

A MODERN VERSION OF AN ANCIENT WEAVE

by BERTA FREY

While on her way to my Studio a friend of mine saw, in a shop window, a pair of Peruvian dolls. Being tremendously interested in anything Peruvian, and having a passion for dolls in native costume, my friend's interest in the miniature lady and gentleman proved to be extravagantly irresistible. When she reached my place, her enthusiasm was boiling over, her story was as exciting to me as the dolls had been to her.

The discussion of things Peruvian inevitably led to Peruvian weaving and especially to the leno or gauze type of weaving. Hanging on a wall of my studio is a loom from Guatemala,—a very primitive affair, and yet the Guatemalian women do beautiful leno on it, and without benefit of doups. Why couldn't we? And so the experiments began.

The mixture as we eventually worked it out is neither fish, flesh, nor fowl, for we have used a mixture of methods.

But it is fun to do and it is "fool-proof"; it can be done on any loom, on any threading; it will work equally well on a two-harness loom.

The loom on which we were working that afternoon was threaded with a 10/2 cotton warp in a simple twill (1-2-3-4); one thread per heddle and two threads per dent. For weft we used a No. 5 Perle, but subsequent experiments have shown that the warp thread, if used double, is better.

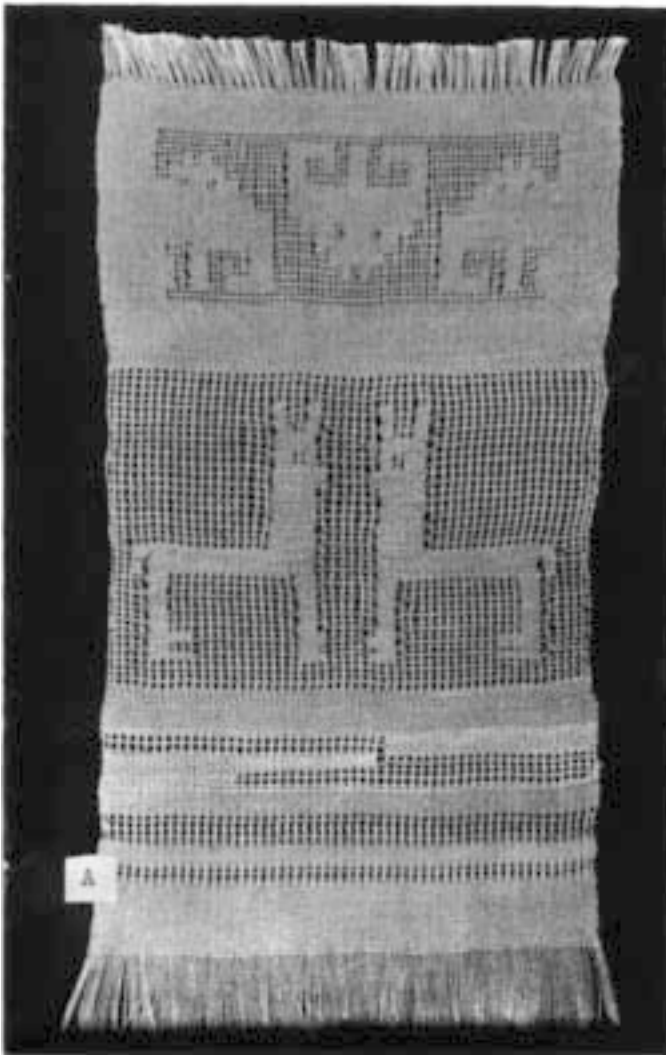


ILLUSTRATION 1

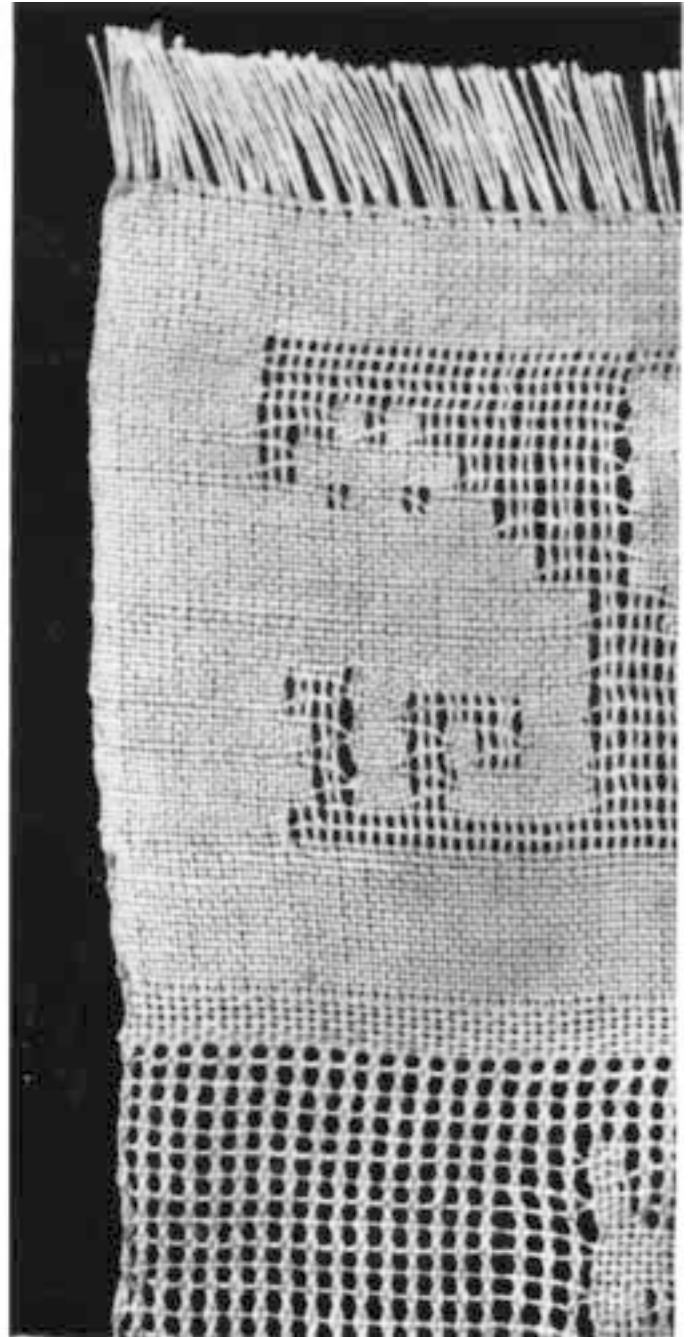


ILLUSTRATION 2

On the twill threading, we have used for the plain weave, 1-2 against 3-4. With the double weft, this gives a two-and-two basket effect.

There is nothing new about this way of weaving Leno. Many weavers are familiar with the technique and use a single row of twists as a finish for hems. But I hope that I am not the only weaver that had never before realized its many possibilities.

To weave the plain gauze, raise harnesses 1 and 2. It is not essential that these two harnesses be raised if there is a different threading on the loom; the essential thing is that the *first* thread (or pair of threads on a twill threading) through the reed be the one that is *up*. With the left forefinger, pull the threads of the upper shed slightly to the left, and pick up the first thread from the under shed. On our twill threading, a pair of threads was considered as a single thread. Release the first upper thread (or pair) and pass the shuttle *over* it. Pick up the second under thread and pass the shuttle over the second upper thread. Continue across the loom in this way.

A flat stick shuttle will prove to be most convenient; or a smooth stick may be used to pick up, then turned on edge to make a shed. The tension should be looser than usual to prevent undue wear on the warp threads. If the work is kept close to the breast beam, the angle of the shed opening is more acute and it is a simple matter to pick up the under threads and pass over the top ones. A little practice will result in very good speed.

When all the threads have been crossed, and the shuttle drawn through, change to the 3-4 (or opposite) shed and weave from left to right in the ordinary way. Because of the warp twist, the weft does not pack closely; only alternate rows have to be "hand done" so that this is not too

slow a method of weaving, and putting in a pattern does not slow up the process. As a matter of fact, if a design is so arranged that more than half of the surface is pattern rather than background, the weaving is speeded up considerably.

The thread starts at the right and passes to the left, twisting the warp threads as it goes, then returns to the right side of the weaving on a plain shed, thus making two rows of mesh squares. This is shown at A on the photograph of illustration I. The weaving of two rows of squares at a time makes the only "catch" in this technique. The design must be so arranged that there are always two squares, or a multiple of two, in the unit of design as it progresses in the warp direction. It is not necessary to have an even number of squares in the width of the design. See fig. 1.

After the first row of the pattern has been counted out properly, and the pattern set correctly, most of the hard work is done. Until the technique is mastered, it is easier to work with heavier warp threads or with pairs of warp threads.

Fig. 2 will explain the weave easily. There are sixteen warp threads in the diagram—eight pairs. The 1-2 harnesses are raised; the weft thread begins at A and passes over alternate pairs of threads. Then the 3-4 harnesses are raised and the weft thread returns to the right side, passing over alternate pairs of threads. The diagram shows four plain weft shots before the twisting begins. The 1-2 threads are raised and held to the left while the 3-4 are picked up, then the 1-2 are dropped below the shuttle and the same procedure repeated on the next four threads. To make the solid part of the design, the shuttle carries the thread through the shed as it stands open, without twisting the warp threads—in the diagram, this is over two pairs of threads and under two

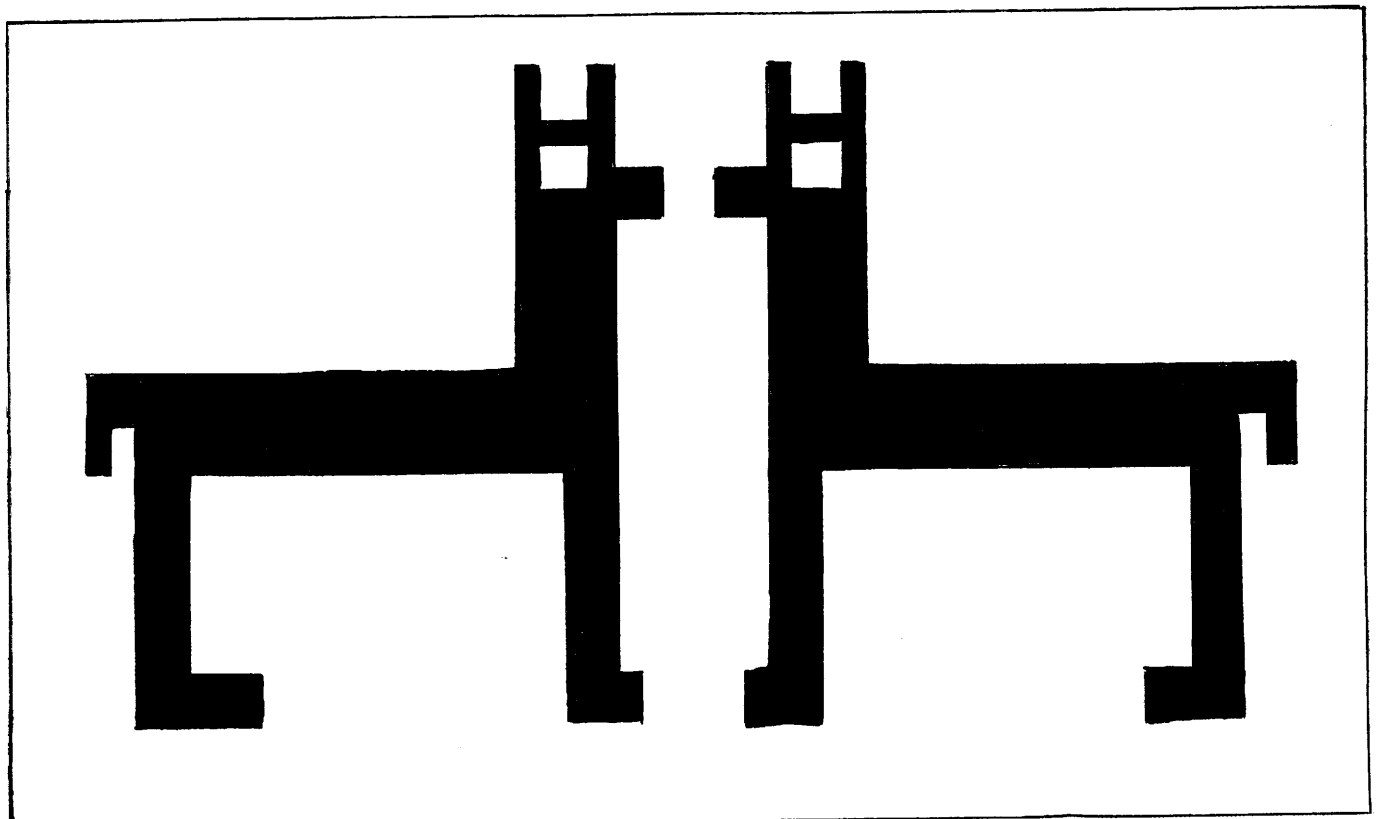


FIGURE 4

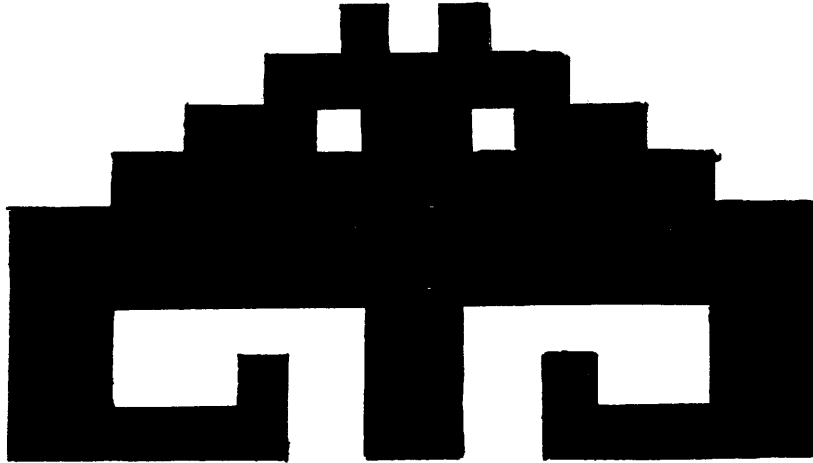


FIGURE 1

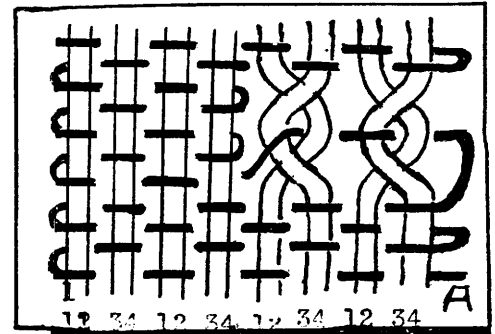


FIGURE 2

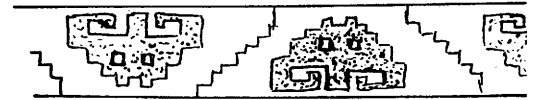


FIGURE 3

pairs—to the edge of the solid block of pattern. The shed is changed, bringing up the 3-4, and the weft is returned over two pairs of threads to the last twist. Again the shed is changed and the weft is taken back to the left. Because the twist does not allow close packing, it takes three tabby shots to fill in the space on the warp equal to that caused by the twist.

It will be seen that the pattern is laid in by a method not so different from the old Spanish "Red-de-Telar" or loom-net. I wonder if the ancient Peruvians would approve of a Spanish adulteration of their art. From the vantage point of the twentieth century, it seems rather logical. It is the addition of the Spanish that distinguishes this technique from the "Woven Lace" as described in *The Weaver* for July, 1938.

The return of the weft thread over the twists will take as much space on the warp as did the weft thread that caused the twist. That distance must be compensated for by adding two more short weft threads to the space, first over 1-2 then over the 3-4, bringing the weft to the left of the plain weaving. With the 3-4 harnesses raised, the weft is taken to the right of the work, to be ready to start on the second group of squares.

If one were weaving the Llamas of fig. 4, the pattern would be laid in as follows: make five twists; weave three shots of tabby back and forth over five threads and under five threads; make twelve twists; weave over three and under three for three weft shots; make three twists; weave plain for the fore foot of the second Llama; make twelve twists; weave the hind foot; make five twists.

Fig. 3 is copied from a Natural History Museum Leaflet by Charles W. Mead. It shows a fish design as woven in a tapestry belt. It served as a design source for the top part of the sampler shown in illustration I. The weft used there was No. 9 Perle cotton, but if the same yarn as the warp (10/2) had been used, it would have been better, for the weaving would have been more nearly square. The method employed in weaving the fish design is exactly the same as that used for the Llamas below it, but it was woven on the regular tabby of 1-3 against 2-4, and single warp threads were crossed instead of pairs. Weaving this part of the sampler showed that it is much better to have plain tabby along the selvages. It is easier to keep a good edge, and too, there is not the tendency to pull in.

Fig. 4 is a pattern for Llamas arranged after D'Harcourt. It is not the one used on the sampler, but a corrected one. The attempt at toes on the woven piece was a bit of cheating on the weave and was not too successful. Illustration II is an enlarged view of the woven cloth and shows more clearly the construction.

We almost felt that we should apologize to that master-weaver of centuries past for the liberties that we took with her invention of gauze weave; but we consoled ourselves with the thought that she would appreciate the pleasure that we derived from doing something different, and that she would accept as sincerest flattery our efforts to imitate her art.