

The St. Louis Guild of Weavers and Their Work

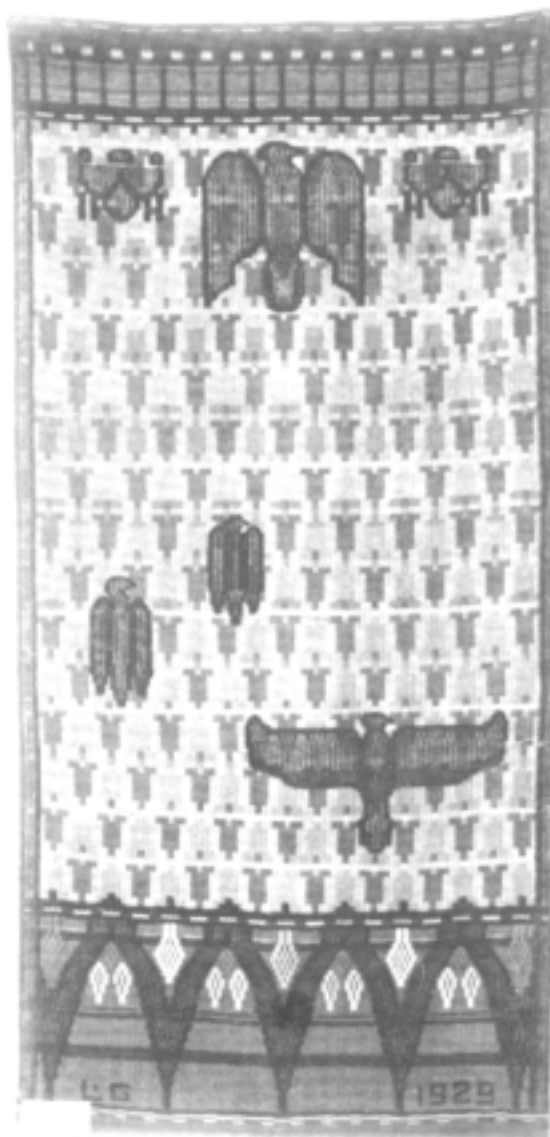
BY PAUL BERNAT

WE have been witnessing in this country a remarkable revival of hand-weaving. During the nineteenth century hand-weaving was superseded by the machine, and it almost became a lost art. Weaving, unlike the embroidery crafts, had not been a true home art, but was rather on the order of an industry that had proved economically efficient in the household; consequently with the advent of cheap machine production it disappeared. Some countries, however, sustained its vigor, and amongst these were Norway and Sweden. In these Scandinavian countries the gentlewomen for many centuries occupied themselves with the weaving of tapestries, rugs, and harness textiles on their looms, maintaining their interest and activity in the art up to the present day. The first moves in its reintroduction into the United States were taken by the brilliant Scandinavian craftsmen who came over here. The interest evinced was great, and now the Americans have taken in hand the development of weaving as an art, probably carrying it further than ever before in our history. Tapestry is rapidly becoming a commonplace with us, yet in Colonial days it was almost unknown.

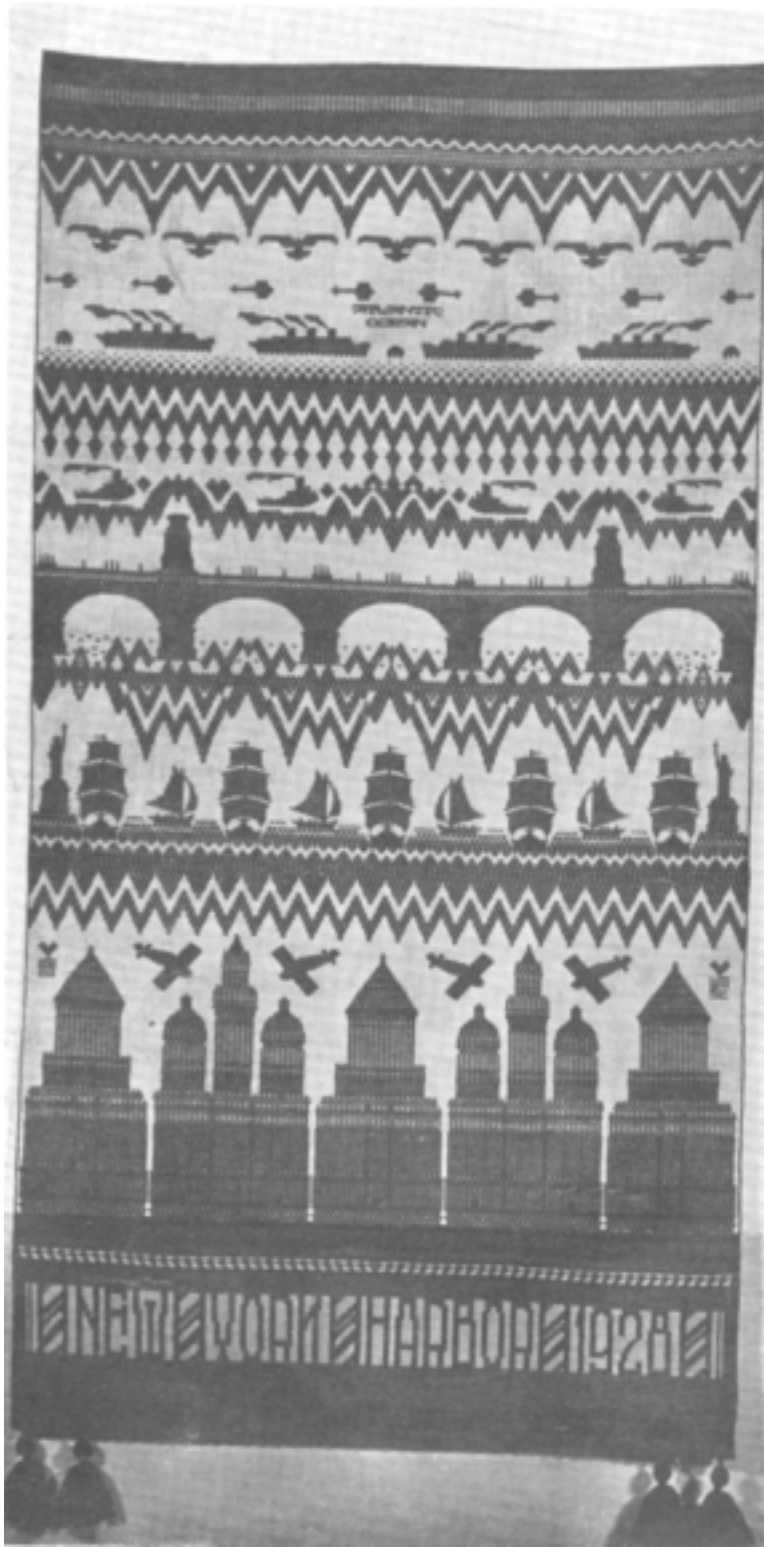
The revival has been in evidence for about

forty years. That the progress has been great is manifest in the exhibit of the St. Louis Guild, which embraces virtually all the widely practiced modes of weaving. Though this exhibit is confined to the products of a few weavers in one city, it shows much more character and artistic achievement than the exhibit of English weavings recently shown — these being the product of weavers from all over England.

The St. Louis Guild of Weavers is an outgrowth of the class in weaving at the St. Louis School of Fine Arts, which was established through the efforts of Mr. Wuerpel, the director of the school. This class is conducted by Miss Lillian Glaser, a versatile weaver, and she is also active in the Guild. It has been her endeavor to tie up weaving with the arts, and she has based her instruction on the individual plane that appertains to sculpture and painting. The students are encouraged in a



Wall hanging woven by L. Glaser. Warp, 3/2 mercerized cotton, "Roman Stripes." West, Sherland, tan, orange, yellow, lavender, green (two shades of each color). Pattern, black zephyr. Design inspired by the Painted Desert, Arizona. Texture inspired by mercerized cotton fabric woven by Arnold Talbor, Germantown, Pennsylvania



Wall hanging, "New York Harbor," woven by L. Glaser. Warp, 20/2 natural mercerized cotton. Weft, unbleached linen. Rosengang threading. Pattern, black and brown Fabri. Inspired by the harbor itself.

Left: Tapestry No. 1, "King Enthroned." Warp, 9 cord sinew thread (linen), 10 ends to the inch. Weft, 4-fold zephyr. Right: Tapestry No. 2, "Maya Warrior." Warp, 6/4 cotton, 10 ends to the inch. Weft, 4-fold zephyr. Designs derived from a close study of Maya sculpture. Designs and color schemes developed in the classroom. Weaving done at home, dyeing done at school, by Caroline Horton Cowan

general study of textiles and the available books treating of them; they have instruction in the fundamentals of color, texture, and design; and they learn the rudiments of the loom and its manipulation. The endeavor is always made to let the student give rein to their predilections and to exploit their preferences in weaving technique so long as their work conforms to good artistic principles. Advanced students are given instruction in dyeing and are thus enabled to create colors for special schemes.

The looms used range from the simple two-harness tapestry frame to the eight-harness loom, the bulk of the work, however, being confined to the four-harness looms. As many of the students retain their enthusiasm for weaving, they have purchased looms for home use; maintaining their connection with the school through the Guild attendance at class sessions for the preparation of weaving projects.

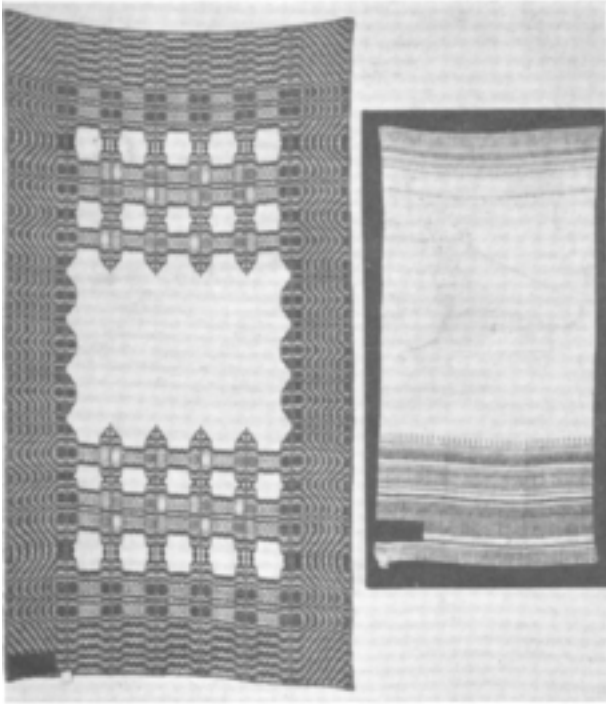
Weaving, in the simpler techniques, is not a mysterious art and, with adequate training in technique coupled with artistic sensibilities, the weaver is enabled to produce beautiful things. Weaving in this country has felt the need of well-trained instructors who can convey the technicalities of the art as well as set the pupil on the right artistic path. Now that weaving has graced itself in the robes of an artistic craft, in place of the craft industry of a hundred years ago, it is essential that weavers familiarize themselves with the more graceful techniques like tapestry, and be strong enough in their convictions to handle color daringly besides making fabrics that are unusual and have a distinct place in the home and in apparel.

That the St. Louis Guild is fortunate in having an instructor possessed of these capabilities, and of what great advantage this has been to them, is evident in their work. The weavings shown are in a

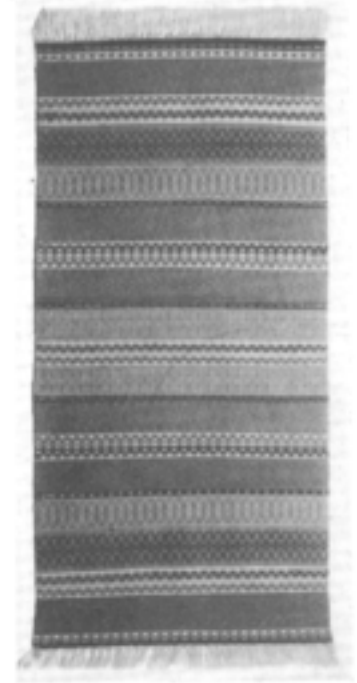


wide variety of techniques and inspired by countless sources of design. All the weavings were faultlessly done and truly artistic. Many of the more notable examples were woven by Miss Glaser, and she has utilized tapestry, laid-in, and harness weaving for expression.

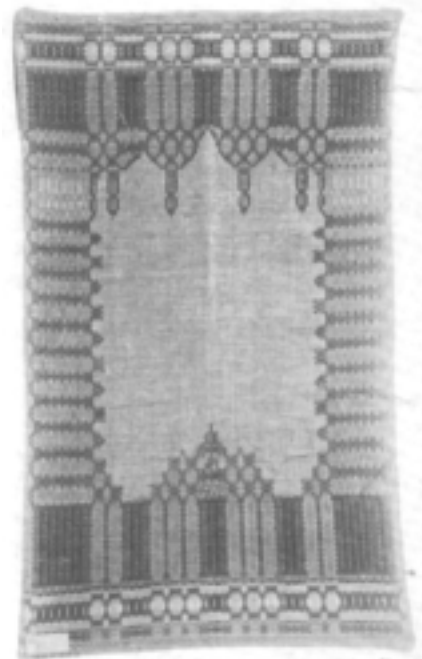
In view of the success of this Guild it is to be hoped that other cities can find art directors with the energy of Mr. Wuerpel and instructors of the brilliance of Miss Glaser to enable them to develop weaving groups of as much promise as the St. Louis Guild. The art of weaving is so ramified and so replete with possibilities that it is shameful to let it degenerate into the repetition of blue and white coverlets or plain linen damask weaves. Stagnancy has brought this about in some centers, but it is to be hoped that all weavers will become alive to the



Left: Table runner, "Windflower," woven in class by Bessie Recht. Warp and weft, linen, 30 ends to inch. Pattern, strand cotton, blue and three shades of yellow. Right: Towel, "Rosengang," woven by Elsie Siroky. Warp and weft, linen warp, 30 ends to inch. Pattern, green linen



Rug woven by Carolyn Horton Cowan. Warp, 9 cord sinew thread (linen), half-sley in No. 15 reed. Weft, Craftwool, shades of tan, brown, red, blue and black. Threading, Rosengang. Design and color from Oriental sources — texture, Scandinavian. Woven in the classroom



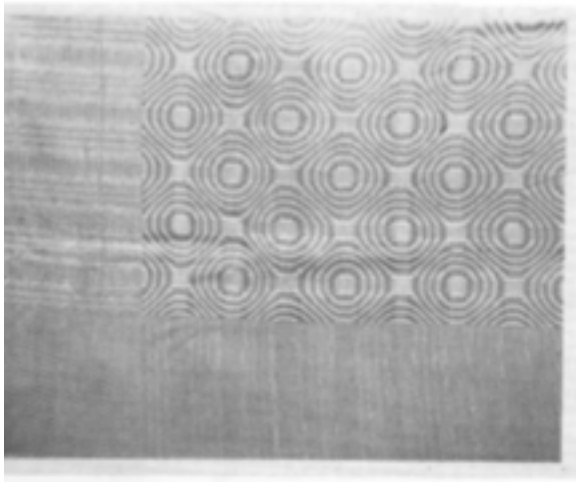
Wall hanging woven in classroom by Jessie F. Harris. Adaptation of "The Trellis." Warp, golden grey mercerized cotton 10/2, 23 ends to inch. Weft, red Fabri (dyed in class)



Left: Table runner, "Rings and Chains," woven at home by Corda Saunders. Warp, 20/2 mercerized cotton, deep gold, 30 ends to inch. Weft, 20/2 mercerized cotton, deep gold. Pattern, Shetland, yellow and orange. Right: Table square, honeycomb and dimity, woven at home. Warp, No. 20 Perle



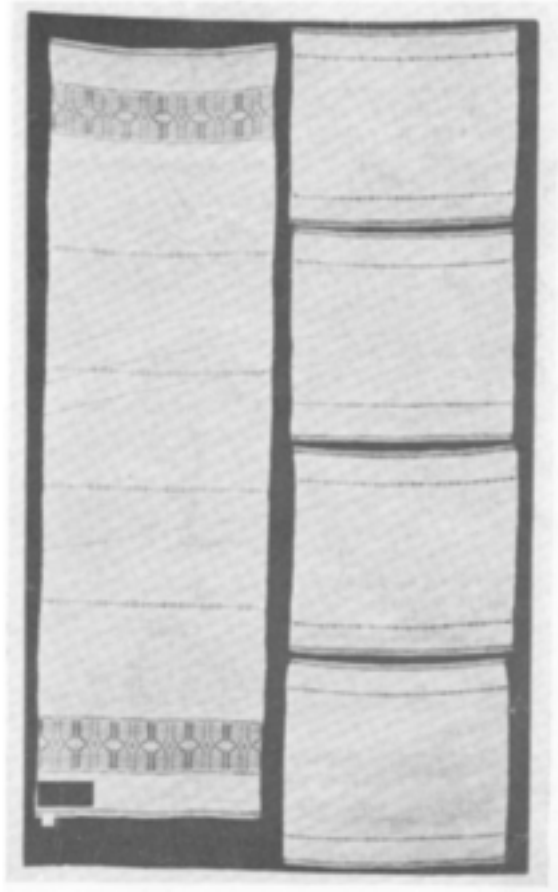
Table runner woven in classroom by Elsie Siroky. Embroidery weave, from Italian and Serbian sources. Warp, weft and pattern, mercerized cotton, white



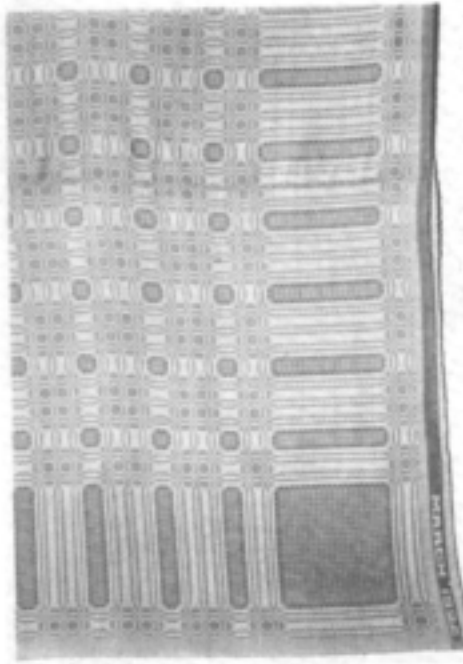
Coverlet woven in classroom by Iusy Bankston Godbold. Warp, rose Perle No. 20 (2202), 30 ends to inch. Weft, rose Perle No. 20 (2202). Pattern, cream Shetland (702)



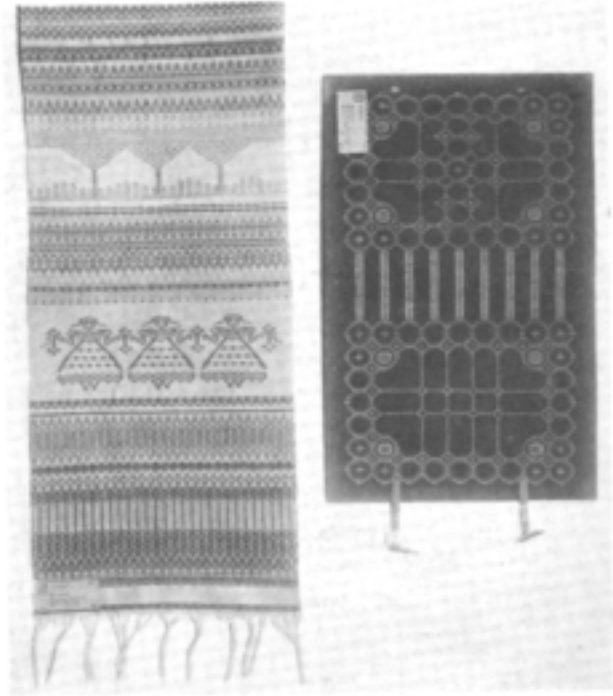
Left: Cushion, "Blazing Star," woven by Ella M. Jurgens. Warp, 20/2 blue mercerized cotton (2206). Pattern, blue Fabri. Opposite, grey. Color and texture planned in classroom; woven at home. Right: Cushion woven by Minnie Clay Waerpel. Warp, 20/2 mercerized cotton (2206). Pattern, two shades of brown strand silk



Luncheon set, "Chariot Wheel," woven by Ella M. Jurgens. Warp, linen. Weft, bleached tow. Pattern, orange mercerized cotton. Woven at home



Coverlet woven in classroom by Katheryn L. Rouse. Warp, blue Perle No. 20 (2206), 30 ends to inch. West, blue Perle No. 20 (2206). Pattern, tan (dyed in class)



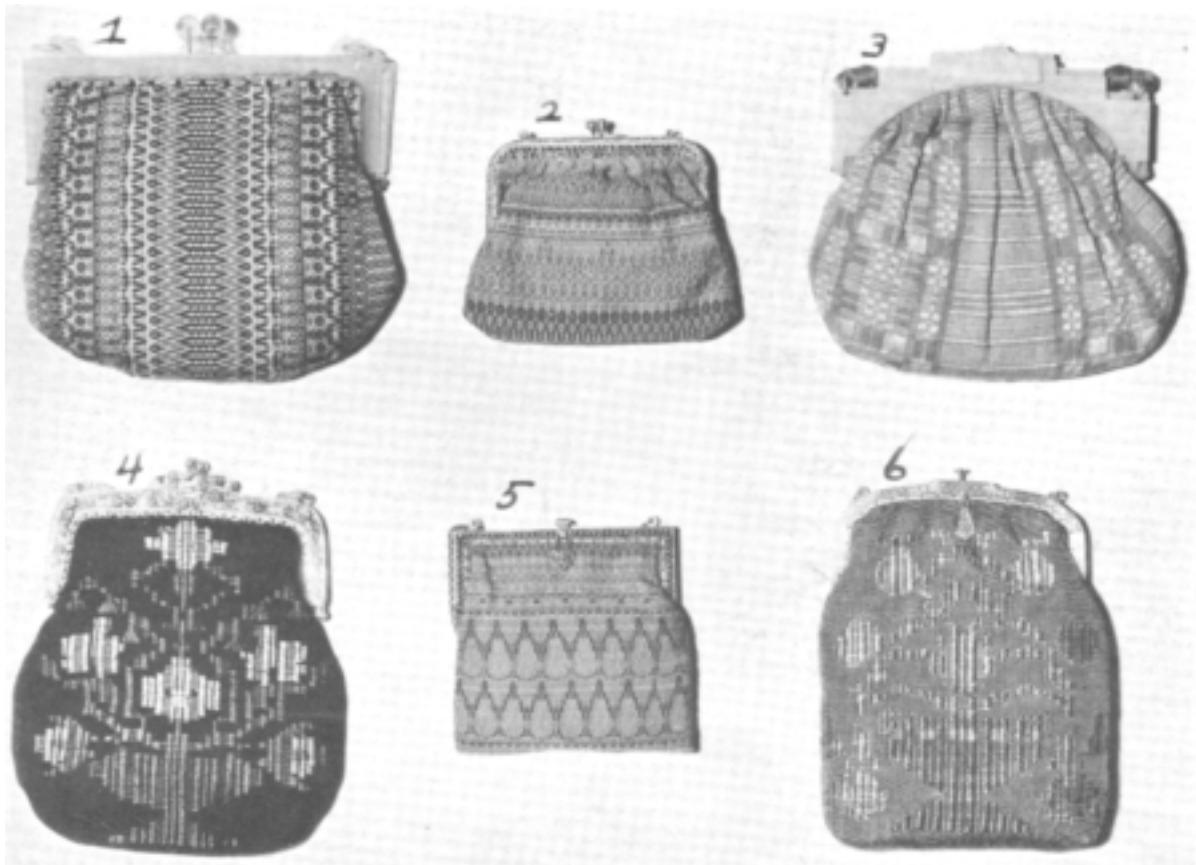
Right: Portfolio woven in classroom by Eleanor Ploeger. Warp and west, dark green Fabri. Pattern, "Pick-up" on Dewdrop. Fabri, taupe, tan, henna and orange. Left: Sampler woven in classroom by Elsie Siroky. "Pick-up" on Russian Diaper. Warp and west, 20/2 mercerized cotton; gold. Pattern, weaving special, shades of red, blue, green and yellow



Left: Table runner, "Monk's Belt," woven in classroom by Minnie Clay Waerpel. Warp, natural cotton warp. West, strand cotton, navy, orange and yellow. Woven "on opposites." Right: Wall hanging woven in classroom by Elsie Siroky. Design from Italian and Scandinavian sources. West and warp, linen 30/2 grey, 28 ends to inch. Pattern, weaving special, shades of blue, green, red, brown, and yellow. Texture, embroidery weave, "Art School pick-up"



Left: Table runner, "Dewdrop," variation, woven at school by Grace Lischer Brumbaugh. Warp, No. 20 Perle (2206), 30 ends to inch. Pattern, taupe Fabri, woven "on opposites." Opposite, orange and gold laurel (dyed in class). Right: Wall hanging woven at school by Minnie Clay Waerpel. Warp, No. 20 Perle (2206), 30 ends to inch. West, tan Fabri. Pattern, class problem in Dukagang. Double Fabri in shades of brown and green (dyed in class)



No. 1 and No. 5 by Carolyn Horton Cowan. Spun silk warp and weft — Rosengang. Planned at school, woven at home. No. 2 by Ella M. Jurgens. Spun silk warp and weft — Rosengang. Planned at school, woven at home. No. 3 by Iusy Bankston Godbold — Daisy Chain; woven at school. Warp, No. 20 Perle, golden tan. Pattern, Fabri, deep tan; opposite, pale tan. No. 4 and No. 6 by Jessie F. Harris. Spun silk warp and weft. Pattern, embroidery weave. Woven at home

possibilities in their craft and branch out into these fascinating new fields offered in creations of original design: upholstery, colored luncheon sets, hangings, tapestry and laid-in weaves of all kinds.

It has not been possible to illustrate all the pieces shown, but the endeavor has been made to present representative or unusual examples in various techniques. As so many of the designs are complicated in their treatment and color schemes, the captions cannot be thorough in their description of the pieces, but they convey sufficient information to help the weaver or others interested in the textures to analyze them and to secure creative leads. All of the coverlets were unusually good and showed a fine sense of proportion in the relation of the borders to the body of the design as well as in the color schemes. One of the outstanding pieces was the hanging, "New York Harbor," woven by Miss Glaser. It has always been the writer's contention that contemporary life and surroundings present a wealth of design possibilities and that we are blind to ourselves when we hark back to a romantically colored past for material. Miss Glas-

er's production is modern in its conception, but is as interesting as anything garbed in the accouterments of the Medieval period. In order to throw into relief the blocked masses, a combination of dark on cream was the color scheme; it has proven as effective as the black on white of the etcher's art.

The embroidery-weave table runner by Elsie Siroky was as delicate and web-like as a bit of old lace. The shimmering waviness of the plain center was an effective foil for the graceful figures in the border and allowed them to stand out in a fascinating rhythm of line. Another delightful piece was the "Dukengang" sampler woven by Miss Alice Crane. The pattern was as charming as those appearing in the finest specimens of peasant weaving, while the color scheme with its soft yellow and green toning had an attractive mellowness. Samplers have always been a charming mode of expression in embroidery, but have not been exploited to any extent in weaving. Nevertheless, they afford many possibilities in the weaving craft both as a class problem and as an artistic creation. Embroidered samplers fall into two general classes, and so

can the woven samplers. There are samplers which demonstrate the worker's ability in the wide variety of available stitches and which also act as guides for technique possibilities — this type would be an excellent concluding problem in the class, for in one piece could be combined harness, plain, laid-in, embroidery, and tapestry weaves. The second and more common type of sampler is the commonly known sampler design characterization, in which stitch, pattern design, and text are combined; the corollary woven sampler is the type developed by the St. Louis Guild, and this classification tries the worker's mettle in weaving ability, color handling, and design creativeness.

All of the woven bags were charming; but two especially stood out, as they possessed all the jewel-like charm of the beaded bag. By a skilful interplay of color on the Rosengang threading, a shimmering delicacy resulted, and the bags were charming enough for evening wear. There were two tapestry hangings exhibited by Miss Carolyn H. Cowan. These tapestries were of Maya design origin and exotic in feeling. The weaving was well done, and Miss Cowan displayed great ability in her handling of a complicated pattern. Tapestry, like painting, is actually a simple technique, so achievement rests on the worker's shoulders and calls into play one's best artistic faculties.

In closing this article it might not be amiss to say something of tapestry and its peculiarities. To us tapestry is a new art, for it was never developed in this country till recent years. But now it is coming into favor and many people are practising it. Tapestry is an art of grandeur and of delicacy, and through this medium have been created the most glorious of antique fabrics; yet it is just as easy to have a botchy production for the fruit of one's efforts as a charming wall hanging. The simplicity of the art leads to complications in color, design, and the manipulation of the technique.

Many peoples have developed the art of tapestry, but it always had its ups and downs with vagaries and meanderings of racial taste and aptitudes. The high marks were reached by the Greeks and Coptic Egyptians, the Peruvians of the Pre-Inca and Inca periods, the Scandinavians, and towering over all the French and Flemish of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. These peoples attained the static action and boldness in clear-cut, soft coloring on

which good tapestry depends. Tapestry is not facile enough in texture to duplicate the quantum of shading and depiction of sentient action that characterizes painting; it is too majestic and stiff for the curlings of a brocade; and the dimensions are usually too large for overcrowded designs or startling color schemes. Atmosphere and decorativeness are obtained through the repose in broad backgrounds, sweeps of gorgeously figured drapery, and accumulations of decorative plants or other motifs. The painter can select any commonplace scene and make it effective — examples are the landscapes of the English School represented by painters like John Crome, Constable, and Moreland, or the seventeenth-century Dutch genre painters like Vermeer, Terborch, and De Hooch. The tapestry weaver cannot do this, for the even quantitative-ness in color leads to insipidity in his art, and consequently he must use artistic license. The Gothic designers had a predilection for light and dark with the Mille Fleur characterized by the deep blue background on which the interspersed floral forms stood out; later designers modulated the color schemes and gradually tended towards lighter patterning, yet managing to retain the sense of opposing values for clarity and toneful decorativeness. The old tapestry weavers were always perspicacious in their sense of harmony and used colors that combined well — they were not given to experiment, with the bother of trying to offset one color by a second so that a third could be used. A good deal of tapestry being woven today, including the Scandinavian, modernistic, and American, is apt to stray from these sensible rules and is characterized by insipid, pale tones; colors so close in value that they lack clarity and have the effect of the revolving prism; or shades in violent clash. The difference between the new and the old can be summed up in that the old represented and decorated, while the new often just represents, whether it be a depiction or one's psychosis.

To do, one must understand, and that is why discussions of this sort are in place. All of us are anxious to have weaving develop and reach a high plane in the arts. We can obtain this goal if we know what we are about and display intelligence as well as dexterity. The St. Louis Guild of Weavers is on the right track; they are bold experimenters, while adhering to time-worn tenets.