NEEDLE LACE

BORNE OF THREAD AND AIR

STRETCHING THE LIMITS OF NEEDLE AND SOUL

OCTOBER 1, 2007 TO
FEBRUARY 2, 2008

MON-SAT 12:00-6:00 PM
FREE ADMISSION

EXHIBIT CATALOG

LACIS MUSEUM of LACE and TEXTILES
2982 ADELINE 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, to 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 are 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 examines the most exacting of all needlework, which once became the obsession of royalty, depleted State treasuries and supported the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of lacemakers throughout Europe. The intent is to comprehend the legacy left by these laces, the creations of extraordinary skills that can never resurface.

Jules Kliot, Director
Each of us has known moments of striking disclosure, when the walls that limit our perceptions are pushed back to reveal the undreamed of.

A sudden change of scale often brings about this enlargement of vision, like the first glimpse of a galaxy through the telescope or a drop of water brought into microscopic focus. The infinitesimal order of nature commands the same awe as its cosmic grandeur.

When, however, the perceived miracle is a human achievement, the awe is tempered with pride. We learn something new about ourselves and our capabilities when, for example, we experience for the first time the revelation of lace.

Anna Bennett  
Curator of Textiles, emeritus  
The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
The most precious of all laces, needle lace, at its summit, reached a perfection of skill beyond comprehension of all that is human. Beyond technical skill, the needle, combined with spirit and soul, demonstrated the ultimate of our capabilities.

It is the close examination as well as touch of this fabric that draws one into a world of myth, fantasy and wonder. It is a glimpse of workmanship that reached stitch densities of 10,000 stitches per inch, which surely will never again be equaled. To see first a design of open and solid areas and then to comprehend that this has been transcribed into a fabric formed from threads as fine as those of a spider’s web, where even the finest line is constructed of the minutest of twistings, plaitings and loopings, and then to feel the weightless
character of this fabric, is to be caught in the addictive spell of lace. And all this was the product of a simpler world where lighting was a candle and a magnifier was a globe of water...a world where near fanatical levels of patience and dedication to reach unprecedented heights of human skill existed. This was the Renaissance in all its glory and lace certainly embodied this spirit.

Unlike much of needlework, true needle lace is easily identified. Its unfathomable price and the dedication of time required for its creation restricted it to the expense accounts of Church and State. These were laces that decimated state treasuries and were
the cause of strict sumptuary laws forbidding their ownership. The stitches, designs and analysis of threads allow us to locate the various styles in time and place. Innovation was not in the hand of the lacemaker, as specific techniques and stitches were clearly defined and protected by the State.

We look at the lace maker as the final participant in the execution of a piece which would be commissioned initially by the Court, placed in the hands of the finest artists of the time to be translated to a pattern on parchment, and lastly turned over to the needleworker who ever so carefully and proudly stitched her soul into the physical creation.

The purpose of this exhibit is to take the viewer into this world...to not only see the glory in design but to feel the hand of the lacemaker who transformed fibers as fine as those of a spider’s web into the glory fit for the all powerful. Photos of these
pieces as seen through the microscope help the viewer understand this wonder, where threads are little more than fiber filaments, drawn by needles that can only be imagined.

Nurtured by the Renaissance, lace, an openwork formed by threads alone without any ground fabric, evolved in two distinct forms: Bobbin Lace, where multiple weighted threads were manipulated, and Needle Lace,
where a single thread is manipulated by a needle. These two distinct techniques are referred to as “true lace,” and they reigned from the early 16th century to the early 19th century, when the “popular” or imitation laces were conceived to serve the new bourgeoisie in an industrial age.

Needle lace is the child of embroidery, from its initial beginnings as decorative infillings in a fabric base, reaching its peak of perfection between 1625 and 1775, supported by the courts of Europe. The needle held its own with the 19th c. popular laces but remains today as little more than a shell in such contemporary needle laces known as Battenberg or tape lace.

In examining any piece of lace, the toile, or solid areas of the design, and the entoilage, or connecting areas are first observed. All true needle lace is constructed of a single thread, the punto a festone commonly referred to as the buttonhole stitch, whether worked tight
or loose or twisted before looping, or stitches piled on top of stitches like grains of wet sand to produce the dense sculptural quality of the Venetian point laces.

By control and design, the dense toile as well as the open entoilage are created. The entoilage can be short bars, or brides, joining the toile portions, or it can be a delicate net called a reseau.
worked in sections, first the toile motifs and then the entoilage joining them, often worked by different lace makers. A third technique would later be developed, referred to as applique, where the toile sections were sewn to a premade net. This gained much popularity in the 19th c. when machine made nets became available.

As values, social order, economics and taste evolved, as evidenced in the decline of needle lace, new forms and innovation dominated
the lace world. Simpler methods, imitations, machine manipulation of threads, the reworking of the earlier pieces, which were too precious to be discarded, and innovation by the lace maker was the mode.

Defining and naming becomes much more difficult, and we now have the pleasure of fantasizing about time and place. Much is now conjecture as we find so much omitted from the rules of lace making.
So we share our discoveries, the little we know and so much of what we don’t know. The most important aspect that we want to share, and want you to take with you, is the intrinsic value of these pieces that becomes so obvious as you witness the soul of the lacemaker through viewing these works....and no explanation is needed.