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Emily Dickinson

Judy Chicago (1980): Emily Dickinson was born in Massachusetts in 1830 and chose to be a recluse in order to have the freedom to write. Her writing was completely at odds with prevailing ideas of what poetry and women were supposed to be. Only seven of her more than seventeen hundred poems were published during her lifetime. She bound them with a darning needle into tiny books, which were only found after her death. People say to me, “But Dickinson was such a strong woman; why portray her in pink lace?” But my point here is, of course she was a strong woman, but she was almost smothered by the Victorian ideal. The plate is done in a traditional china-painting technique called lace draping, which we adapted for our own use. If you look closely at the runner, you can see it’s done in lace and a technique called ribbonwork, brought to the project by a woman whose mother had passed her ribbons and this nineteenth-century technique down to her. I wanted to both honor and preserve what would have otherwise been a lost art.