



SUMMER JULY 2020

# ESPALIER

*Espalier* | Gloria Balder Katzenberg



Gloria Balder Katzenberg. *Espalier*. c. 1973. Angora, wool, linen, cotton, rayon, and mixed gold metallic/silk cord and silver metallic threads, wood, glass, and plastic beads, sequins on linen ground with wooden slats. 16 1/2 x 31 1/2 in. (41.9 x 80 cm). The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of Gloria B. and Herbert M. Katzenberg, Baltimore, BMA 2013.137. © Estate of Gloria Balder Katzenberg

On a background of bright red linen, a multi-limbed form stretches across the horizontal surface with its individual limbs reaching upward. Various threads, beads, and sequins form this mysterious tree-like thing. A trunk or thick stem is made with seven different elements—threads of varying thicknesses and colors, different kinds of stitches, and even ivory-colored beads. At the top of this trunk, the object bursts into a complex structure with fuzzy spirals, a densely packed section of round black beads, a tightly stitched off-white circle surrounded by tiny taupe beads, and much more. Limbs—most stretching upwards, but some reaching horizontally before they curve towards the top of the artwork—range from a simple double line of stitches to a dense spiral of deep gray that unfolds into several lines of stitches dissipating into widely spaced stitches in progressively lighter colors. What are all the colors, shapes, and textures you can find?

The title of this artwork—*Espalier*—indicates that this fantastical form is actually a tree. An espaliered tree is one that humans have trained to grow horizontally against a wall. This technique is used for decorative purposes but also to preserve space in smaller gardens. The artist captures this effect of a tree flattened and spreading against a surface.

*Espalier* was made with skill and precision, but there is also an imaginative whimsy to it, which reflects the approach of the artist whose initials, GBK, can be seen in the lower left-hand corner of the work. GBK stands for Gloria Balder Katzenberg, a Baltimore-based artist who designed, created, and wrote about the art of needlepoint. In her 1974 book *Art and Stitchery: New Directions*, Katzenberg urges the reader to approach needlepoint with a sense of freedom:

*Don't be too concerned with names, and labels, and categories ...  
Use [stitches] as you wish, where you wish, blending, distorting,  
and experimenting.*

## RELATED ACTIVITY

Try your own experiment with needlepoint. Find some fabric that has some substance to it—avoid jersey or T-shirt fabric—but isn't too stiff, either. Select different colors and thicknesses of threads. You can also use a variety of beads and sequins. Use needles that will work with the different thicknesses of threads and the size of the openings for any beads and sequins. Place the fabric in an embroidery loop (available at fabric and craft stores). Following Gloria Balder Katzenberg's directions from her quote above: "use [stitches] as you wish, where you wish..." What happens when you do that? What is the result?



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