

# THE MAGIC OF GOOD DESIGN

by MARY ELIZABETH STARR

Photos by Cranbrook Academy of Art

A World's Fair is a wonderful place to see the best examples of whatever one is interested in. To weavers both the World of Tomorrow in New York and Treasure Island in San Francisco offered examples of the best the modern world has to offer in modern textiles. In New York one had to seek them out in the exhibits of the nations while in San Francisco one found them assembled in the Decorative Arts section of the Fine Arts Pavilion. It is of especial interest to weavers that the well known textile designer Dorothy Wright Liebes of San Francisco was responsible for that admirable display of ceramics, glass, textiles, bookbinding, jewelry and interior design which so delighted all Treasure Island visitors. The New York Fair visitor found an abundance of beautiful hand weaving in the pavilions of the Scandinavian countries.

To anyone who studied the beautiful modern decorative textiles in either of these displays it was quite apparent that color, design and texture are their distinguishing characteristics. No new technics of weaving are employed, but well known technics are often used in new and esthetically satisfying ways. An overshop pattern may be treadled to create a texture rather than a pattern or various types of free weaving may be employed to give emphasis as well as texture interest. Unusual textures are frequently obtained by the use of unusual materials, such as rope or spun glass, or our tried and trusted wools and cottons are spun into yarns having definite texture interest. The color and design of modern textiles show a certain casual sophistication which is at the same time, paradoxically, both free and restrained.

Is it not significant that many of the beautiful modern handwoven textiles are created by artists who acquire enough technical knowledge of looms to create their designs rather than by weavers who are tradition bound to looms and special, often complicated, technics? An artist with a desire to create textiles regards looms and weaving technics much as an artist with a desire to illustrate regards printing presses, block printing and lithographing. In either instance they are the artist's tools. They are technical necessities the use of which can often be carried out most efficiently by trained technicians. But the technician, left alone, is apt to become involved in the intricacies of his equipment and to produce technically perfect goods devoid of artistic merit.

Is it not well to ask yourself honestly if you are adding something of beauty to a world which needs it greatly or if you are merely making painstaking copies of other peoples' ideas? If you belong to the second class, and all but a handful of weavers really do, what can you do to lift yourself out of the rut? The best thing to do is to go to an art school. There are many good art schools all over the country. No one would have to go very far to find one. Take all you can get in design and color but do not expect everything you learn to be applied directly to weaving. Your teacher will be giving you fundamental principles which are applicable to all forms of art. It is for you to make your own

applications to weaving. You will recognize that weaving imposes some limitations on designs, but that there are absolutely no limitations on the numbers of designs possible.

If you want to go to an art school where hand weaving is specifically and excellently taught investigate the Cranbrook Academy of Art. It is located on a beautiful country estate in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, just twenty miles from Detroit. It is one of a sisterhood of enterprises sponsored by the Cranbrook Foundation. Others in the group include Christ Church Cranbrook, Cranbrook School (for boys), Kingswood School Cranbrook (for girls), Brookside School Cranbrook (for smaller children), and the Cranbrook Institute of Science, each well known in its especial field.

Upon these rolling Michigan hills have been built fine modern buildings—studios, dormitories, faculty residences and museums; the surrounding grounds and gardens have been beautified with the lovely statues and fountains of the famed Carl Milles; but most important of all a faculty of unexcelled ability has been assembled. The instructor of textile design and weaving is Miss Marianne Strengell.



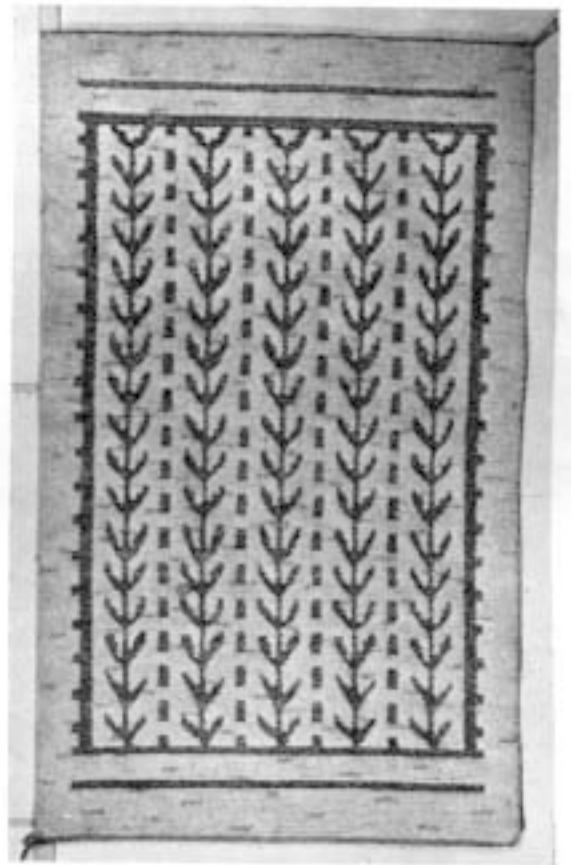
Marianne Strengell at a Cranbrook loom



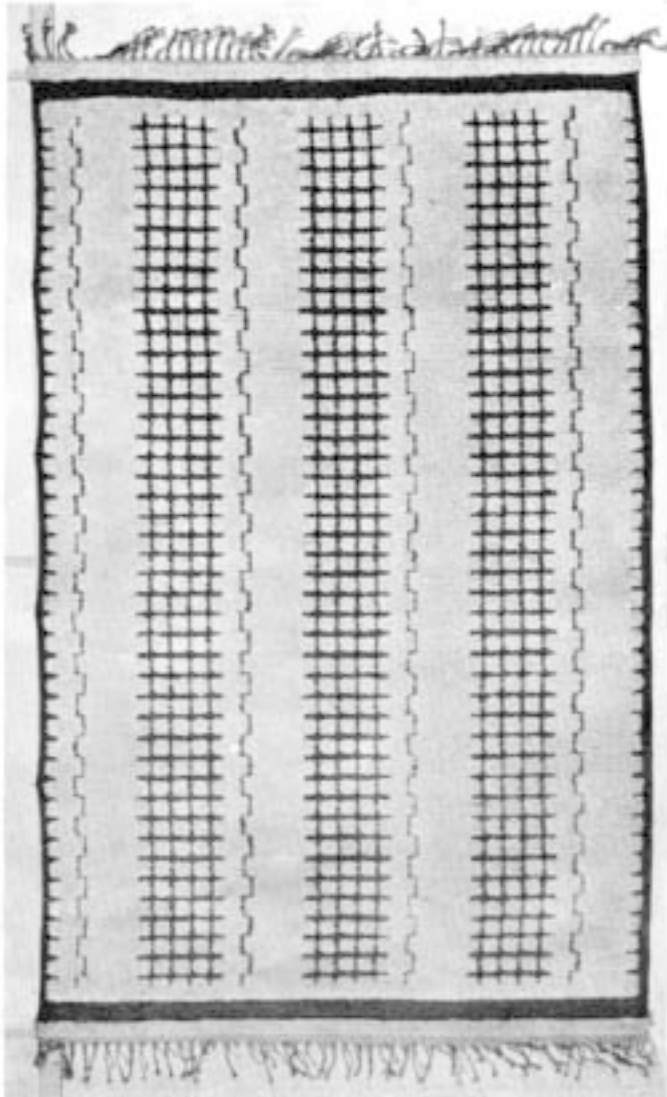
The Weaving Studio, Cranbrook



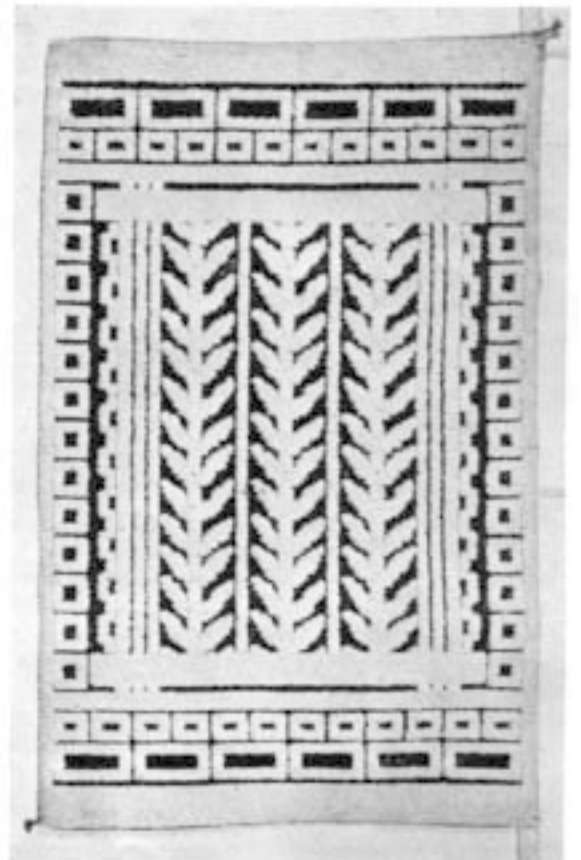
Variety in rug textures as created by Marianne Strengell



Half fossa rug designed by Marianne Strengell



Half fossa rug with off-white pile on an old gold ground. Designed by Marianne Strengell and exhibited in the Decorative Arts section of the World's Fair in San Francisco.



Half fossa rug designed by Marianne Strengell





Craft studios as seen from the formal gardens at Cranbrook



Half flossa rug designed by Marianne Strengell

She had her earliest instruction in art school in Finland, her native land. This training she has since made use of as a designer in Sweden, Denmark and Finland. One can readily understand what this background means when one considers the leadership of the Scandinavian countries in modern decorative art. The textile displays at the World of Tomorrow plainly showed the leadership of these northern countries. Miss Strengell is now in this country as a talented young woman, trained in the best of Scandinavian tradition, backed by commercial experience both in her own shop and in the employ of well known firms, and attuned to contemporary times. Contact with one who occupies a high place in her field is stimulating in itself but the most important thing one gets at Cranbrook is a feeling of some independence in creating one's own designs.