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Large Print Handout

Winifred Nicholson

Cumbrian Rag Rugs

Sheep Dog, 1920s

Designer unknown, made by Mary Bewick

Rag Rug, textile

Private Collection

Winifred Nicholson first discovered rag rug making in Cumberland in the early 1920s during a visit to Margaret Warwick. Nicholson encountered Warwick in her kitchen, using a proddy tool to craft a rug by pushing fabric strips from clothing through hessian stretched on a wooden frame. The piece, *Sheep Dog*, is believed to have been designed and made by Warwick in the 1920s at her farmhouse.

Two Cats by a Fire, c. 1970

Designed and made by Mary Bewick

Rag Rug, textile

Private Collection

Galloway Bull, 1957

Designed and made by Mary Bewick

Rag Rug, textile

Private Collection

Sheep, c. 1960s

Designed and made by Mary Bewick

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

Highland Cattle, 1960s

Designed and made by Mary Bewick

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

In the 1960s, Nicholson revived the rag rug making tradition in Cumbria by encouraging local makers, including Mary Bewick, to make attractive rugs that could be sold. Bewick's rugs, such as *Galloway Bull*, characteristically feature farm animals, centrally placed.

Bewick's pieces are typically framed with simple borders and created from small tight loops of fabric. They are some of the finest and most technically intricate rugs. Her deep connection to farming and her keen observation of animals are evident in her work.

Animal Squares, c. 1960s

Winifred Nicholson, made by Florence Williams

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

Animal Squares is divided into fifteen sections, featuring animals in alternate squares. An accompanying sketch, displayed in the archive case, outlines Nicholson's instructions to the maker. Nicholson specifies which animals should appear in each square, these animals include a stag, horse, dog, canary and hen, bull, ram and cat. Notably the cat resembles a mouse rather than a cat in Williams' rendering.

Butterflies, c. 1960s

Designed by Rafaele Appleby, maker unknown
Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

Two Cats by a Fire, c. 1970s

Designed and made by Mrs Davidson

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

Mrs Davidson, based in Bewcastle in North Cumbria, was one of the most prolific makers, crafting 31 rugs. *Two Cats by a Fire* depict the animals with wide eyes and pink noses curled in front of a fire with a pot on the range. The warm domestic scene is framed by a joyful border composed of tessellated multi-coloured triangles.

Lion and Lamb, 1968-88

Designed by Winifred Nicholson, made by Mrs Davidson

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

Mrs Davidson's work, *Lion and Lamb*, designed by Nicholson, depicts a tiny lamb nestled against a lion. This imagery may reference the Old Testament book of Isaiah 11.6, where the two animals are presented as visions of peace and balance in a world free from fear and danger.

Four Storks, c. 1983

Designed by Li Yuan-chia, made by a group of women meeting at the LYC Museum & Art gallery

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

Four Storks was designed by Li Yuan-chia, an artist and curator who founded and ran the LYC Museum & Art Gallery (1972-1983). The piece was made collectively by three Cumbrian women at the LYC. It depicts storks circling a central irregular form containing a sun-like orb, and multicoloured geometric shapes. The blue background suggests sky or water.

The LYC Museum & Art Gallery was a vital cultural space in Cumbria that showcased prominent national and international artists and fostered cultural exchange. It served as a vibrant hub for the local community, hosting events and creative workshops.

Tiger, early 1960s

Designed and made by Janet Heap

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

Birds, c. 1970

Winifred Nicholson, made by a Cumbrian Volunteers Women's Club

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

Dancing Panther Cub, c. 1966

Designed by Winifred Nicholson, made by Florence Williams

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

A young panther cub leaps energetically, its legs and tail in dynamic motion, surrounded by a vibrant swirl of birds and flowers. The natural elements are echoed in the rich border of flowers and floral designs.

Nicholson based the piece on a newspaper clipping of a textile fragment from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The original clipping is displayed in the archive case in the gallery.

On it, Nicholson left detailed instructions for the maker, specifying that the panther should be made 'yellow and black' against a 'deep golden green' background. She asked that the border be 'pale green' with 'every bright colour available' for the flowers.

Animal Squares, 1966

Designed and made by Mary Bewick

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

Lion, c. 1971

Designed by Winifred Nicholson, maker unknown

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

Lion was inspired by a postcard of a hooked rug, Lion and Beaver, from the American Museum in bath that Nicholson recieved from a friend in 1971. The postcard is displayed in the archive case in this gallery. In Nicholson's design the golden lion is surrounded by flowers, an ornate pink jar, a butterfly, foliage and various birds against a vibrant blue background with the beavers omitted from her interpretation.

Black Swan

Winifred Nicholson, maker unknown

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

Black Swan, designed by Nicholson, features a black swan with a bright orange beak gliding over bands of water in varying shades of blue, its red feet just visible beneath the surface. At the top of the composition, tangled stems and branches with orange specs against a beige and grey background, suggest a riverbank.

Jonah and the Whale, April 1969

Designed and made by Florence Williams

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

Florence Williams, a prolific rag rug maker, made 58 rugs for Winifred Nicholson, began her craft shortly before the Second World War while living in Warwick Bridge, Cumbria. Her work is noted for its technical proficiency, featuring tight loops, intricate details and embroidered embellishments.

In *Jonah and the Whale*, the Old Testament story is vividly portrayed with Jonah inside the giant whale and the dynamic motion of the sea is captured through bands of blue, white and green.

Magpie, 1970s

Designer unknown, made by Florence Williams

Rag Rug, textile

Private Collection

Magpie was designed by a Cumbrian school child. His art teacher was Andy Christian, a close friend of Nicholson who taught at the local school. The child, a passionate Newcastle United FC fan, was tasked by his teacher, Christian, to draw an image unrelated to football. The boy cleverly depicted a magpie, the emblem of his favourite club, without his teacher realising the connection.

The resulting rug, crafted by Florence Williams, features the bird-like figure that arguably resembles a dinosaur more than a magpie. An angular cream shape in the background suggests a goalpost, while the bird's outstretched wings evoke a celebratory stance, reminiscent of a triumphant player.

Batman and Robin, 1968

Designed by David Nicholson, made by Florence Williams

Rag Rug, textile

Private Collection

Batman and Robin was designed by David Nicholson, grandson of Nicholson, and inspired by the iconic comic book heroes. It features a masked Batman in a blue-grey Batsuit against a deep blue-black background, alongside his sidekick Robin in a red suit with a black eye mask. The words 'POW' and 'ZOC' appear in sound-effect bubbles, echoing those found in the comic books and the animated series.

Batman and Robin are enduring crime-fighting heroes and key figures in popular culture. From 1966 to 1968, the comics were adapted into the live-action television series 'Batman' and the first film released in 1966. David Nicholson was influenced by the animated series of that era.

Scarecrow, 1970s

Designed and made by Florence Williams

Rag Rug, textile

Private Collection

In *Witch on a Broomstick*, by Florence Williams, the vibrant, swirling sky evokes magic and movement as the witch soars, accompanied by her black cat familiar. *Scarecrow* features horizontal bands of colour to represent the natural landscape. The scarecrow's warm smile, contrasting with typical eerie depictions, suggests the rug was designed by a child.

Witch on a Broomstick, c. 1970

Designed and made by Florence Williams

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

Tractor and Haycart, 1967

Designed by Jovan Nicholson, made by Mrs Hall

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

A number of rugs were designed by Nicholson's grandchildren and great-nieces. They were each paid one pound for their designs, which they drew boldly in marker pen on large pieces of hessian.

Jovan Nicholson, Nicholson's grandson, created designs including *Farmyard* and *Tractor and Haycart*. These designs were inspired by Cumbrian farming scenes and his experience of rural life.

Farmyard shows a farmhouse surrounded by lush farmland with grazing sheep, cattle and roaming chickens. A blue tractor and a horse-drawn cart traverse a winding path in the upper portion of the rag rug and, in the foreground, two buildings flank the left and right sides of the composition.

Tractor and Haycart features a patterned and colourful block-shaped tractor pulling a stacked cart filled with square bales of golden hay. They are set against fields depicted in shades of green.

Cumberland Landscape, 1968

Designed by Jovan Nicholson, made by Florence Williams

Rag Rug, textile

Private Collection

Jovan Nicholson's design for *Cumberland Landscape* mimics a painting through its distinct arrangement of foreground, middle ground and background. It features a vibrant patchwork of fields in shades of blue, green and yellow and at the top, grey sections suggest craggy mountain tops. In the immediate foreground to the right, tree forms emerge, while silvery tracks lead to a farmhouse nestled within the landscape—possibly the same farmhouse depicted in the rug *Farmyard*. The maker, Florence Williams, enhanced the farmhouse with intricate embroidery to add depth and texture.

Farmyard, 1960s

Designed by Jovan Nicholson, made by Florence Williams

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

Trefor Rivals, 2022

Rafaele Appleby

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

Rag Trade, 2022

Lu Mason

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

Loose your Rag, 2023

Rachel Mathews

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

Hyacinths on the Window-Sill, 1985

Emma Tenant

Rag Rug, textile
Private Collection

Cumbrian Cat, 2013

Designed by Betram Nicholson, made by Betram and Elena Nicholson

Rag Rug cushion, textile
Private Collection

Liberation of Colour, 2016

Digital Film

12min, 12 seconds
Ccourtesy of MIMA

Annotated newspaper of a textile fragment

The Museum of Fine Arts Boston

Newsprint

Sketch for a Tiger Rug, early 1960s

Winifred Nicholson

Ink on paper

Postcard depicting Lion and Beaver

The American Museum in Bath

Card

Rag Rug making tools

Belonged to Emma Gass

Wood and metal

Sketch for a Tiger Rug, early 1960s

Winifred Nicholson

Ink on paper

Postcard depicting mosaics in Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna

Unknown date

Card

All Private Collections