

In Miss Blumenau's Studio.

ON TEXTURES—

Notes of a Contemporary Weaver

By LILI BLUMENAU

TEXTURE, which has always been the most important factor in cloth designing, has recaptured our imagination. The present importance of texture seems to affirm a renewal of man's ability to feel and see.

More is expected from the contemporary weaver than the actual knowledge of operating a loom, or simple satisfaction with weaving recognized symbols, such as diamond patterns and rows of trees. His duty is to give consideration to the elements he employs in his work, if he wishes to gain desirable effects in the woven cloth. The creative weaver must have intuition and the ability to analyze consciously the nature of his ingredients.

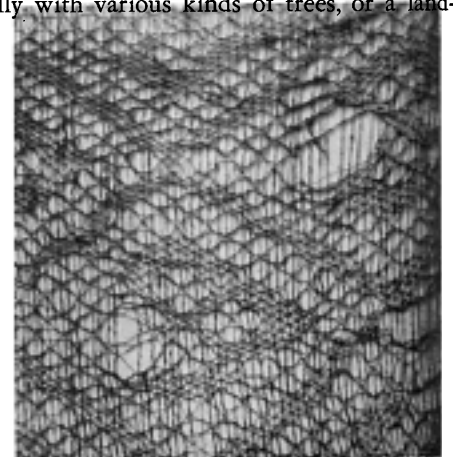
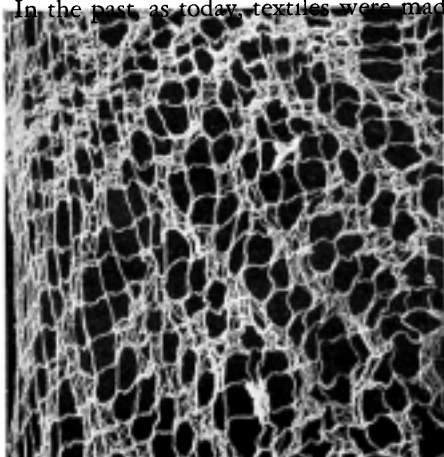
Peruvian, Coptic, and medieval weavers were thoroughly familiar with the means by which they gained their effects. The Peruvians, using primitive looms, achieved the most inventive effects of transparency by twisting warp threads in a system called leno. The Copts, embroidering linen threads on the surface of a wool tapestry, created decidedly varied textural qualities. The great medieval weavers were aware of a wide range of tapestry techniques and chose particular ones for particular purposes in the presentation of flowers and human figures.

In the past, as today, textiles were made from any type of

fiber which could be spun into threads of varying degrees of cohesion, thickness and smoothness. Then, as now, the crossing of warp and weft produced an unlimited variety of weave constructions, enhanced by the addition of color and texture.

The essential qualities of a textile are its appeal to the sense of touch and the tactile value which it communicates to the eye. Every surface has a characteristic texture. Its nature depends on the allover disposition of its smallest parts, or its structure. Textures have as many names as color: hard, soft, rough, smooth, shiny, prickly, embossed,—an infinite vocabulary. The distribution of the various particles which constitute a surface produces sensations. Some textures excite us agreeably and produce pleasant sensations; others inflict their character too strenuously and we dislike them. Certain textures may be agreeable to one person and arouse disgust in another. Seeing burdocks, for instance, makes some people uncomfortable while others get terrifically excited about the structure of that particular plant and experience only the beauty of its textural effect.

There are many texture sensations which are out of our hands, so to speak, and are simply visual; a wood seen from a distance, especially with various kinds of trees, or a land-



Ancient Peruvian Lace, with Birds.

Coptic Tapestry, Linen and wool, 4-5 B. C.

Gauze loomwork from Peru.

Photographs, Peruvian textiles, AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY; Coptic, COOPER UNION.

scape from a plane. In these instances, the beauty of a texture is enjoyed without precise or close knowledge of what is represented. Through the microscope, for example, a wool fiber has a texture completely unrecognizable as wool and produces a sensation entirely different from the familiar product seen in the skein.

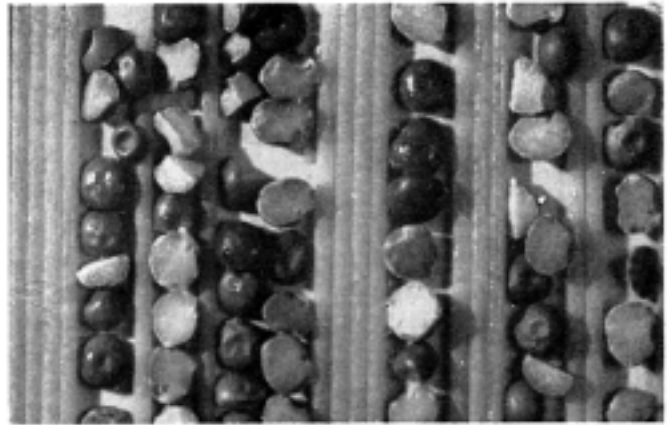
As pointed out before, every surface has a characteristic texture the nature of which depends on the allover disposition of its particles. A surface is therefore the sum of its parts and is created by natural means, which cannot always be explained, or by knowledgeable artifice and invention. The bark of a tree and its exciting structure cannot be explained. The polished surface of a table, however, is the result of a craftsman's calculated use of a certain polish to obtain the desired effect. It is easy to see that invented textures consist of two qualities: the original raw material and the processing or treatment added by craftsmen. The wide variety of materials available to the weaver, having been already processed many times, then enter the final stages of their transformation into his product. The result will depend on his imagination, taste and technical skill.

Textures are part of our daily living, but only a few people are aware of them, enjoying and sensing them to the fullest degree. To fail to develop sight and feeling for texture is to neglect the extraordinary richness of environment. Until recently our system of education has almost completely disregarded the actual value of tactile perceptions and sensations, strongly stressing instead the development of capacity to think logically and to absorb factual knowledge. More facilities for the development of imaginative and perceptual sensations and enjoyments are needed in our time to lead man to constructive, individual happiness.

The world of the weaver has vast possibilities for creating sensations, essential to enjoyment. A plain white cotton thread in itself may not have much texture but these cotton threads change character when employed in different densities, one proportion opaque, another transparent. The weaver creates a texture with a plain yarn through the slewing of the reed. In a plain weave limitless possibilities of creating texture may be observed. An alternating warp of heavy and fine yarns, nubby and plain, smooth and rough, and variations of plain weave in horizontal and vertical ribs are means of variety. The materials may be used alone or successfully combined, according to the judgment and taste of the weaver. Variations may be obtained through squares, expressed in different yarns, or contrast of warp and weft effect. Rug and tapestry techniques provide infinite texture resources. Relief effects may be obtained by corded weaves, based on plain weave. Continuous effort, exercise and experimentation on the loom are essential. The nature and the handling of yarns and weaves may also be learned through working with other basic materials.

Modern education has begun to encourage a wide and close acquaintance with materials. The German Bauhaus and many other progressive art schools of the first half of the 20th century encouraged students to experiment with materials such as wood, metal, paper and textiles, before choosing a vocational specialization. Through working with

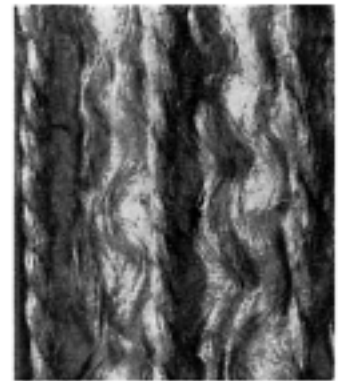
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Corded design—macaroni and split peas.



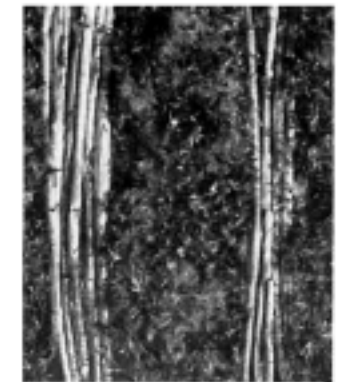
Variation in staples.



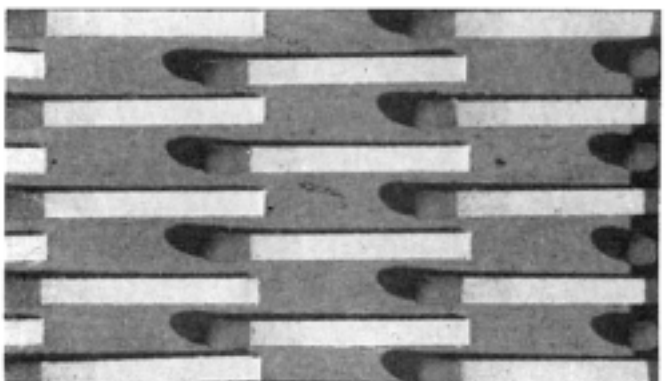
Luxury from raveled rope.



Pile effect—leaves and stones.



Weed seeds—soft as silk.



Matches assume a textile-like quality.

*Photographs on this page and Miss Blumenau's Studio
by RUDY BLESTON.*

finished? If a large loom, is the frame heavy enough to hold it firmly on the floor? Is the hardware well-made? Do you want string heddles or metal heddles—the old looms all used strings, and in renovating old looms, many of their devotees continue to use string—that is what was intended for that loom and what should be used. String works better, they say. Also before buying a loom consider carefully what you intend to make. Do you intend to make only small articles, or do you have larger projects in mind? It's surprising what you can do with a 20-inch table loom if you really put your mind to it—belts, handbags and purses, table linens, towels, scarfs—all sorts of things for which you may find a demand. What you intend to do also determines the number of harnesses. You can add additional harnesses to some four-harness looms. Perhaps if you intend to weave elaborate patterns it would be better to purchase an eight or twelve-harness loom to begin with.

Where will you use your loom? Are you lucky enough to have attic space, a room over the garage, or have you got a barn to use for a studio? Maybe you don't care how your loom looks, but if it is set up in the living room, maybe how it looks is important. Looms are made today in a variety of woods, black walnut, cherry, maple and others. The old looms—the 18th and early 19th century models used by many well-known weavers—sometimes found in barns and trash piles in a most dilapidated condition—often are beautiful pieces of furniture, preserving that indefinable charm which all articles of good craftsmanship seem to have.

There is a new stream-lined model with a reinforced aluminum alloy frame which can be clamped on a table for work and put away easily when not in use—weaves 38 inches—which many persons may want to investigate. Not only can it be moved easily inside the house, but it can travel in the back of the family car. Weight 30½ pounds.

This loom, which has been arousing much interest in textile schools this spring, is designed to overcome some of the limitations weavers have found in old type hand looms. A new adjustable friction let-off is said to eliminate light and dark streaks in the finished fabric.

The head motion, which governs the treadling pattern, greatly simplifies handweaving because it locks on every pick, eliminating errors by means of a simple leverage principle. A unique hand wheel and cylinder replace eight treadles.

The best advice to the weaver is to try out as many looms as possible, just the way you try out cars. Often looms are available at a weaving center for a small fee or may be rented to use in your home.

On Textures

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the materials the student discovers step by step not only the possibilities of the materials, their structure, texture and surface treatment; he also learns to observe the capacity of wood for instance and how to use it in a purposeful way. This self-education which gets away from imitation and book knowledge, has already proved itself in the field of practical modern design. The so-called Bauhaus method is a sound foundation for useful ends, in the technical handling of materials as well as in the many creative and esthetic possibilities which it inspires.

The weaver in search of textural effects should first learn to look for the textures in other materials of his environment. Some of the most common objects daily passing before our eyes may be rediscovered by the weaver in new relationships. Bread will not be any more only the food we eat but it will also be a demonstration of two combined textures; the spongy porous crumb and the hard exterior crust. A brick wall of a house with its horizontal and vertical lines might be seen and felt by the weaver in a completely different way than by the photographer or painter. An endless range of fresh experiences can be gained through new ways of seeing with an open mind. Certain objects can be arranged by the weaver, beginner or advanced, in such a way that they suggest a woven fabric and provide a starting point for an altogether new and interesting weave and texture. Peas, matches and macaroni are common materials but as we can see from the reproductions in this article change their

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On Textures

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identity and become almost textile-like. During this arrangement of materials, in themselves unrelated to yarn and the loom, the artist-weaver must bear in mind the nature of cloth and the practice and experience of weaving. Through these experiments he increases his ability to feel and see. In this way the weaver learns to make imaginative comparisons between life products and the loom products, which enrich life. • • •

SPINNERS AND WEAVERS OF MODERN GREECE

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luncheon and tea sets, and yardages of various kinds.

Among other groups of handweavers in Greece is that established by G. Stewart Richardson, an English lady, a designer and an artist, where fine cottons and other fabrics are produced, both for apparel and upholstery use. George Topoglides, a designer, is an associate. This firm also is noted for its handwoven raw silks called "coucoulariko."

Handwoven raw silks were used not only for sports and summer day dresses but also for a most luxurious evening coat, embroidered in gold, designed by

Jean Desses, best known among Greek contemporary designers, who is now a member of Paris *haute couture*.

Heavy cottons in natural tones as well as brilliant colors were used for sportswear, as were peasant handkerchiefs combined in different ways. Fine cottons appeared in other styles. Modern as well as ancient dress employed embroidery, done while the fabric is on the loom as it was in earlier times. Several enormous peasant skirts of cotton, one black pleated all the way round, were combined with raw silk blouses.

Although the brilliant colors won high praise, the natural tones of the silk, linen, cotton, and wool fabrics almost stole the show. Textures derived from blending the different natural handspun yarns, usually in plain weaves, showed great beauty and variety.

The production of the beautiful fabrics seen in New York is an extension of everyday activity, since almost all Greek families in the country districts spin and weave for their own use, as pointed out in the first section of this article. They want beautiful things to wear and to use in their homes and if they did not make them by hand they would not have them. Not only are the textiles for personal and home use beautifully made, but also such articles as the sacks to hold the wool which is carried from farm to market on donkey back.

Primitive spindles and handlooms, as well as the fly shuttle looms in the small "factories" have been set to work for the rehabilitation of the country, now that conditions have become more stabilized. Neither the great destruction and suffering caused by the war or the years of civil strife following it destroyed the Greeks' love for beautiful textiles or their interest and skill in producing them. Production was carried on under incredible difficulties and now this devotion to a traditional art has a most practical application in the development of Greek trade with other countries.

The Cavalcade of Greek Fashions was presented in the United States under the patronage of Mme. Vassili Dendramis, wife of the Greek ambassador to the United States, Mrs. Henry Grady, wife of the American ambassador to Greece, and Mrs. William O'Dwyer, wife of the mayor of the City of New York, for the benefit of Queen Frederika's Fund for Greek War Orphans. • • •

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