



PORTRAIT OF AMELITA GALLI-CURCI.

EMBROIDERY IN FINE WOOLS ON "FLESH RACHEL" LINEN FOR SKIN TONE. LINE AND DESIGN GIVING DEPTH AND EXPRESSION AS IN CHINESE PORTRAITURE AND IN OLD MANUSCRIPT PAINTINGS. STITCHES: SIMPLE OUTLINE, BUTTONHOLE, RUMANIAN, CHAIN, RUNNING AND DARNING; WITH CONCENTRATION ON MOVEMENT AND RHYTHM. PRIVATELY OWNED (1924).

GEORGIANA BROWN HARBESON, A PAINTER IN NEEDLEWORK

by

FRANCES MORRIS

AS THIS number of the BULLETIN gives a brief survey of the field of modern embroidery, it is fitting that a few introductory paragraphs should be devoted to the work of the Club member to whom we are indebted for the following articles, one who is herself a veritable painter in needlework—Mrs. Georgiana Brown Harbeson.

Mrs. Harbeson, who is generally conceded to be the foremost American exponent of the modern movement in embroidery, is of New England ancestry. She thus comes naturally by a pioneering instinct that has a tendency to lead her adventurous spirit into new realms of activity, for she is the great-niece of Lucy Ann Packard of Quincy, Massachusetts, who was the first woman to be granted the privilege of making needlework copies of portraits in the Vatican.

Blessed with such a heritage and endowed with a wealth of imagination, it is not surprising that though still young, she has to her credit an enviable record of achievement. She is a graduate of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, a member of the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors, a mural painter and creator of a number of Broadway stage settings and ballets.¹

In turning aside from painting, Mrs. Harbeson, therefore, brought to this, her latest field of attainment, the exceptional variety of technical training that it has been her aim to acquire in her devotion to the idea that the inspiration of an artist should find expression in many mediums in order that each expression might be enriched by all that has been

¹ "Venetian Lace Ballet" in John Murray Anderson's "Jack and Jill." The "Sampler Ballet" for the Paramount Theatre. "Greenwich Village Follies." "The Vinegar Tree."

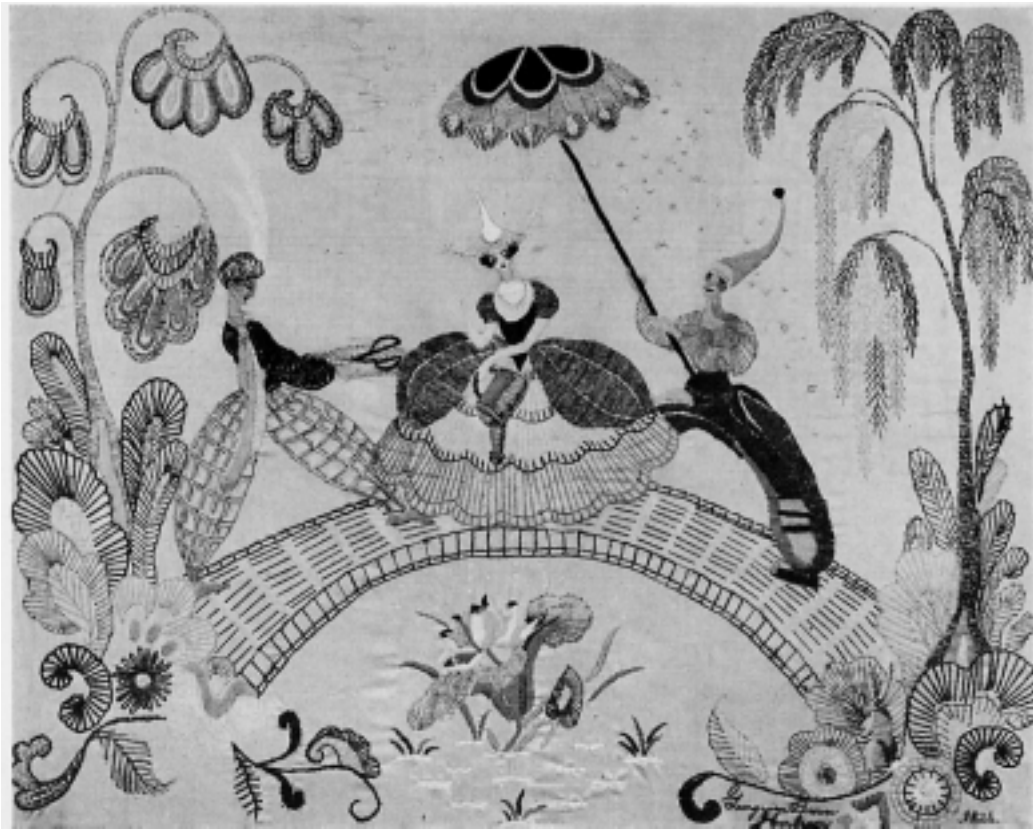


PLATE I—WATERING THE LILY.

CHINESE CHIPPENDALE OVERMANTEL FOR A BOUDOIR. EMBROIDERY IN FINE WOOL ON GREEN-BLUE TAFFETA. COLORS: CORALS, FLESH, PALE, AND YELLOW GREENS; SHADES OF ORANGE, VERMILION. WATER DROPS SUGGESTED IN LITTLE OPALESCENT BEADS. TOUCHES OF SILVER THREAD IN THE STARS. COURTESY OF MRS. BELFIELD, MERION, PA. (1926).



PLATE II—SPIRIT OF NEW ENGLAND.

"I HEARD A BIRD SING IN THE DARK OF DECEMBER
'T WAS A MAGICAL THING AND SWEET TO REMEMBER."

EMBROIDERY IN FINE WOOL ON WHITE VELVET. COLORS: DARK GRAY AND BLUE TONES; COSTUME IN MAPLE ORANGE. STITCHES: DARNING, BUTTONHOLE, SATIN, HERRING-BONE (ON COSTUME), CROSS-STITCH, Y, AND STEM STITCHES. COURTESY OF MRS. FRANKLIN MAGEE, NEW YORK (1927).



PLATE III—THE ENCHANTED ISLE.

EMBROIDERY IN CREWEL ON GREEN BLUE TAFFETA IN TONES OF YELLOW, BLUE GREENS, CORALS, AND TWO SHADES OF VIOLET BLUE. ORIGINAL IN THE PERMANENT COLLECTION OF THE ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS, HONOLULU, HAWAII (1931).

learned from other techniques—a theory the truth of which is clearly demonstrated in the exceptional quality of her work. Thus equipped she naturally experienced no difficulty in substituting the needle for the brush, although in this new medium her mastership of the latter is clearly indicated in the brush-like quality of her stitchery.

Perhaps Mrs. Harbeson's most valuable contribution to the development of high standards in modern embroidery is that she demonstrates the importance of strict adherence to the fundamental principles of design, and the value of simplicity in line as a vitalizing force in the creation of a pattern.

Referring to the evolution of a decorative embroidery, Mrs. Harbeson describes three stages of the process: the first is the preparation of the design, which in her work is always pictorial. Of this feature she says, "I always stylize them which is necessary to the quaintness of the method and all the connotations of this decorative art." After preparing a water color cartoon the picture is drawn on the material, but not in color, which is worked up as the embroidery develops from what she aptly terms her "palette of wools." The second stage is the selection of the background. The third is the yarn, and this important factor is best described in her own words, "For textures that will express my themes, I hunt high and low and combine in one piece of stitchery several qualities and varieties of worsteds. Worsteds may absorb or reflect, sink or rise. My pictures are three-dimensional, and this quality in yarn, its marvelous running shadows, makes possible the effects of graduated light. I search also for pleasing colors, and often fade them in the sun to get the desired tone, and sometimes I dye the natural yarn. The final episode is the stitches. By means of them I aim to express both movement and emotion, using them like brush strokes. They may be open—for which an unusual chain stitch is often used where a lacy effect is needed—or they may be closed or massed. In any case shadows travel along the direction of the stitches, whatever they may be, and produce a variety of tone."

The accompanying illustrations show more clearly than any written word the distinctive quality of this artist's work in which the charm is so akin to that found in romantic figure subjects of French medieval embroideries.

The reaction to Mrs. Harbeson's work is aptly described in the following paragraph: "No one can examine Mrs. Harbeson's delightful panels



PLATE V—THE GARDEN OF LOVE.

EMBROIDERY IN FINE WOOLS ON PALE PINK LINEN. COLORS: TONES OF ROSE, YELLOW AND GRAY GREENS, PALE BLUE AND WHITES. SIMPLE TECHNIQUE TO GIVE RHYTHM AND SPIRIT TO THE DESIGN. PRIVATELY OWNED (1932).



PLATE VI—THE SOUL AND HIS DESTINY.
SIGNS OF THE ZODIAC.

DINING-ROOM WALL HANGING. EMBROIDERY IN FINE WOOL ON CHERRY COLORED VELVET. COLORS: PEACH, AMETHYST, DARK GREEN, AND LIGHT CORAL TONES. STITCHES: CHAIN, BUTTONHOLE, BLANKET, CROSS, RUMANIAN, AND SATIN. ORIGINAL OWNED BY MRS. BROWNELL GRANT (1933).

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without perceiving that she brings to her work a fresh, crisp genius. Her fancy is exuberant, but her composition controls it and is a language of communication between her and her public. Her gift for abstraction is of incalculable value in her translation of stories into stitchery and gives to her work a naïveté which is altogether refreshing.”²

² Helen Johnson Keyes—*The Christian Science Monitor*, July 26, 1933.



“RECOGNITION OF USSR.”

EMBROIDERED PANEL BY MRS. THEODORE ROOSEVELT, JR.

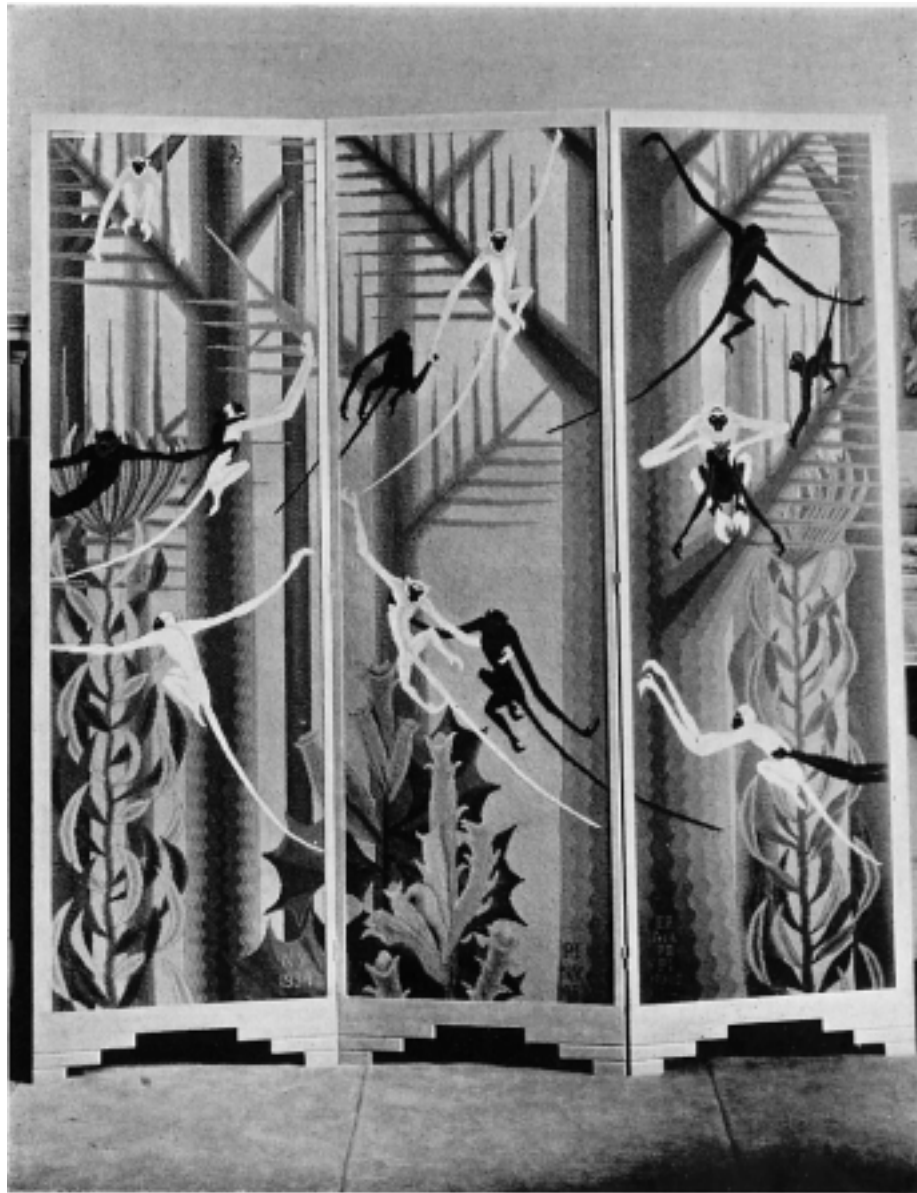


PLATE VII.

THREEFOLD NEEDLEPOINT SCREEN. RHYTHMIC DESIGN OF MONKEYS WORKED IN GRAY WHITES AND GREEN BLACKS. THE COMPOSITION IS BRIGHTENED WITH SHADES OF LIGHT TO DEEP YELLOW GREEN, OLIVE GREEN, GRAY BROWNS, YELLOW OCHER, AND FALL LEAF COLORS. IT IS INITIALED TO INDICATE THE LOCALITIES WHERE IT WAS WORKED—THE PHILIPPINES, PORTO RICO, AND NEW YORK—AND DATED TO SHOW THE PROGRESS OF THE WORK DURING THE THREE YEARS REQUIRED TO MAKE IT.