

In Word and Thread

A letter to
Marguerite Tiste



MICCA

Dear Marguerite,

You were twenty-three years old.

I keep coming back to that number, Marguerite. Twenty-three. An age when life can still take so many different directions, when so much has yet to happen. And yet beside your name stands a date that brings everything to an end: 27 June 1671.

You lived in Ellezelles. Sixty years had passed since six women from the same village had been condemned for witchcraft on a single day. Their names had barely become history when yours, too, entered the judicial records.

Your trial took you to Mons. There, on 27 June 1671, you were executed after being accused of witchcraft. Few personal traces remain of the life that came before that day. Your name remained. Your age. Your place of residence. And the way your life ended.

When I began knitting for you, I chose quiet, earthy colors. Beige, black and grey. Colors that do not demand attention. But as I worked, small colored threads began to appear between the stitches. Red, green, blue, yellow. Here and there, without any regular pattern. I felt they had to stay.

Perhaps because you were so young.

They are only small streaks of color. They tell us nothing about who you were. I do not want to give you a character that I cannot find in the sources, nor invent dreams that no one ever recorded. But amid all those muted shades, I wanted something lively to appear in my knitting.

The diamond also returns again and again. Two broad bands run around the slip-over, knitted in purl jacquard. The floats remain visible on the outside, so the lines are not sharply defined. The motif almost looks woven, as if an older piece of fabric had been incorporated into the knitting.

The diamond is an ancient motif that has acquired different meanings over the centuries. It has been associated with femininity, fertility, new life and protection.

For you, I think especially of protection and new life.

Two things that sound painfully at odds with your name.

That is why I did not want to make a perfect garment for you. The threads may remain visible. The colors may appear unexpectedly. The pattern does not have to look equally precise everywhere. Your slip-over carries no image of you and does not try to tell us what you looked like or who you were.

It carries only your name.

Marguerite Tiste.

A young woman from Ellezelles who was twenty-three years old when her life was ended on 27 June 1671.

More than three and a half centuries later, I add something small: a few colored threads among the stitches. Not as a memory of a life I can fill in for you, but of the life that was there.

*With love,
Mieke*