



# Contemporary Hand Weavers of Texas

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6522 Mercer Street, Houston 5

Volume 9, Number 5

January 1, 1958

## CHANGE OF ADDRESS

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## NINTH TEXAS CRAFTS ANNUAL, in DALLAS

A woven space divider, "Fantasia" by Florence Hickman of Dallas, won the top all-media award in the recent Ninth Texas Crafts Annual, jointly sponsored by the Craft Guild of Dallas and the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts. The exhibition was held at the Dallas Museum November 27 through December 15.

The \$100 Grand Prize awarded to "Fantasia" was contributed by Neiman-Marcus. Other all-media honors went to a stone-ware bottle by Richard M. Lincoln of Fort Worth, winner of a \$50 purchase prize offered by the San Antonio Craft Guild, and a gold ring with stone by Shirley Lege Carpenter of Dallas, winner of a \$50 award.

Besides the all-media awards, awards were made in the following categories: weaving, decorated fabric, pottery, jewelry, metalsmithing, leather, bookbinding and "other media".

Jurors were Thomas S. Tibbs, Director of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, New York; Robert Winn of the Witte Museum, San Antonio; and Taylor Robinson of Dallas. Mr. Robinson, a member of the American Institute of Decorators, also handled the installation of the exhibit, which one art critic referred to as "a triumph of its own".

The top award in the weaving category went to Gene Drummond of Dallas for a casement cloth called "Synplastic".

The award for decorated fabric was won by Betty Bland Harlan of Dallas for "Birds", a silkscreen. Robert Yaryan of Wichita Falls received honorable mention in weaving for a rayon and cotton yardage.

While the size of the show (45 items in all) was small in comparison with some Texas Crafts Annuals of the past, the stringent standards of the jury resulted in a show of outstanding quality that elicited praise from both critics and the public.

Seventeen pieces of weaving and decorated fabric were accepted. Many of the weaving entries rejected were rejected because of poor selvages. It was the opinion of the jury that even though a fabric is woven for upholstering or some other use in which the selva will not show in the finished product, the craftsmanship of the selva is indicative of the weaver's control, or lack of control, of his medium. A few items were rejected on the grounds of triteness or unsuitability for a contemporary exhibition. A group of ties entered in weaving were ruled out because the judges felt that such finished products do not properly belong in a craft show. They would have preferred to see the fabric submitted, marked as yardage for use in ties.

Exhibitors in the weaving and decorated fabrics categories, in addition to those listed among award winners and honorable mentions were: Doris Coulter, Austin; Mrs. Dorothea M. Engleman, Fort Worth; Rudolph Fuchs, Denton; Estella Henkel, Dallas; Mrs. Claiborne Johnson, Dallas; Stella LaMond, Dallas; John A. Lehee, Dallas; Mrs. Kay Maxham, San Antonio; and Mrs. M. J. Mittenhall, Dallas.

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The Dallas Craft Guild would have liked to see more entries in weaving and hopes that more weavers from throughout the state will enter their work in the Tenth Annual next fall.

.....Charleen McClain

(Editor's Note: This is the first time that a piece of weaving has won the all-media award in this show. Congratulations, Florence!)

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Helen Bourgeois has, for the past two summers, gone on a two weeks tour of Mexico conducted by CHT member, Thurman Hewitt. In 1956 the emphasis was placed on weaving centers, in 1957 on interior decoration. This article covers the weaving which impressed her on both visits.

#### WOVEN IN MEXICO.....by Helen Bourgeois

Recently one of our well known news columnists said that every man needed to know that life did not start yesterday and that what happens today has a long past. This is so true of the arts and crafts we see in evidence today practically everywhere you turn in Mexico. The busy, skillful, little hands of the Mexicans are creating many of the same things that were a part of the great ancient culture of that land, the history of which dips back 10,000 years. Although the Red man in Mexico was conquered, his cities and his temples destroyed, he, beaten and crushed, made a vassal of Spain, his roots were strong; so strong that his culture has grown and flowered again. This cultural growth was made even stronger by helpful influences from across the seas.

We know that when Cortes arrived in Mexico in 1519 A.D. the native Indians were producing a handwoven white cloth made from wild native cotton. This cloth had many uses, one of which was the background for feather painting, which is in itself a form of weaving. The brilliant plumage of the birds in the tropical regions of Mexico surely inspired the feather artist just as many an artist is inspired to paint a pic-

ture of a sunset to preserve the beautiful colors forever. Feathers have ever been used for decoration, sometimes on clothing, but chiefly for head-dresses, but the use of the fine, brilliantly colored feathers by the Indians of the plateau of Mexico in making cloaks for their chieftains, was a fine art. A man's clothing in those days consisted of a loin cloth and a tilmatl, a sort of cape, which was a rectangular piece of the handwoven cotton cloth. This wrap was not too warm and those who could afford the cost, mostly the rulers, had cloaks of feathers. The method of collecting enough feathers to make one cloak is a long story in itself. The project of feather painting a cloak was so tedious that after the design was drawn with charcoal on the cotton cloth the piece was cut in squares of about one foot, and a square given to each artist who was to work on the project. Feathers from hundreds of birds were used in a single cloak. The lower barbs were stripped from each feather, leaving the tip like a tiny leaf with a stem. The colors were separated so the feather painter could select his colors in the same manner in which an artist uses his palette. Then with little copper tweezers, a feather was selected and placed just where it belonged in the design. The quill was woven in the cloth and held in place with a drop of liquid gum. The tip of the next feather overlapped the first, and so on until the square was finished, when all of the squares were fitted together and joined by gluing them to another whole piece of cloth. The skill required in making these squares of feathers, so the design would be adhered to when put together has been classified as one of the lost fine arts. It has deteriorated until today it is one of the least important of folk arts. The pictures of birds and flowers on small gift cards are all that remain. Some of these feather cloaks were sent by Montezuma along with splendid gold jewelry as gifts to Cortes when he arrived in what is now Vera Cruz. At first opportunity Cortes sent at least two of the cloaks to his Emperor in Spain and it is said one of the cloaks is now in the British Museum in London.



While the art of feather painting was abandoned with the advent of wool from Spain, weaving has never waned. The Spanish imported sheep into Mexico thus giving the native Indians material for clothing with much less work involved. I have been wondering what the feather painting artists would have done with the many varieties of natural and synthetic yarns at our disposal today. In practically every city and every rural village in Mexico you can today find looms and skilled weavers. The men weave on the ancient upright looms and the women and girls on the handmade belt looms. Belts galore are woven on these belt looms, also the cape-like wrap, called a quexquemiltl, which is worn by the women. In good sized towns you can usually find a weaving industry such as Casa Brenna in Oaxaca. This establishment is housed in a very fine old colonial home, built around a large patio. The salesrooms are across the front and around the sides and at the back are several large weaving rooms and a long gallery where about twenty women sit, winding bobbins for the weavers. This is a pretty sight; there are two rows, the spaces between each woman and the one next to her are all equal. Each is winding a different colored yarn and the bamboo wheels on their handmade bobbin winders reminded me of toy ferris wheels. The large dye vats and drying racks for the yarn are in the open patio and add striking color to the gardens of the patio. About one third of the space around the patio is occupied by the pottery makers. This firm makes all kinds of household linens (cotton), aprons, skirts, etc., and rebozos of fine Australian wool with lacy macrame fringes. One of the salesmen told me it took a skilled worker eight hours to knot each end of these rebozos. The largest size sells for \$11.20 U.S. currency.

Around the main plaza in Oaxaca you can always count on finding a rug weaver from Teotitlan del Valle, one of the Zapotec villages about fifteen miles from town, with a selection of his handwoven rugs. The yarn is all handspun by the women of his village. Many of these rugs carry the geometric designs used

in the walls of ancient Mitla ruins. In the markets everywhere you can find quantities of handwoven items, even tea towels for 24 cents each. These towels carry the same four harness patterns used by our ancestors. There are many shops in towns the size of Oaxaca where you can select your handwoven materials and have skirts and blouses made up in a day. From the vast supply of handwoven articles in the shops and markets one would know there were looms and weavers in every nook and corner in Mexico.

Now we'll go to Mexico City to touch on the subject of weaving being done to meet demands of the decorator today. We were invited to the home of Frank Sauter, whose business is the manufacture of fine furniture from mahogany and wood of the rosa morado tree, which is a beautiful light wood, something like white maple but a richer texture. Mr. Sauter had assembled the artists and craftsmen who had furnished materials for the Continental Hilton Hotel in Mexico City. They had graciously brought a good many articles representing their work. A French woman, Madame de Preux, a refugee from Hungary, who has a studio in the city, had brought several large rolls of handwoven materials for drapery and upholstery. All of the warps were black cotton, 20/2, threaded twill and 24 to the inch. Nearly all of the weft yarns were wool. The upholstery fabrics were woven four shots of plain twill in one color, one tabby of the warp yarn, then four shots of plain twill in another color, introducing as many colors as desired. One fabric used wool in colors of gold, orange, mustard, pale yellow, coral, deep yellow, ending with a black tabby and a tabby shot of light tan in a heavier wool, a little heavier than knitting worsted. Another color combination was a shiny rayon about the size of Perle 3, apricot color, then rose pink wool and then one shot of large grey wool. Another combination was turquoise and purple shades. Madame de Preux uses native Mexican weavers in her studio.

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Here we also met Marie Baron. She showed us a collection of the tapestries she and her husband, Jean, had designed. They are artists; Marie's designs being mostly abstract, while Jean's are figurative and stylized, both featuring delightful color combinations. These are woolen tapestries and it probably would be impossible to produce them adequately in a country where no such ready made serape-weaving tradition exists. They have interested serape weavers in different states in executing their designs. These tapestries are in no sense, technically, a development of the French Gobelin. In the Mexican serape-weaving technique both sides of the weaving are identical, except, of course, should lettering be involved. The Barons first make a small sketch in color, which sketch is transferred to a cardboard or strong paper, the full size of the tapestry. This "prototype" is then delivered to one of their weavers, perhaps in some village few people have heard of. The final work is produced with very few headaches for the inspired creators. This demonstrates eloquently the adaptability of Mexico's hereditary rural weavers and the efficiency and versatility of the primitive loom they use. The Barons' art is already finding its way to the United States, the Bahamas and other places.

In the Jim Tillett silk screen studio we learned all of the materials he uses for silk screening are handwoven in his own studio. That is where I saw the largest warping mill I had ever seen. It was about ten feet wide and five feet in diameter. Mr. Tillett told me this plant was originally used for weaving until he took it over for printing his designs.

I would like to tell you about a bedroom in the home of Arturo Pani, one of the best known designers and decorators in Mexico. The room was on a corner of the house, and overlooked the garden. The two outside walls of the room were draped, as was a third wall, from ceiling to floor and corner to corner with a Fortuni print, white background with gold figure. There was a Hollywood bed

with ruffle of the same Fortuni print, with a bedspread of the old Marseilles type. In each corner of the room to break the monotony of drapery was a mahogany post, floor to ceiling, simulating the posts of a poster bed. The Fortuni print could be replaced with a handwoven fabric and would make a wonderful project for a weaver who thinks nothing of weaving 75 yards of material. Mr. Pani likes handweaves and in his home most of the furniture was upholstered with plain ivory colored fabric, the rayon boucle giving texture to the weave. This was rich looking with the browns of the mahogany furniture. In his downtown studio there was a large window with heavy drapes. The same drapery material was used as wall covering, running across six feet of wall to the corner of the room on one side of the window. Mr. Pani said it was cheaper than wall paper. This fabric was woven of 20/2 dark brown cotton warp and heavy natural colored cotton novelty in a diamond pattern.

In one of the very modern homes in the Pedregal there was a family room, and on the floor, about ten feet from the television set, was an enormous boxed pillow, about four feet square and as thick as a mattress, upholstered in a beautiful woolen Scotch plaid. This was the comfortable spot from which the small children in the family watched television.

We visited the rug factory at Amecameca, which is owned by Paul Brown from the United States. They make rugs used in embassies in many countries. A round rug, twenty feet in diameter, of French blue, was just being completed for the United States Embassy in Paris. These are hooked rugs, the pile being made of a combination of nylon, acetate and viscose on a background of soft white cotton mesh. They handweave this cotton backing on two ancient looms.

There must be many more examples of fine industries in Mexico where artists and designers from the United States and other countries are finding the means for executing their designs in



quantity by using the skilled hands of the Mexican weaver, the artisan who has kept on weaving, century after century, through every known hardship. It seems to be as much a part of him as his hands. If he has no loom he weaves with straw, or anything, but his little hands weave, weave, weave.

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### SAMPLE

Dorothea Engleman sent the very attractive sample this month.

Threading: Twill

Warp: 2/30 worsted set at 30 to 1"

Weft: 2 strands tweed silk, 1 strand 2/40 tan silk, wound on same bobbin. (Or 3 strands tweed silk)

Treading: 1-3, 1-2, 3-4, and repeat.

Material siliconed and mothproofed by The Countryside Handweavers. (See ad--last page)



### CHAPTER NEWS

The San Antonio Contemporary group, all of whom are also members of the San Antonio Handweavers' Guild, joined additional members of the Guild in a joint Christmas party at the home of Mrs. R. F. Schoolfield. Mrs. Schoolfield's co-hostesses were Mrs. G. M. Baker and Mrs. W. C. Griffith. Members exchanged gifts, many handwoven and others useful to weavers.

The Fort Worth Weavers Guild has had an especially interesting program this year. The emphasis has been on room decoration. Each member drew a slip with a month and a weave, and was made

responsible for a program on the weave drawn, making for very interesting meetings.

At the November meeting a box of yarns for the TB Hospital was assembled from donated yarns, and \$10 in addition was donated for warp yarns.

The Houston Chapter of CHT held its Annual Christmas party on December 17.

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### BOOK REVIEW

NEW KEY TO WEAVING.....Mary E. Black.  
Cloth, 592 pp., \$12.00.

The Bruce Publishing Company, 400 North Broadway, Milwaukee 1, Wisconsin.

I have just finished looking through a really fabulous new weaving book - "The New Key to Weaving", by Mary E. Black. Those of you who own her "Key to Weaving" may think this is just another revised edition --- you're wrong! This is all of that and so very much more. This answers all the "hows" and then completes the picture with the answers to the "whys".

Beginning with the loom itself, it progresses through materials, warp and weft figuring, warp making (with several methods described), warping, with a choice of six different methods, fully detailed; then it takes up the weaves in logical progression from the plain through more complicated weave structures. There is a section on fibers, with the burning tests in table form, a thread and setting chart for every imaginable hand woven article, (such a help for an isolated beginner). It includes detailed finishing methods, a glossary of foreign weaving terms and a complete index.

As a special surprise, unusual in a general weaving book, two large sections are devoted to the Scandinavian tapestry and rug weaves, the Swedish knot tapestry method and full instructions for Gobelin tapestry weaving.

The illustrations are wonderful, and profuse.



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