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Mary Wollstonecraft

Judy Chicago (1980): You can see the relationship between the plate and the runner at its highest point of tension at the place setting for Mary Wollstonecraft. The plate is very strong and assertive, its form twisting and lifting, so much so that the edge of the plate begins to break from the circular form. Mary Wollstonecraft stood at the threshold of modern feminism, and her plate is a symbol for trying to break loose. The strength in the image on the plate, next to the obsessive and trivializing needlework of her runner, starkly represents the contrast between Mary Wollstonecraft and her environment. The runner is done in a technique called stumpwork, which by our standards I suppose is an odd art. Some people told me that traditional stumpwork was the ugliest needlework technique they'd ever seen, but I myself thought it was wonderful. In traditional stumpwork objects are put together with no reference to size or proportion: butterflies are bigger than people, houses are smaller than lions. The leader of our stumpwork team recruited everyone she could find and engaged them in a competition over who could make the greatest banana or the best starfish and objects kept coming in the mail from all over the country. The back of the runner conveys the story of Wollstonecraft's death. She died giving birth to a child who would eventually write the novel *Frankenstein*—Mary Shelley, whose name appears on the Heritage Floor, directly above the place setting for her mother. It was very difficult and painful for me to deal with this image, but I felt it was essential to represent the reality of childbirth and what it has done to many women's lives.

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