

# American Yarns... An Inspiration for Weavers

## PART TWO

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LET US DISCUSS the most complex problem, that of the creative inspiration of the weaver. It is not easy to analyze the mysterious process, which gives birth to any art creation — the fusion of the engendering spirit with the material, which in our case is the thread.

First, there is an emotional urge, flashing through the mind, wandering around for the discovery of its material embodiment. The first help to your thoughts is either the object to be formed, or remembrances of materials, their texture, their structural flavor. The most decisive moment for any realization is the actual touch with the material — the decision to choose the first thread. It is like in music. The first sound initiates the sequence of all the following sounds.

It is like in painting. The first color put on the canvas decides the sequence of all other colors. In weaving, if the first thread has been chosen, the others follow, obeying an inner drive, an irresistible one if the weaver has all his heart and soul at work.

A true composer's emotions are intimately bound up with the sensation of sounds and their interactions. In music no concept of sounds is possible which could not originate from musical instruments.

Briefly, at the moment of creation, the composer's inner ear hears sounds of instruments. What sound is for the composer, color is for the weaver. The flavor of the sound, given by instruments, is for the weaver's world the thread with its texture.

Therein lies the deepest truth of creative weaving. Threads are like flowers, of which no one is like another. How could I describe with words the thousands of textures of threads! Some are shining, round and smooth like the polished skin of serpents. Others are coarse, pointed or round. Capricious knots interrupt the flow of their hairy surfaces. Some of them look at you with eyes like your pet dog. They have spots of colors, coming and going.

It is the interplay of textures which makes their joyous dance of approaching or of contrasting with each other. The best marriages are those where the two parties are different but nice to each other. So it is with weaving. Contrasting textures, amalgamated in one expression, give the pep. A fundamental rule of creative art has always been that of contrasts. There can be no hills where there are no valleys. Coarse yarns like to be mingled with smooth ones. Twisted threads need their more evenly flowing companions.

Are you aware that I am speaking of many things, of yarns, textures, music love and flowers, but nothing of "the

pattern"? How often am I asked how to come to the pattern, whether I make a previous drawing before starting to weave or not?

A true pattern is the outcome of an interplay of color and texture of definite yarns, and this applies to a certain purpose.

Naturally you can make a previous drawing, but only if you have experience enough not to see the paper and color pencils of your drawing but to visualize the actual weaving you are intending to produce.

In the industries, the pattern is given on paper because the designers do not know how to weave. But there is always a weaver who knows how to translate from the paper to the yarn.

If you have to work out weaving for a special case, e.g. a hanging for a certain window, then you must make a plan for motif repetition, before beginning to weave, like an architect makes plans before building his house. There is no weaving without repetition. Weaving without repetition is tapestry. The repetition is the backbone of any woven thing. How should the repetition be understood?

First of all, you have to have a creative idea which can be repeated. If you do not have it, there is nothing to repeat.

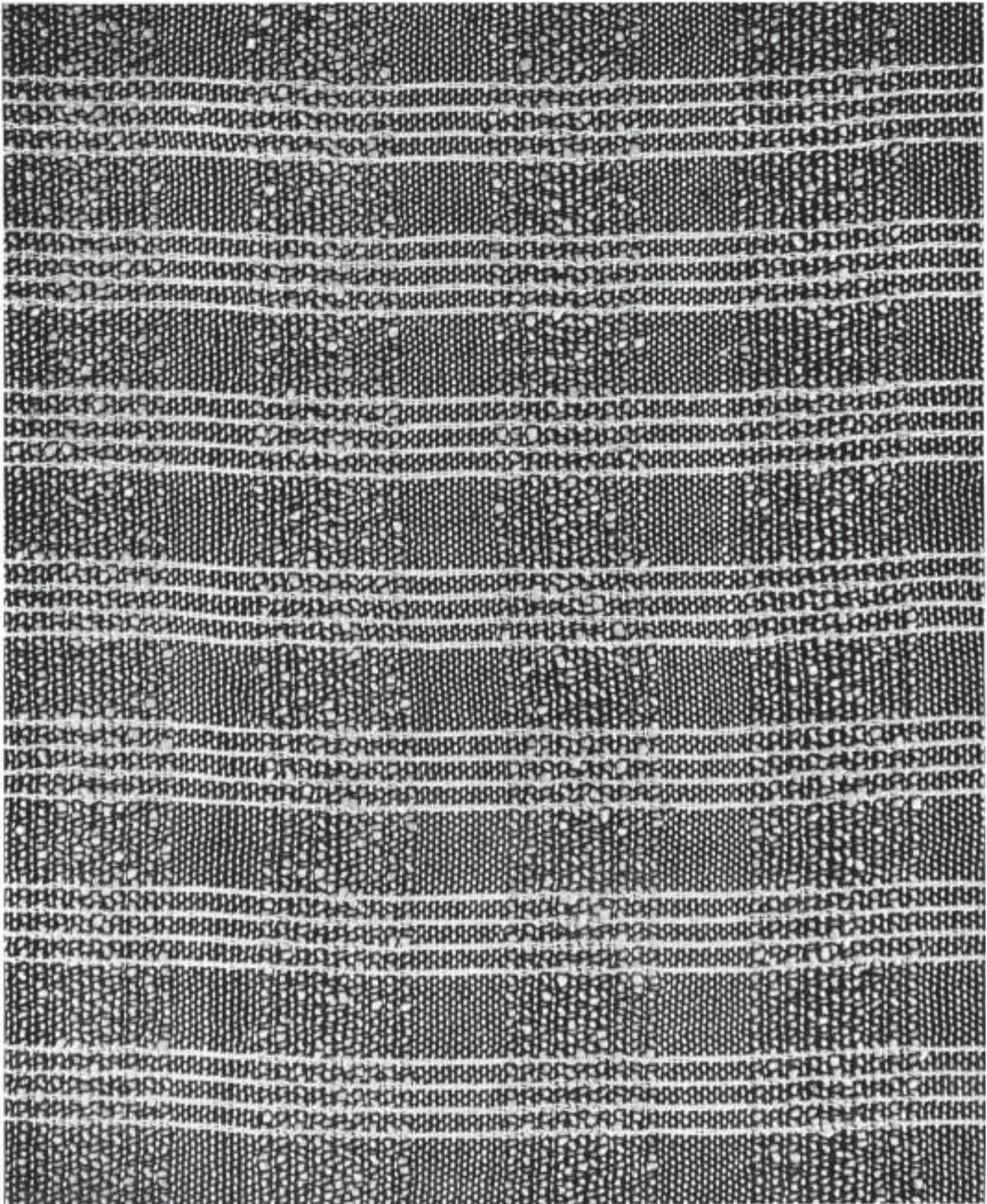
Let us go on. If you have something worthy to repeat, then think only of that which architects call the scale. A necktie needs another scale of repetition than a hanging. First of all, please start to observe the scale of everything belonging to our art.

To explain how to approach these problems, let us take as an example the artistic organization of the dress from the point of view of application of pattern.

The dress is never an accomplishment in itself, like a painting or a sculpture, but it comes only into being if it is worn, worn by a certain person. Seen from another angle, we can state that the main function of a dress is the emphasis of the bodily beauties of women. As the average woman has undoubtedly many beauties, but not all of them, the dress has always to correct defects. Those defects can be lessened only by the right and conscious application of form and color.

As we previously mentioned, the form of a dress is not so much conditioned by the cut as by the texture of the material. Each material has its special kind of draping on the body. The draping conditions the aspect of a style (cut). That means the form of the dress is mainly conditioned by the material, and not the material by the style.

But the omnipotent factor in dressmaking is the color of the dress and its arrangement — the pattern.



The main point consists of the problem of the color distribution on the material with respect to its application. This problem is a purely creative one because in it is in-

involved the creation of the pattern itself. You will understand me easily if you kindly forget that a pattern is something for which you are looking in books, and, if it seems to

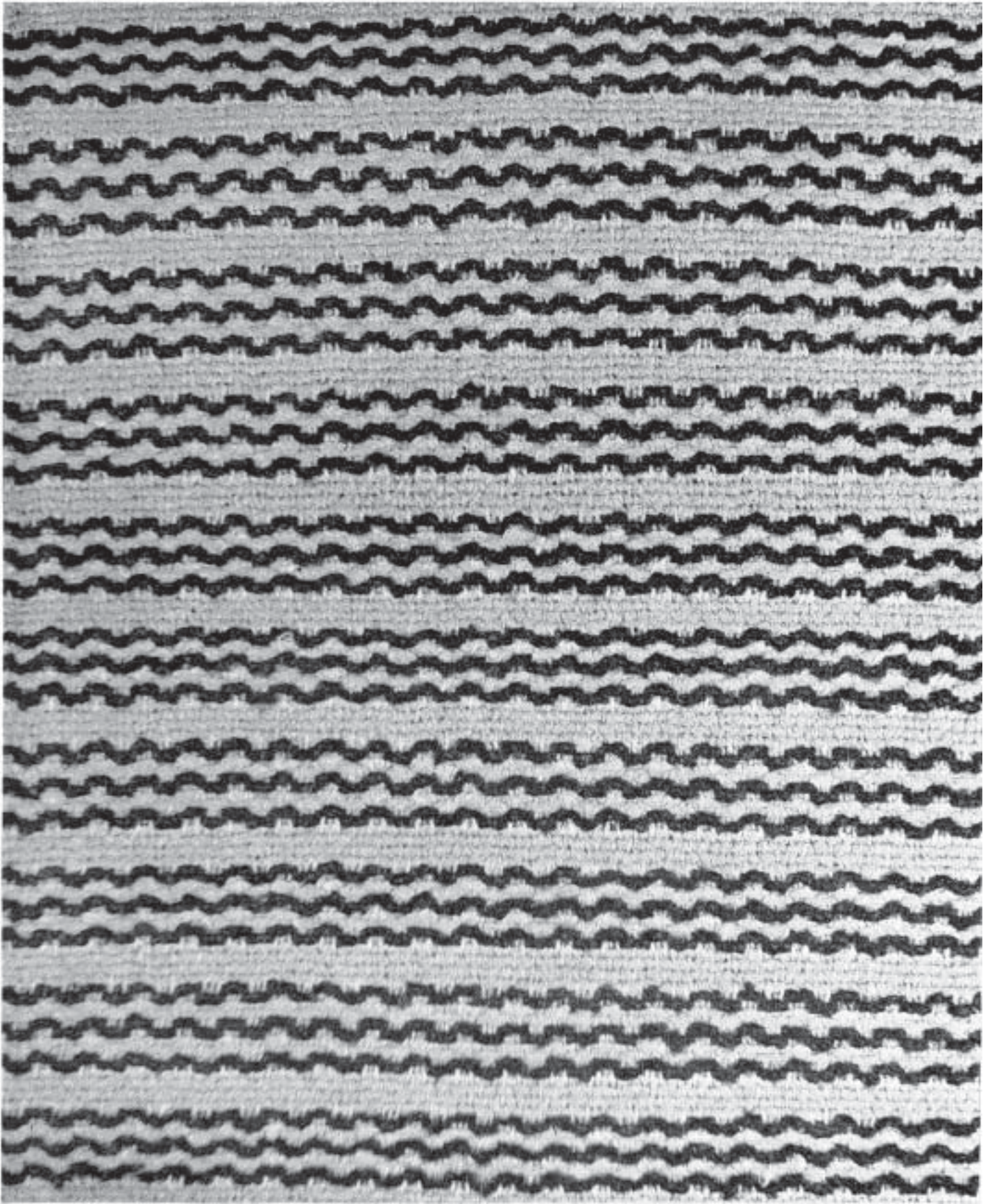


ILLUSTRATION NO. 2

be nice, you take it. No, a thousand times no. We have arrived at the essence of weaving.

The pattern is born by the interplay of the shape of a  
*THE WEAVER*

feminine body with its color of hair and complexion and the purpose of the dress (evening dress, sport suit, etc.).

You understand well: A pattern is the outcome of these

conditions and not a previously fixed ornamental arrangement, superimposed on the dress to be conceived.

Look! There is a charming girl, but her thorax is too long. You apply a vertical pattern, or you spread out isolated color spots on your fabric. This is entirely wrong. What she needs as pattern is a horizontal circulating motif whose width of stripes depends not on what you may have seen similar in a book or a store, but only on the amount of inches the thorax is high and of the extent of the stomach to the breast.

In general, stripes and corresponding patterns have to be applied to bodies with defects of length; that means if the legs are too long for the upper body. If the legs are too short, stripes are a fatal mistake. Irregular or repeating color spots as pattern are advantageous for lean or slim bodies. The slimmer the body, the larger should be the color spots of the pattern. For stout persons, no pattern is the best. Here we have to consider the general color as much as possible. Colors which contain yellow or red produce in us a feeling of expansion. Colors containing greenish blue diminish a volume if we like to make it less apparent. The ideal pattern in this case is the pattern created by texture.

Two different yarns used in any rhythm whatsoever will give you beautiful results. It also works well with overlong bodies. English people have a fine sense for that. Therefore you find the English weaving mostly consisting of texture and not of pattern.

There are many roads which lead to Rome, but only one that leads a weaver to a creative, new pattern. Dare a fancy! First, make your own threading. It will be always more interesting than an old outworn one, copied from a book. And you will have much more satisfaction than by slavishly copying alien accomplishments. This done, start to weave. Your first impression will be that your invention is far from being new. Everywhere, in books or in department stores, you will see again your invention. You will become discouraged.

For ages and ages, millions of weavers have been at work. How can I do something new? But you are wrong. Think of music, it has only 64 sounds, and there is no end to their variations, from Palestrina to Strawinsky.

We weavers have many thousands of sounds, our color shades. Music has only thirty-two instruments. Weavers have many hundreds of them, the threads, with their most different textures.

The truth is that in weaving, if you are not out for copying, no repetition is possible. A little bit of a different texture, a slightly different change in the warps, a different color shade one next to another, and a new pattern has been born. In time, your eyes start to see all those things better, and then you will change from your discouragement into creative courage.

Please, try this out: Make a warp of five yards. Start to weave the most different ideas on the one and the same threading. You will be astonished what variety of pattern you will obtain when you change only the texture of your yarns.

I feel it would be an omission not to mention a current which from time to time comes to the surface. I mean what

is called "adaption of folk art motifs to American design."

Ornamental motifs are not born by playing around with nice scrolls, but they are the deepest expression of human emotional rhythms, and different with races and religions. Furthermore, all those "exotic" (Hindu, Mexican, Peruvian, Turkish) motifs are born of rural populations, therefore corresponding to a rural spirit of color scales.

The American rhythm of life is quite different; this makes a fundamental difference. A New Yorker or Bostonian would never think of arranging his home in the style of the Bavarian alpine peasants, so we cannot wear any other peasant weavings, be they from Bavaria or Peru.

We come now to the problem of color. I can only touch this problem in its main points.

First, let us lay bare one of the most popular mistakes which lead to creative sterility. You can hear, very often: "I do not like blue, but lilac purple is wonderful." Like the children have to overcome the measles, a creative weaver has to overcome the sentimentalist sickness, to like certain colors and to dislike others. A color in itself, seen from the viewpoint of creative weaving, is meaningless. A color comes into being only by juxtaposition with another color. Mostly, the problem of harmonizing colors starts with the harmonious combination of three colors. It is never a question what colors you are using, but how you are harmonizing them. Seen from this creative angle, a color comes only into its full bloom when the neighbor color or colors have been put on.

Certainly, the artistic application of color is conditioned by taste. But it would be a mistake to believe that taste alone, or your taste, could solve the problem of creating and selling handwoven products. I like to approach this problem by making a few remarks and suggestions which could help weavers to sell their products with success.

The use of colors extends in two directions: Use of color as the expression of variety and taste, and the use of color as the heightening of the object's spatial expression. Let us discuss only the first form of expression in color: that of taste or variety.

Color has merely the effect of variety if we place those colors next to each other which evoke our joy in color-tones. Consequently, colors which are joined only with an eye to their variegated nature are an expression of taste. This taste can coincide with a personal preference, or it can be the favored expression of a national or regional character. The expression of personal taste determines the choice of the purchaser of a necktie, of silk stuffs, or cloths for furniture. The personal taste of the purchaser determines the color of the object.

The collective taste, either of a regional or national character, determines the coloring in folk-art and folk-lore.

We see how completely different coloring in Old-Mexican art is from that in Inca art.

If we examine this question more closely, we see that there is still another distinction in collective taste. This is, in general, the distinction in taste between a rural and an urban population. The taste of rural people in their coloring prefers a gay variety. City people prefer muted colors. Gay colors correspond to a primeval joy in colors; muted colors

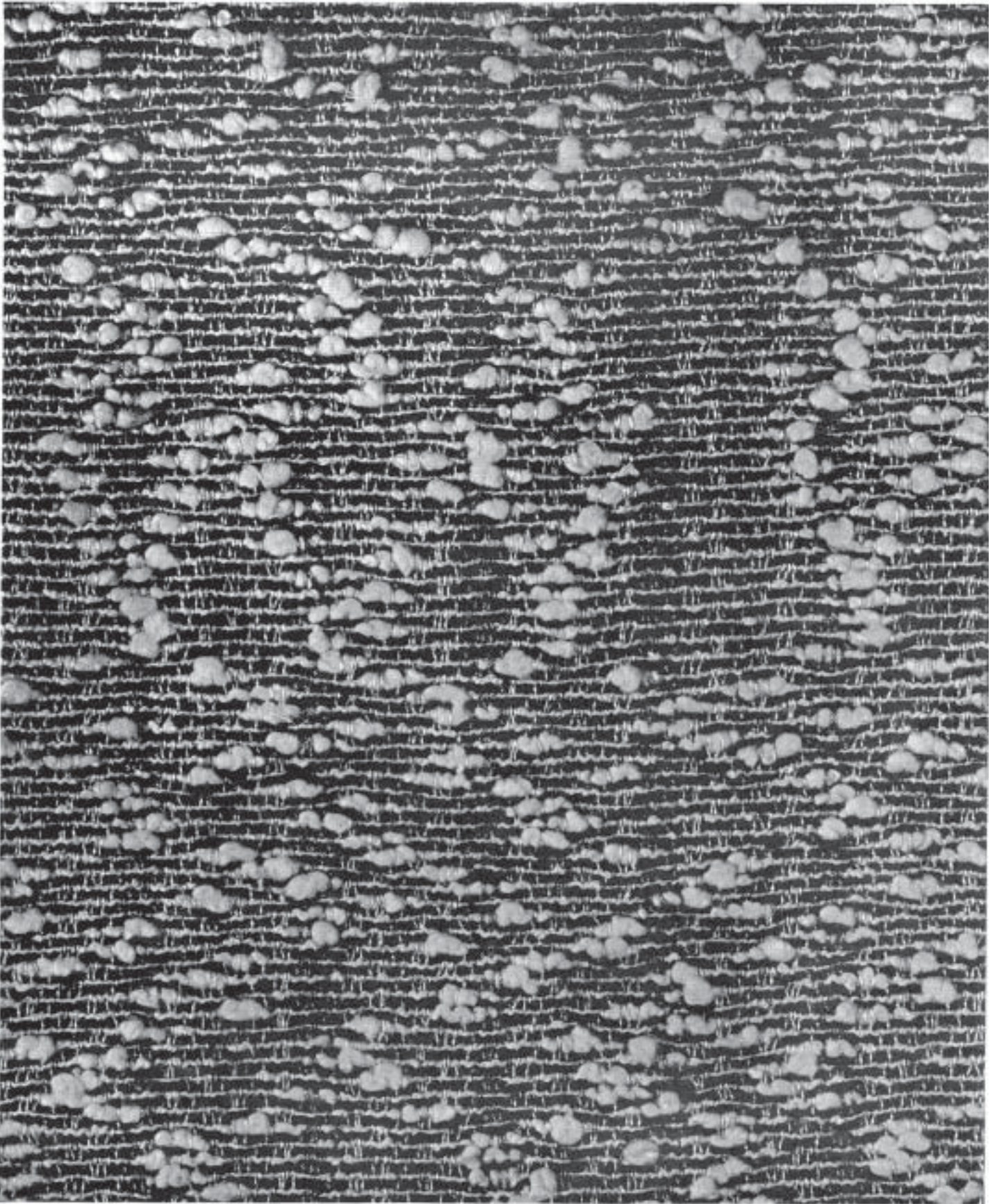


ILLUSTRATION No. 3

are the expression of a more subtle taste. Joyous colors can be seen in the gayly decorated clothing of the Slavic peasant-woman. Color as the expression of a subtle taste can be seen

in all the show-windows of stores in the city; shirts, neckties, hats and gloves are of similar colors in all their various shades. The expression of distinguished taste in the interior

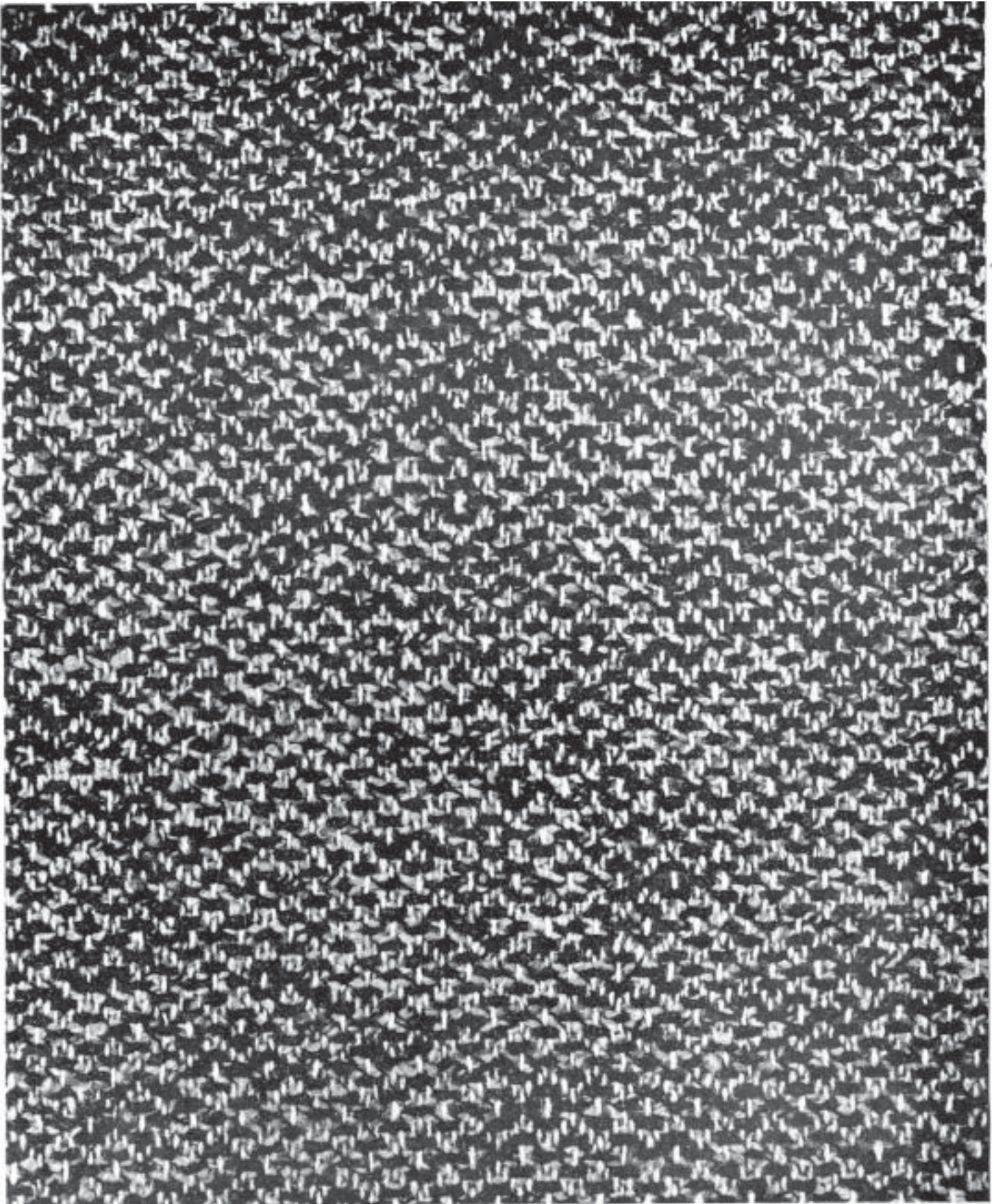


ILLUSTRATION No. 4

arrangement of clubs approaches complete monotony of colors, corresponding to an expression of impersonal boredom.

Peasant, primitive coloring is obtained by placing colors together which are strongly contrasted in value. Coloring appropriate for the distinctive taste of urban life is obtained

by placing colors together which have, of course, different qualities (red, green, etc.). Nevertheless, these qualities are of such a kind that they take away as little of the light-impression as possible from each other. To give the laws for applying these colors would lead us too far afield. Yet we see that coloring can be considered from the viewpoint of taste, both purely individual and collective. Commercially, this circumstance is made possible because of the psychosis of the masses for colors in styles. The problem of color applied to weaving is closely related to that of color as an expression of taste. The pattern of weaving corresponds also either to a personal taste or to a collective one.

The artistic means of creating ornament in patterns is based on the following:

The individual color-spots can be either formless, that is, without representational content (silk-stuffs) or with representational content (rugs, tapestries, gobelins). They must be created in such a way that the spots of color are in quantitative and qualitative harmony with each other. That means that the colors must not only harmonize in their tones. The size and the surface extension of the spots of color must also be in scale, corresponding to the character of the spot of color (necktie, dress, wall-hangings).

True creative weaving is, like true music, the expression of inner, emotional rhythms. It does not mean covering warps with pattern or ornaments borrowed from the past.

These rhythms, expressing in weaving as well as music the emotional rhythms of men, live in us today as formerly. However, on this fact is based an extraordinarily important factor which we can describe thus: Why is one pattern pleasing to the public, and another not? Why does the general public often prefer one pattern to another? Why is the pattern preferred by the public sometimes a good one, sometimes a bad one? How should patterns be designed which can be sold? You can see that these are important enough problems from the standpoint of creative patterns.

First of all, we assume that the attractive nature of the patterns to which the public has been accustomed for some times does not enter into discussion. I mean stabilized historical pattern.

The rather more important question is why the public will either buy or not buy a newly designed pattern. A weaver comes to the manufacturer with a sample. The manufacturer is as a rule helpless, because he is afraid to decide. As a rule, he never knows whether the pattern will please or not. Naturally we assume that the pattern in question is an artistically excellent one. If it is a question of a really new pattern, the manufacturer must rely simply upon some vague kind of judgment as to whether it pleases him or not. Then this excellent pattern is executed and it does not sell. What is the reason? The reason is that neither the artist nor the manufacturer knows what is really at the basis of a new pattern. We are certainly not concerned with whether the artist who produced the pattern has expressed himself in an individual creation which has taken his fancy, and which, therefore, he seeks to impose upon the manufacturer. Also we are not concerned with whether the pattern pleased the

manufacturer or not. The one and only thing that matters is whether this pattern corresponds to the contemporary, inner rhythms of the public.

If the pattern corresponds to the inner rhythms of the public it will sell, whether it is good or bad.

The public has no definite taste, because it has no definite aesthetic point of view. Whether that is a good or bad thing we cannot here discuss. But the public has, nevertheless, something which we usually pass by inattentively: the public has instinct. This instinct comes from the inherited rhythms which live in its soul. If we would only have these things in mind, if our schools investigated and discovered not only bodies and intelligence but also the spiritual rhythms of both young and old, then we would come upon very marvelous results. We would discover things which would make the future of weaving and art of national expression. Weaving will not then be engaged on the wrong track of copying, but on the living path of creation.

There are a few illustrations of my weavings.

Illustration No. 1: Material for summer dress, very light quality. The warp is Bernat Black Linen Warp and Baby Pink Perle Cotton, mercerized. The filler is made of Baby Pink Perle Cotton, mercerized, Bernat Kool-Knit, Cherry Blossom. The general effect is one of a pale wine purple with some fine dark lines. The mixture of colors fits almost any complexion and hair color.

Illustration No. 2: The texture of this material is of an unusual soft quality. It has been created for summer dresses. The warp consists of Bernat White Fabri. The filler is Bernat Gray and Black Mousseux. The effect is a vibrating white-black play of colors.

Illustration No. 3: For sport coats, summer wear. Warp: Bernat Perle Cotton in gold, yellow and white. Filler: Flammelle and Kool-Knit. The Henna color of the Kool-Knit makes with the knots of the Flammelle (yellow) a very attractive and unusual color combination, heightened by the different textures of the yarns.

Illustration No. 4: For suits and coats (fall and spring). Warp: Bernat White Fabri. Filler is Bernat Fiesta and Mousseux. Thanks to the most attractive color combinations of the Fiesta yarn, the surface of the material gives a wonderful harmony of variegated coloring. The black yarn unifies the sparkling color character of the material.

Illustration No. 5: This picture has been introduced to show the draping qualities of my materials. More and more, soft qualities are in vogue. There are very beautiful Scotch materials on the market which are less in demand because of the stiffness of draping. The materials represented on this photograph show you the marvelous draping qualities of Bernat yarns. (*See front cover.*)

The illustrations are only a few representatives of all the innumerable possibilities of pattern invention, coloring and textures. Slumbering treasures of beauty and wealth of creative weaving characterize the wonders which yarns disclose.

Look at them intimately. Combine certain yarns you think the best if put together. Then, go to the loom and try them out. You will feel happiness, the compensation of all creative efforts.