

THE TAPESTRIES OF JEAN LURÇAT

from notes made by

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THE SO-CALLED "tapestries" of Jean Lurçat, of which "L'Orage" (Plate XIX) is a magnificent example, have been exhibited in America during the last few years at the Toledo Museum and the Brooklyn Museum; and in Paris at the Galerie Georges Petit. Most of his work has been acquired by private collectors in Paris, but there are also some pieces owned by collectors in New York and California.

Lurçat's method of work is distinctly individual, and the result of many years of experimentation. In the first place, his tapestries are not woven on a tapestry loom, but are embroidered in gros point on canvas. This was, at least, the technique observed in a piece seen in New York a few years ago, and Lurçat's own description of his work suggests that all his panels are produced in the same way. The artist, then, prepares no preliminary cartoon or colored sketch, but draws the design directly on canvas of the required size, thus eliminating the necessity for any subsequent alterations in scale by the worker. He uses about two hundred colors of wool, and this number he constantly reduces, for he considers it too great. Lurçat conceives his designs as a mosaic of colors and carries this in his mind, for the various colors are indicated only by numerals on the areas of the canvas where they are to be used. The worker's only guide, therefore, is the outline of the design on the canvas and the numerals, showing what colors are to be employed, and these he is compelled to follow. There is thus no intermediate step, in the form of a sketch, between the complete idea in Lurçat's mind and the finished tapestry, while many of the panels designed by Lurçat are the work of his wife. For large hangings several workmen were employed, each doing a section, and this increases the rapidity with which the work is done. The



PLATE XIX.—L'ORAGE.
EMBROIDERY IN GROS POINT BY JEAN LURÇAT.

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artist believes that in these impatient days one cannot spend years on one piece of work, and adds, "*donnez-moi la Muraille de Chine et une armée adéquate. En six mois j'aurai tout couvert.*"

Lurçat has been inspired especially by the great tapestries of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and he deplores the results which the domination of painting has produced in the tapestries made since the sixteenth century. He recognizes that, in part at least, the decline of tapestries as wall decoration is due to the fact that the distinctive differences in design and technique between a tapestry, or a composition in wool, and a composition in oil paint have been lost to view.

Although these embroidered hangings are distinctly "modern" in design, many of the technical conventions of rendering such details as the water (with waves) in the middle ground are precisely the same as those found in many seventeenth century English embroideries. The pattern, both of design and color, is carried from top to bottom of the panel as is most fitting for wall decorations of this sort. The color itself is fresh without being garish or startling and the number of different surface patterns shows considerable ingenuity.