

WHITEWORK EMBROIDERY

THE MERGING OF
NEEDLE, THREAD, CLOTH AND SPIRIT



Appensell Embroidery

AN EXHIBIT

OCTOBER 2, 2006 TO
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EXHIBIT CATALOG

LACIS MUSEUM of LACE and TEXTILES
2982 ADELIN STREET, BERKELEY, CA 94703

THE LACIS MUSEUM OF LACE AND TEXTILES

LMLT was established in October of 2004, as the legacy of Kaethe Kliot who was the spirit of the Lacis Textile Center and Retail Store, a haven for the textile community and all involved in virtually every aspect of the textile arts...a place where she provided support, encouragement and knowledge to all. This spirit remains, after her untimely passing in 2002, in the Museum which encompasses all that she loved.

This spirit is best exemplified by comments received from those she touched:

...whenever I needed to recharge my spirit, I knew that a visit to Lacis would do the trick...

...her sense of the appropriate, that just-rightness which made Laces the alluring treasure trove that draws us in...

...her enthusiasm was contagious and she always wanted to share it. She was the consummate teacher...

...she had a mission to share everything she knew...

...she did what she loved and her passion and enthusiasm was always evident...

...Kaethe was the sort of person one takes with them – part of who I am is because of her...

...She will be remembered for many things; for me it will be a sense that all is possible...

The core of LMLT is the lace and textile collection of Jules & Kaethe Kliot, representing 40 years of dedication to the preservation of the finest of human handiwork. The collection includes thousands of specimens from pre-Columbian Peru, the finest laces from the 17th c. European courts and examples of the machine laces exemplifying the 19th c. industrial revolution. An extensive library, focusing on lace, textiles and costume with over 10,000 items of books, patterns, articles and other ephemera, and a respectable collection of the related tools of the textile crafts is included in the resources of the Museum.

LMLT is dedicated

- to preserving the spirit of Lacis as created by Kaethe Kliot as a place of support, knowledge and encouragement for all involved in any aspect of the textile arts.
- to preserve lace and textiles of all cultures from all periods including the patterns and tools of creation, the objects of their purpose and the literature associated with these objects.
- to provide a resource center for research and documentation of these objects.

This current exhibit explores the broad realm of whitework embroidery. Transending virtually all cultures, all ages of needlework, all levels of society and all levels of skill, the common element is the human interaction with a woven fabric and the need to inject the soul into it.

Jules Kliot, Director

Starting with a simple fabric base,
a thread applied with a needle
by the embroiderer's hand
becomes a miracle of the human spirit
as the simple stitch demonstrates
the ultimate skill and devotion of the worker.

Spanning all cultures, this transformation of a fabric through the absorption of unfathomable hours of time, defines a passion and defies all comprehension of these skills in today's complex world.



Hungarian Whitework

The most basic definition of Whitework embroidery is embroidery of a single color, typically matching that of the base canvas, where design and skill is defined, primarily, by texture. The effect is low-key, representing a purity and demanding close scrutiny to experience its beauty. It is this demand for detail that requires the highest skills of the needle worker.

While primitive white embroidery has been found in Coptic tombs and evidence persists of experiments with whitework skills in most cultures, the use of metallic and color threads of cotton and wool, prevailed as the material for fabric decoration as evidenced by the extraordinary 11th century Bayeux tapestry and the Opus



Pullwork Embroidery

Anglicanum embroideries of the 13th and 14th centuries.

In the 15th century a new concept for fabric decoration with a needle took root and predominated in Western culture. The



Pullwork Embroidery



Lefkara Embroidery

fabrics of linen were coarse and inviting to the skills for modifying the structure of the fabric itself. Threads could be withdrawn and threads could be pulled together to create both controlled designs and a striking piercing of the fabric.



Drawnwork Embroidery



Richelieu Embroidery

Surface embroidery gained a new partner with these techniques, design could now rely on contrast



of solid and open areas rather than color and material textures. This monochromatic or whitework embroidery would soon develop into lace where the base fabric was completely eliminated. By the 16th century, this gossamer fabric of needle and thread alone, took Europe by storm with State fortunes spent on lace. Crossing national boundaries lace was traded, stolen, and smuggled,



Richelieu Embroidery

as laws were soon passed restricting its use. Those denied

its ownership were not, however, to be deterred, as embroiderers developed techniques to circumvent the restrictive laws. By the nineteenth century white work



would demonstrate the ultimate skill of the embroiderer. For the first time the sheerest and most delicate of fabrics were produced, a most fitting



Appensell Embroidery

canvas for the skills that were previously demonstrated



by the lace makers. Taking a parallel course, the finest laces would be challenged by the finest embroideries and often the two merging into a magnificent unity. As we dreamed of turning straw into gold,

the needle workers were able to virtually change cloth into lace.

Pulled and drawn thread work reached a new perfection, focused initially in Saxony with the development of *Dres-*





den embroidery. The exquisite *Sewed Lace* (later called *Ayrshire*), *French* and *Swiss Appensell* as well as the *Pina* embroidery of the Philippines followed the Dresden beginnings as extraordinary whitework dominated

the needle arts. The fine work of the professionals, in turn,

inspired the needle workers of all social levels, who adapted the techniques and stitches to the readily available coarser fabrics. Each region adapted its own folk motifs to create regional styles: in Scandinavia Danish *Hedebo* and Norwegian *Hardanger* flourished, while in Germany the drawn threadwork was popularized as *Schwalm whitework*. In Cyprus, a form of hardan-



ger took on the name *Lefkara* and in England *Mountmellick* embroidery became a household avocation.

In the later part of the Nineteenth century, drawn work in particular, took on a new popularity, where it was exposed and explored in the many *Women's* magazines, where it was described as "the most mechanical of all the arts in lace making....

Anyone who can hemstitch can make drawn work." Names such as *Virginia*, *Mexican*, *Spanish*, *Bulgarian*, *Danish*, and *Modern* were applied to various subtleties of this lace.

Because Idle hands were considered the devil's workshop, and no respectable lady would work outside her home, the hands of elegant ladies turned out yard after yard of needleworked flounces, edgings, collars and cuffs. Ladies'





magazines were filled with patterns and lessons, ensuring that beds were draped



with elaborate linens, tables were laid with cloths, runners, and napkins, and even the furniture was properly clothed with scarves, doilies, and antimacassars, all of which would need to bear the family monogram in an embroidered style reflecting the family wealth. Most often, such pieces



were worked in white, which epitomized the demure purity of their makers. Troves of these treasures would define the newly wealthy as they were incorporat-

ed into their homes and garments and accumulated in their trousseaus. Here, the canvas was the function, whitework the soul.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the popularity of needlework was at its height, and whitework lent a touch of

beauty to the grim realities of war and economic depression. After the second World War, however, the decline was apparent as increasing numbers of women joined the work force, leaving little time for fine needle work with most of the diminishing demand satisfied by machine embroidery and handwork from third



world countries.

While whitework may have become an endangered species, it is far from extinct. For some needleworkers, it is a way to honor their cultural heritage. For others, it is a way of preserving history that



records the lives of anonymous women. Still others are inspired by the memory of grandmother's hands to take up needle and thread and make their own contribution to assure an ongoing tradition.

It is our hope that the work you see in this exhibit will inspire you to pause and think of the hands, hearts and dedication behind each piece, and perhaps pick up a needle, thread and piece of muslin.



The many techniques of white work are often combined, some as a reflection of the base material and others independent of the base material.

WORKING WITH FABRICS WHERE THE THREADS CAN BE COUNTED:

PULL WORK, where the threads of the fabric are pulled together to



CUT WORK, where geometric holes are cut out in geometric patterns. Hardanger and Lefkara embroidery being examples.

WORKING WITH FABRICS WHERE THE WEAVE IS NOT A FACTOR:



FREE SURFACE EMBROIDERY, where the embroidered threads lay on the surface of fabric. Appensell (Swiss) embroidery being the finest and Mountmellick characterized by the heavy base material.



APPLIQUE, where additional layers of fabric are sewn to the base fabric forming shadow effects. This is commonly found in Madera work and in some of the Pina embroidery of the Philippines.

EYELET EMBROIDERY, where holes in the fabric are formed by piercing, the name Broderie Anglaise commonly applied,

RICHELIEU EMBROIDERY, where free-form openings are cut into the





fabric, design defined by contrast of negative and positive areas.

MUSLIN

The finest cottons originally came from India in the early

18th century, when “a Hindu spinner could spin a pound of cotton into yarn 250 miles long. . . This yarn was woven on the most primitive



looms into fabric so fine as to deserve the name “Flowing Water”.

The story is told that when a Nawab reproved his daughter for allowing her skin to be seen through her clothes, she demonstrated that she was wearing no less than eleven thickness-

es of such material.” It was not till the latter part of the 18th century that the first cotton mills of Scotland could produce such fabric.

The Flowerers, M. H. Swain



PINA CLOTH

One of the finest handwoven textiles in the world made in the Philippine Islands, it is woven from fiber of the

wild pineapple plant. A tedious process of gathering, scraping, cleansing, as-sorting and weaving. The cloth is wo-



Aryshire Embroidery
ven from single unspun
fibers, approximately 30"

long, knotted together to create the long lengths necessary for weaving. The knots virtually invisible can be seen as the small microscopic dots on the cloth. An experienced weaver could weave about two inches of the narrow cloth a day, much of it done under a mosquito net, to save breaking the fine fibers





by the breeze.

The finest of this work dates back



to mid 19th c., the skills represented in these

pieces only memories. This exhibit will allow the visitor to explore the vast



Pina Embroidery

range of whitework skills. Some reaching



beyond comprehension and others as familiar as that found on Mother's pillowcases.

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