



Scherenschnitte

Date

c. 1846

Primary Maker

Calista M. Sherman

Medium

Cut paper

Description

Calista Sherman passed away at the youthful age of twenty, but she left a legacy nonetheless. A resident of nearby Verona, New York, Calista submitted this Scherenschnitte, or paper cutting, to

the Oneida County Fair in September 1850, a time when women enthusiastically entered their handmade works to the fair for the purpose of exhibition, judging, and prizes. According to the Rome Sentinel, Calista's cut paper picture was "ingeniously executed" and she was awarded a dip pen as a prize. The German folk tradition of Scherenschnitte involves folding and rotational symmetry to cut designs into paper with scissors, similar in practice to Ancient Chinese paper cutting called Jianzhi. Often carried out by American women in the domestic sphere, the intricacy of scissor cutting was socially acceptable in comparison to the brute masculine connotations of knife cutting. While there is visible evidence of folding in Calista's design, her cut work is largely asymmetrical. Squirrels and birds scamper across the picture plane, rustling the flowers and tree branches she likely viewed as inspiration from her window at home. The work was likely made by Calista as a symbol of mourning to commemorate the death of Phebe Tompkins (1832-46) of Madison, New York, whose name is inscribed on the verso.

Dimensions

Composition: 6 7/16 x 8 5/8 in. (16.4 x 21.9 cm)