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Album Amicorum of Elisabeth Cosman

In Dutch, illustrated manuscript on paper

Netherlands (Rotterdam, Arnhem, The Hague, 's-Hertogenbosch) and Germany (Wesel),
1831-1842 (dated)

26 folios on paper, no watermarks visible, modern foliation in pencil, 1-26, loose leaves (single sheets and bifolia), SIX EMBROIDERIES, TWO WATERCOLORS, ONE PICTURE MADE FROM STRAW, ONE MUSICAL SCORE, minor stains, in overall excellent condition. Loose leaves kept in the original cassette of deep blue silk over pasteboards, both covers decorated with gilt borders, gilt edges, white and green inner silk lining with gilt borders, silk worn and fragile on the spine, minor wear on the gilt decoration, otherwise in excellent condition, kept within a contemporary slipcase of marbled paper, very worn. Dimensions 91 x 154 mm.

The genre of the *Album Amicorum* has a lot to tell us about social interaction and cultural context from the sixteenth century, when it originates, through the nineteenth century (and perhaps beyond). This one is exceptionally rare; this example was made for a woman, whereas most surviving *Alba Amicorum* belonged to men. Collecting souvenirs from her friends and family, including embroideries, a musical score for piano forte, and poems, Elisabeth's album provides unique insight into women's social networking. The beautiful silk cassette enclosing the sheets adds to its allure.

PROVENANCE

1. This is the *album amicorum* of Elisabeth Cosman, born Sijmons (also spelled Symons in our manuscript) in Rotterdam in 1814, the daughter of Barend Sijmons and Francijntje Janson. Elisabeth married the banker Adolph Cosman in Arnhem on August 1, 1842; their marriage certificate survives in the Gelders Archive in Arnhem (see Online Resources for a digitized copy). Elisabeth began her album at the age of seventeen and the entries continue until the year of her marriage. Our manuscript is recorded in the Repertorium Alborum Amicorum (Online resources).

TEXT AND ILLUSTRATION

ff. 1-2v (bifolium), Entry by Cornelia van Cleeff: f. 1v, [poem about friendship in French dated 10 September 1838 and signed], "Les fleurs n'ont pour briller qu'un temps, / C'est un éclat qu'un soufle emporte; / Mais l'amitié, que je vous porte, / Sera toujours dans son printemps"; on the facing page an embroidery representing a landscape with an antique arch in the foreground, and a church and two houses in the background, border of gilt paper; [ff. 1, 2v, blank];

f. 3, Entry by Eva Hockenbroch: a poem in German, enclosed within a delightful embroidery representing a wreath of small naturalistic flowers and buds, including pansies; signed, no date; [f. 3v, blank];

ff. 4-5v (bifolium), Entry by L. Billerbeck: musical score, *Elisabethen Galoppade für Piano Forte*; decorated above the title on f. 4 with a remarkable floral garland of roses, pansies and other

flowers, painted in watercolor, cut out individually, and pasted onto a support, in order to create a three-dimensional effect; dedicated on f. 5v to "Frau Elisabeth Cosman" and dated "Wesel im December 1842 / L: Billerbeck";

f. 6r-v, Entry by Sophia van Cleeff: "double-sided" embroidery representing a radiating spray of flowers, including roses, lilies of the valley and forget-me-nots, with the inscription "Wandel open" (Turning open) and signature on both sides;

f. 7r-v, Printed birthday card (no signature);

f. 8r-v, Embroidery representing a floral wreath with a rose, forget-me-nots, the initials "N / v / W /" and the date 1839;

ff. 9-10v (bifolium), Entry by Elisabeth van Cleeff: f. 9, a vase with berry branches on a table mat, made with small pieces cut out of straw and green velvet; f. 9v, blank; f. 10, poem in Dutch, incipit, "'t Was uw begeerte, dat ik my..."; [f. 10v, blank];

f. 11, Entry by H. (?) Hockenbroch: embroidery representing a bird and bouquets of roses and forget-me-nots; signed and dated in 's-Hertogenbosch (in German "Herzogenbusch") October 3, 1838; [f. 11v, blank];

ff. 12-13v (bifolium), Entry by Frédérique Haas: f. 12, embroidery of a flower pot; [f. 12v, blank]; f. 13, poem in French, incipit, "De même que sur la froide pierre d'un tombeau ...", signed and dated 1 January 1839; [f. 13v, blank];

f. 14, Inscription by Ad. Cosman, her husband, dated 3 July 1838; [f. 14v, blank];

f. 15r-v, Text in German, dated Rotterdam 1838 by "L. Levié M.D.";

ff. 16-17v (bifolium): f. 16r-v, Entry by B. Symons (her father, Barend): poem in Dutch, dated 1834; [f. 17r-v, blank];

f. 18, Poem in Dutch, signed "10 Oct. 1833 J. G. Litzaw"; [f. 18v, blank];

f. 19, Poem in German, incipit, "Wen dich zum rechten stets die...", dated 20 November 1834 and signed by Mietje Hollander; [f. 19v, blank];

f. 20, Poem in French about friendship, incipit, "Ce n'est qu'une pure amitié ...", dated Rotterdam 5 May 1837 and signed "Votre sincère ami: Louis Pincoffs"; [f. 20v, blank];

f. 21, Poem in French, incipit, "En absence comme en présence, Soyez sûr de ma constance ...", dated Arnhem, 1 August 1842 and signed by F. M. de Lig; f. 21v, blank;

ff. 22-23v (bifolium), [f. 22, blank]; ff. 22v-23, Poem in French by Elisabeth's aunt, incipit, "que je peut [sic] dire à une niece ... que je vous souhaite le grand bonheur / c'est le seul desir / des fonds du coeur / de votre tante / Henrietta van Oven / née Symons"; [f. 23v, blank];

ff. 24-25v (bifolium), [f. 24, blank]; ff. 24v-25, Poem in Dutch, incipit, "Is alles Album, wat men ziet...", dated Rotterdam, 3 March 1834, and signed by J. Schreuder; [f. 25v, blank];

f. 26, Watercolor of a floral garland of roses and forget-me-nots, in the form of a heart that encloses a poem in French "Belle sont les fleurs / Plus belle encore l'amitié / Qu'elle unie nos coeurs / Jusqu'à l'éternité", signed "de Votre Amie Sophia van Oven / La Haye / le 22 Novembre / 1834"; [f. 26v, blank].

The *album amicorum*, or album of friends, is a booklet in which young aristocrats collected entries made by their friends, relatives, and acquaintances whom they met during travels and studies. On the pages of the *Stammbuch*, as it was called in German, friends would usually offer poems, wishes, drawings and watercolors, signed with a date and current location. The *album amicorum* was popular from the sixteenth until the nineteenth century, mainly among male aristocrats, and in bourgeois, and university circles. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the albums were increasingly made for women. The decoration was adapted accordingly, with bouquets of flowers made of locks of hair or with embroidery. The entries were collected locally, from among the closest family members and friends. These albums were more intimate, and no longer served as collections of remembrances of fellow students or prized inscriptions written by great scholars of one's time.

The *album amicorum* is central in modern transdisciplinary research studying texts, reception and collecting in cultural and social contexts and the history of mentalities; see especially the comprehensive study by Werner Wilhelm Schnabel published in 2003. Our manuscript paints a picture of a nineteenth-century home, where young women of marriageable age were perfecting their skills. The embroideries, poems and the musical score for piano forte reflect the pastimes of these aristocratic women and reflect their cultural domestic ambiance.

Until the late eighteenth century, the albums were essentially bound books, but from this period onwards, they increasingly became collections of loose sheets in small cassettes or portfolios, as is the case for our manuscript. Throughout their history, the albums usually assumed an elongated horizontal format.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Marriage certificate of Elisabeth Sijmons and Adolph Cosman (1 August 1842), Arnhem, Gelders Archief, 0207 Burgerlijke stand Gelderland, dubbelen, 150
<https://permalink.geldersarchief.nl/45E02178A66047D1B3D561F7362741FE>

"RAA, Repertorium Alborum Amicorum"
<https://raa.gf-franken.de/de/startseite.html>

Listing our manuscript,

https://raa.gf-franken.de/de/suche-nach-stammbuechern.html?permaLink=1831_sijmons

Suzanne Karr Schmidt, "Eighteenth-Century Social Networking," October 20, 2021
<https://www.newberry.org/18th-century-social-networking>

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