

HAND WEAVING AT THE NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR

Being a Review of Some of the Weavings Exhibited There

by ESTHER HOAGLAND GALLUP

Do you need inspiration for a fresh start on your loom?

Do you long to achieve different textures and color effects and do you yearn to study examples of that culmination of the weaver's art—tapestry?

A wealth of interesting material for study and of immediate practical value was displayed at the World of Tomorrow, New York City's great fair. Unfortunately, not all of the exhibitors plan to return—notably Sweden, one of the nuclei of the hand weaving craft and the source of inspiration of some of our finest work. It is, therefore, especially to those who, for some reason, were unable to see the 1939 edition of the fair that this report is submitted.

Since Sweden, as mentioned above, probably will not be present at the fair in 1940, we shall review her contribution thoroughly.

Most of the weavings exhibited here were from the studio of Elsa Gullberg, perhaps the most noted of Swedish hand weavers and designers.

One's first impression of the work is that it glows with life and light in spite of an, at times, almost stark simplicity of design. Accompanying this vitality, one senses a tremendous *usability* in Swedish weaving (as is, indeed, apparent in all Sweden's arts and crafts). There seems no doubt that this sincere merging of function with grace and charm accounts for the importance of "Swedish Modern" in furnishings today.

There were a few pieces, more in the nature of samplers, featuring traditional stitches: one of double weaving (Finnweave) in luscious dark brown and cream, entirely composed of decorative bands combining the lovely and well known design motifs. Another wall hanging on a cream linen ground employed one of the stick-weaving techniques (Dukagang) [see article in "The Weaver," January, 1938, by Elmer Wallace Hickman] to portray two little doll-like figures flanking a highly stylized fruit tree, and bearing the inscription,

"ADAM EWA I PARADIS!"

The colors were delft blue and rose, the whole effect very delicate and attractive, but seeming, somehow, a little precious in juxtaposition to the more modern work.

Two other samplers, scenes exquisitely wrought by hand in damask linen, were indicative of the high degree of technical excellence that Sweden's weavers have attained.

And yet, in spite of the respect one feels for such skill, one sees that the principal, vital strength of the Swedish hand weaving lies not in the creation of tapestries and intricate damask linens but in the harnessing of this exquisite craftsmanship to the needs and uses of modern life.

Yards and yards of beautiful material for draperies and for upholstery, and knotted pile rugs are the main features of the display. Textiles for curtains and draperies

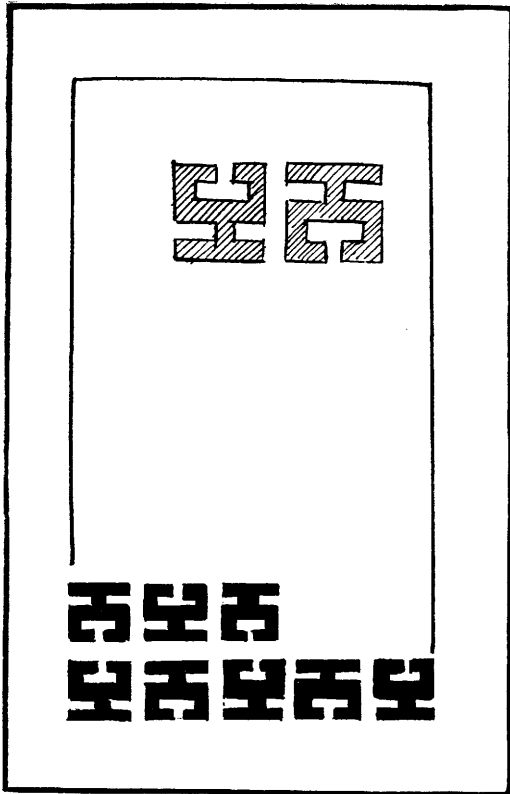
are usually in simple all-over satin-faced weaves, (see the chapter on Swedish weaving in Edward F. Worst's book, "Foot Power Loom Weaving"), occasionally in stripes—usually horizontal—and depending on interesting texture and glowing or subtle color rather than on complicated pattern for their effectiveness.

A kind of pale gold, as though distilled from northern sunlight, is used a great deal in the Swedish textiles, against a ground color of soft oyster white. Rich blue and a delicate green are also popular shades.

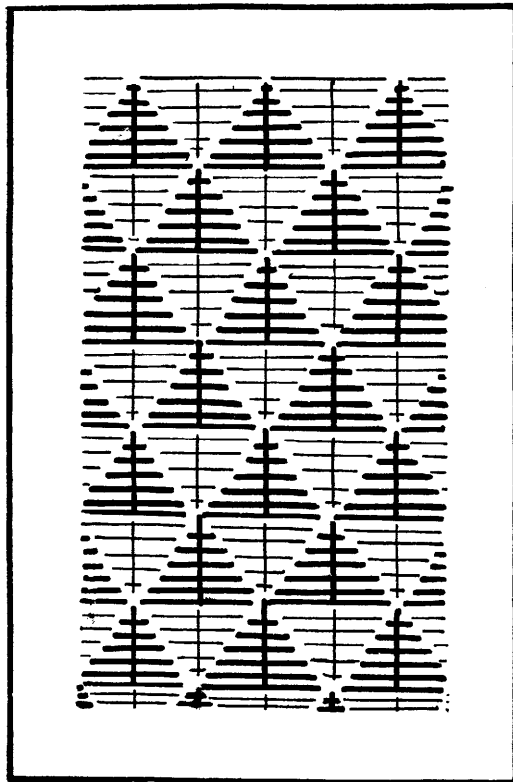
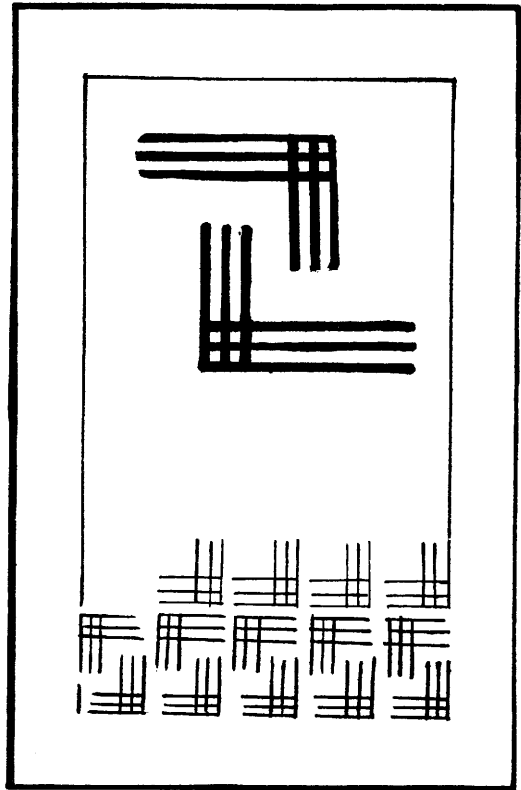
Texture is everywhere stressed. We noticed one chair upholstered in plain, rich blue of middle intensity, its only pattern consisting of a thin line of the same color of a rough slub material. This line recurred at regular intervals, solely to give texture and depth. The fabric on another chair, upholstered in much the same shade of blue (incidentally a very popular color, perhaps because it is complimentary to the blond wood used so extensively) was woven in the familiar honeycomb pattern. The threads outlining the depressions in the pattern were of oyster white nubby material, apparently laid-in in small bits (or else in loops and the loops afterwards clipped) to give a slightly shaggy appearance, once again to create a feeling of texture in the work.

Magnify this tendency to texture about fifty times and you have the all-over fringed or looped rugs and draperies that seem so popular. This effect is achieved by tying-in (using the Oriental rug knot) bands and design areas of threads, in exactly the way one knots a rug; but instead of clipping to make a fine, close pile, the ends are left long—as much as *one to one-and-one-half inches!* This technique is similar to that of "Rya," mentioned by Mr. Hickman in "The Weaver," January, 1937, but the ends are much longer. These droop in a graceful and rather Victorian fringe, in the case of the draperies, and in the rugs lie in a soft snarl, most inviting to the feet. This long fringing (so termed because it looks like fringe, although strictly speaking, I suppose it is a *pile*) is usually of linen or some hard twisted material. The reason for using such thread is, of course, self explanatory. It precludes the possibility of the fringe-ends becoming too quickly frayed.

Two draperies were especially attractive. One, on an oyster white ground of heavy, slub material, striped regularly with pale gold, soft blue, red, and green, carried bands of oyster grey linen fringing. The areas between the fringing revealed the delicate pencil striping of the aforementioned colors, while the fringed areas contained no color. The other, on an oyster white ground intermittently shot with delft blue, bore fringes of a rosy, coral color linen. In this material the opposite effect was achieved by fringing the entire background of the fabric and leaving the design areas, of traditional motif and stripe, unfringed.



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 RUG MOTIFS
 SKETCHED FROM
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The long piled rugs were interesting also. In this case, the pile must have been fully *two inches* long. One was entirely of plain oyster linen; another was woven on a sturdy linen warp with a heavy blue wool filler. Two warp threads were used for each heddle, threaded and woven to a straight twill. The fringing was of blue and white, in a slubby rayon yarn, and the knotting was done in a pattern, the details of which, however, were all but lost in the wealth of loose ends. These rugs, while very delightful to look at, would in all probability, be used *more* as hangings and couch covers since their durability as floor coverings might be questioned.

There were also several pile rugs done in the now thoroughly known techniques of "Flossa" or "Rya," the designs for two of which are suggested herewith in our sketches from memory. (No sketching or photographing was allowed, at least in the Swedish building.) We thought these rugs outstanding in design and color and more typical of the Swedish-Modern than one or two others displayed. These others were, nevertheless, very delicate and lovely in their use of formal flower motifs.

At this point, we shall pass on to the Norwegian exhibit. In the foyer of that building one of the first things to be seen was a delightful circular rug, on a raised dais, showing floral motifs in delicate tones, the whole effect very similar to those rugs last described in the Swedish building. It was a real gem in color, design, and craftsmanship, and should certainly be seen by student and master weavers in case it is again displayed next year.

Generally speaking, in the Norwegian weavings, the design was not quite so free and functional, the colors not quite so light and gay as in those of her sister country, Sweden. One felt a closer adherence to the traditional, although in a broad way the same general techniques were used. The tendency toward fringing and long tufting was not so common but several hangings combined an interlocked tapestry (Aklæ) with intermittent areas of knotting in an interesting way. The most outstanding tapestry there used this combination of techniques. Weft threads were left loose on the edges of the web to form a fringe, and along the sides borders had been knotted-in in the "Rya" technique. As the picture was woven sideways these "fringes" served as top and bottom to the scene and the pile gave an amazing feeling of depth to the finished work. The scene proper combined plain and twilled surfaces most freely to create a very interesting texture. This tapestry, depending as it did on the use of textured surface rather than wholly on color and design, seemed to us a possible indication of a new movement in tapestry weaving.

It is only fair to say here that the Norwegian exhibit was much smaller in number of pieces shown than was the Swedish, hence the relatively small space allotted to an account of Norway's work.

One other piece, however, seems worthy of mention. This was a rug done in "Flossa" technique, of the loveliest somber colors imaginable. The ground was a dull green-gold, the design done in a soft, rich green and woods brown. This color scheme immediately suggested the green of northern pines and the dark brown of their trunks, interlaced against a cold, twilight sky. A sketch showing the general design of this rug is included.

Both the Swedish and Norwegian displays included a few beautiful examples of straight-forward tapestry but for

the thorough student of this art, both ancient and modern, perhaps the two best displays were to be found at the French and Belgian buildings.

It is, of course, more or less contingent on world affairs as to whether or not these treasures will be on display again in 1940. At the times we attended the Fair, officials of both buildings assured us that their countries hoped to return next summer. At least, one can know what to look for if the opportunity does come again.

The Gothic room in the fine arts gallery of the French building contained three tapestries of the era before over-elaboration had degraded the art of tapestry weaving.

These hangings are fine specimens of the work of that golden age. They are named respectively, "Lady with a Hennion," "The Last Judgment," and "L'Honneur." The last mentioned is especially lovely. It is adorned with a flowered ground, suggesting the "Mille Fleur" tapestries, and is further embellished with mottoes in archaic French which even the guide was unable to translate for us!

The remaining tapestries in the galleries are good examples of the work of various well known houses, i.e., a pair of chairs upholstered in Aubusson; a pair in Beauvais; several large Beauvais hangings, and two tapestries of the house of Savonnerie with a texture like silk velvet.

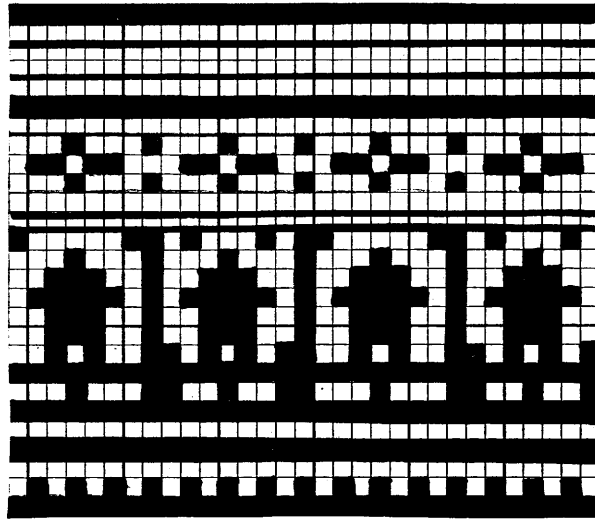
Of course all these textiles are distinctly antique treasures and may not be examined closely. One fact, nevertheless, was readily apparent. The earlier tapestries (of the Gothic period) are much finer artistically than those produced later by the Aubusson and other schools which represent the 18th century period. The golden age of tapestry was from around 1435 to 1500. In its best period, only about twenty tints of yarn were used; the shadings and half tones were achieved through the skillful use of hatching. As the proficiency of the weavers increased (and they did become marvellously adept) the number of shades was also increased, until at the height (or depth) of the art, as many as fourteen thousand shades might be employed in one hanging! Many famous artists contributed cartoons from which the weavers created their gargantuan works. However, because the tapestries were actually mere copies of paintings, designed without consideration for the requirements and limitations of the loom, they were artistically of little value.

A modern revival in England, carried on in a small scale, but showing much of the merit of the fine old pieces, was directed by Mr. William Morris during the 19th century, and some work of great beauty was produced.

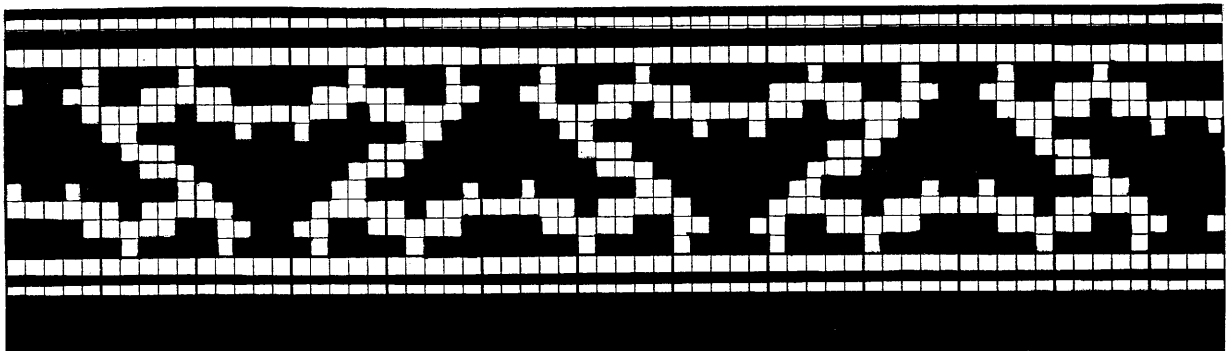
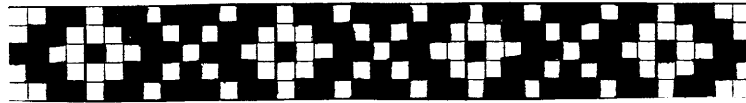
Comparatively little modern tapestry, however, is worthy of the name so it was with great interest and keen pleasure that we found examples of such a brilliant revival of the art in the Belgian pavilion. Here, two types of weaving were represented. The small, intimate tapestry, which resembled a crayon sketch by some modernist, and the heroic, brilliant ones hanging in the entrance hall.

One finds the small tapestries, a set of three, in the arts and crafts gallery of the Belgian building. They were designed by Edward Tytgat and Marie Alg, and executed, entirely by hand, in the ateliers of De Saedeler and Bracquenie. Their colors were rather subdued, and, as mentioned before, they closely resembled a delicate crayon sketch. The second panel especially, bearing the inscription, "La Souplesse des Femmes Est Comme Celle des Flots," showed several nude figures, the drawing reminiscent of the style

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DESIGNS SUITABLE FOR DUKAGANG OR OTHER LAID-IN TECHNIQUE



of the late A. B. Davies. The workmanship of these panels was remarkable; and the sketchy character of the drawing, the quiet color scheme, seemed to make them ideally adapted for representation on the loom.

Whereas you might have to hunt for the small tapestries, the five huge ones, each three hundred and twenty-five square feet in area, really clamor for attention from their places on the walls of the entrance hall. They are large in size, in concept, and brilliant, if rather primitive in color. The work of the houses of Bracquenie, Chaudoir, and De Wit, they are executed from the cartoons of the painter Floris Jespers. Each one, rather quaintly, bears the inscription, "Jespers pinxit, Bracquenie textit," or "Jespers pinxit, Chaudoir excudit," etc.

Three of these five hangings represent some of Belgium's relations with the United States, from the landing of the Belgian settlers, Walloons and Flemings, on Manhattan Island in 1623, to the part the United States played in aiding Belgium during the World War of 1914-1918. The

other two tapestries depict antique and modern Belgium.

The style of these tapestries is more or less one of impressionism. The many factors of incident and scene are somewhat superimposed on each other. However, due to skillful designing and ingenious color arrangement, these complex scenes are not cluttered or confused, but are very coherent. The figures are truly heroic, the portraiture is remarkably good; and in spite of such thorough delineation, there is not the feeling of *interminable detail* which wearies us so when we study some of the tapestries of the 17th and 18th centuries.

But the outstanding feature of these tapestries must be, for many of us, their glorious, almost medieval splendor. They sound, like a trumpet call, their plea for understanding and courage to use the brilliant palette our modern world urges upon us, and perhaps they awake in the weaver a small nostalgia for the great days of the past when the loom played so important a part in recording the life and legends of the people.

New Features in National Conference of American Hand Weavers

by OSMA COUCH GALLINGER

(Continued from Page 17)

Our daily schedule really boiled down to the following: eating breakfast, weaving; eating dinner, weaving; eating supper and talking about weaving. Students could at choice leave their morning's weaving and join a class in draft writing and pattern creation.

The one chief variation in the above schedule, which seemed a matter of preference with everyone at the conference, and brought many outside visitors at this particular hour, was the fireside chat after dinner on some phase of weaving. It was always a much anticipated time. On a bulletin board in front of the fireplace were pinned samples of the technique to be discussed, with published articles and leaflets on the same—from Mrs. Atwater's Recipe Book or issues of *The Weaver*. At the sound of the gong, from all corners of the huge hall conferees assembled and formed a three-tiered half-moon of chairs around our leader. But before we could have the pleasure of "just a-sittin' and a-listenin'", we had to do a thread stunt. Each day there was a sample braid to make or knot to tie, and there was no easing up on anybody. Under the guidance of several assistant teachers we were taught how to manipulate threads and coarse strands to make such useful products as: four-to-eight strand braids, weaving knots, square braids, Egyptian and Indian braids, attractive finishes for bag handles, pillow loops, etc., and while fingers twisted and turned, there were always stories about the origin of the knots or suggestions of new ways in which to use them.

When each one had a good sample for his or her notebook, Mrs. Atwater took her place "in our midst", and gave a talk on the phase of weaving selected, and this always ramified into a world of fascinating discovery for her listen-

ers. Questions were in order and many moot points were settled. After the conference all these lectures were printed and are now available in folio form at the Creative Crafts Publication Studio, Hartland, Michigan. There has also been made available for those who could not attend a folio of ten techniques taught at the conference with accompanying drafts. Each year the same policy will be followed, giving distant weavers valuable records for their files. The conference will have its third session from June 16 to 30, 1940.

One of the unusual privileges enjoyed at the Hartland conference is the proximity to the Edison Institute, Dearborn. This industrial museum is without parallel in the country, and displays implements of all industries of Colonial days. One entire section of the museum is devoted to a display of implements of spinning and weaving. Each year, members of the conference spend a day at this Institute and in the weaving workshops of the Village, under the guidance of Mr. Sydney Holloway who is in charge of the research work involved in putting hundreds of old wheels and looms into traditional shape. Practically every process incident to the hand method of thread preparation and weaving is most beautifully demonstrated.

The lecture subjects constituting the "Talks on Weaving Techniques" given by Mrs. Atwater at our conference in 1939 were the following: The Tabby Weave; The Twill Weave; Four-Harness Overshot; The Crackle Weave; The Three-Harness Weave; Color in Weaving; Linen and Linen Weaves; Summer and Winter Weave; Braids and Plaits; Inkle Loom Belts; Egyptian Card Weaving; Double Weaving and the Finnweave; Warping, Looms and Loom Adjustments.