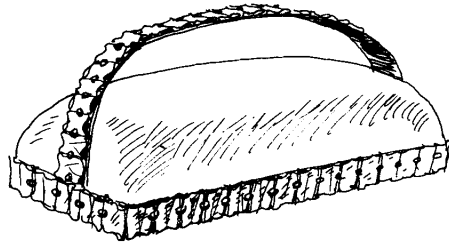


Figure 26. Plomb, about 1900. Private possession, North Holland. Measures: 16 x 12 x 2 cm. The leaded plate has been covered along the edge with a frill of box-pleats in green serge; the pleats are nailed down into the lead with small hobnails. The cushion has been stuffed with fine sand and covered with embroidery in petit point on canvas, representing the country house of the family Blokhuis-de Jong at Driebergen. The leather handle has also been finished with a frill.



Figure 27. Max Liebermann, "Sewing-school in the Amsterdam Orphanage," 1876. Collection Städtisches Museum, Wuppertal.



Figure 28. Private collection, München, 'Steinkissen'.

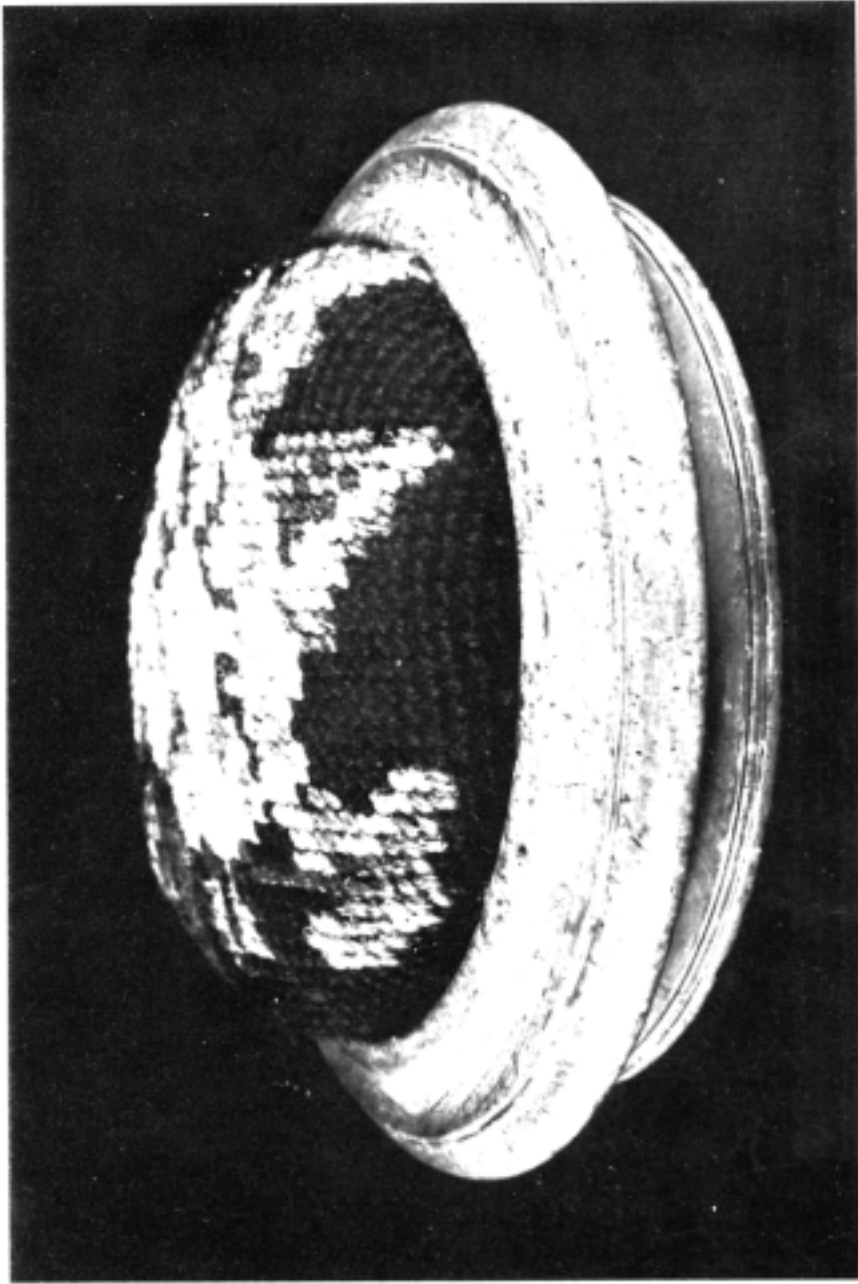


Figure 29. Private collection, Netherlands. 'Plomb.'

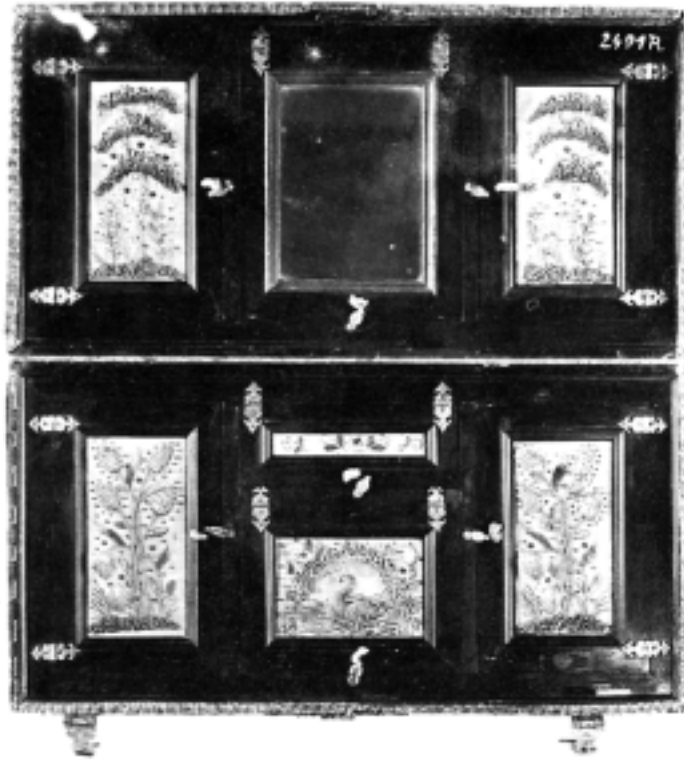


Figure 30. Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munchen, 'Nahkastchen'? (sewing-box).