

THE EMBROIDERIES  
*of*  
MRS. THEODORE ROOSEVELT, JR.

*by*  
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**A**T THE recent exhibition of embroidery held at the Vernay Galleries in New York, the work of Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. received the award for the best piece of needlework shown. This definite recognition of fine craftsmanship and sure artistry by the jury of award, is stimulating to interest in the art of needlework. The outstanding qualities of Mrs. Roosevelt's work are originality in conception—which each of her panels shows; certain departures from tradition in the mixing of stitches to suit the movements of her designs; and the designs themselves: all interestingly modern in thought as well as in form.

The moods of her work are as varied and contrasting as her wide travels, and as universal in character. The range is as delightfully wide in theme as in technique. Her enthusiasm for work is so great that in order not to rush through a panel too rapidly and without proper consideration and study of values, another work of contrasting movement is carried along at the same time.

Upon my visit to Mrs. Roosevelt at Oyster Bay I found the pacifying work to be a portrait of Buddha worked in tones of calm grays, expressing the bas relief quality and intensive placidity of a fragment of Oriental sculpture, an intelligent procedure not only to balance opposites in composition but removing the tediousness of too much anxious attention upon an effort.

“The sampler depicting a hunting expedition of my husband, is my fondest expression in needlework,” explained Mrs. Roosevelt, “because it was the most difficult one to accomplish accurately. Each evening



PLATE VIII.

PETIT POINT SAMPLER RECORDING ANIMALS HUNTED DURING MR. THEODORE ROOSEVELT, JR.'S VARIOUS EXPEDITIONS. DISTINCTIVE FOR ACCURATE PORTRAITS OF SKETCHED ANIMALS. HUNGARIAN STITCH HEIGHTENS MOUNTAINS.

Mr. Roosevelt would examine the animal I had worked upon during the day, offering constructive and anatomical criticism until we had arrived at the proper effect for each animal. For instance, the Tamaraw, native to the Philippines, and now extinct, was worked out from a head in his collection. The body had to be designed from memory." That is where artistry travels hand in hand with imagination, supported by the always necessary research.

The Biblical quotation which stimulated the idea for another panel of tribute to Mr. Roosevelt—"Behold he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills," depicts him skipping across mountain tops with the greatest of ease. I thought his very red beard was a bit of fantasy, but Mrs. Roosevelt told me the beard was authentic as he actually grows a red one on his expeditions.

There is humor in many of the panels as well as poetry of movement and thought. These qualities are well expressed in one of her panels which shows a market scene with gay figures. In this embroidery, the stitches present an interesting contrast. The main theme is worked in *Petit Point*. The tree leaves are done in long, leaf-like, flat satin stitches in crewel stitch technique. This departure from tradition was explained by Mrs. Roosevelt as an invention to relieve tediousness. "I became tired of working continuously with the needlepoint stitch, it seemed to be flat and lifeless, so I made up a stitch that galloped." And that is just what happens to this panel, for this dynamic touch in stitchery places the leaves away from the background, gives conviction to the form, and vitality to the movement of the design.

The decorative high moment of Mrs. Roosevelt's embroideries is the large threefold monkey screen. This is a beautiful rhythmic creation worked out in *gros point*. The colorings establish great vibration in the harmonious scaling of the varying tones of blue and green. These uprights of color columns are swept across in half circle flow by contrasting the white, green, and black of the design of swinging monkeys. The screen is framed in flat silver. Although quite modern, yet it is placed at one end of the large dining-room of the Roosevelt home, where, in the company of conservative antiques it "goes." There is a relationship to the many fine decorative lacquered pieces of Oriental design in the Roosevelt home which makes a good modern feel in place. This is due to the fact that so much of what is termed modern design is culled from

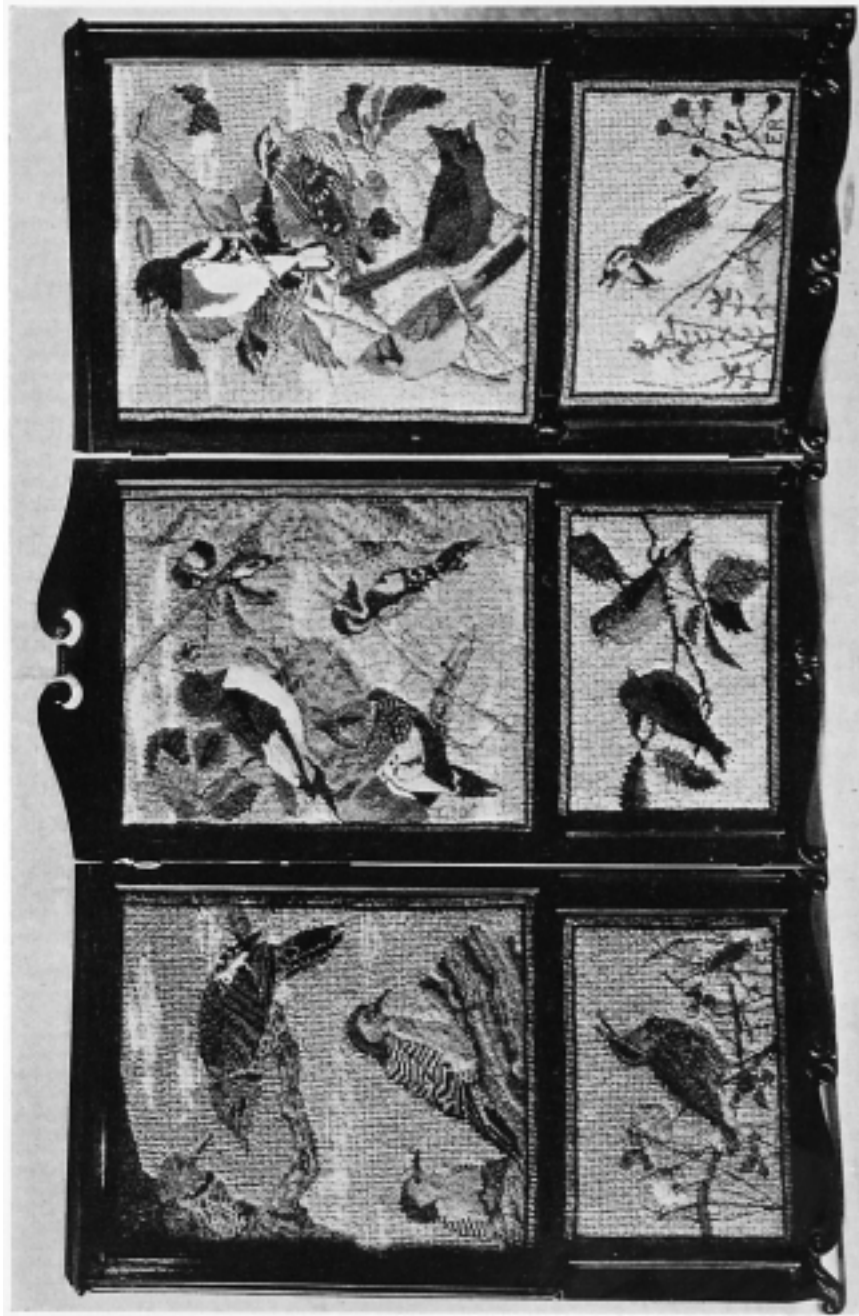


PLATE IX.  
MINIATURE TABLE SCREEN. GOLD STAR AWARD, 1934. BIRD DESIGN ADAPTED FROM OLD PRINTS AND WORKED WHILE IN VERMONT TO CHECK COLORINGS. THE REDS, YELLOWS, AND DARK GREEN OF LEAVES MAKE GAY CONTRAST IN FINE STITCHES TO THE LARGE STITCH BACKGROUND OF CERULEAN BLUE.

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the art of the Asiatics. While the screen panels may relate in feeling to Oriental or tropical forms, the technique belongs to the West. The Oriental seemed to express needlework, decoratively, in the flowing, flat stitches which found their way to us in the crewel stitch technique. Here, it is interesting to observe, that the mechanical limitation of the needlepoint stitch has given way to a satisfying movement and flow through the happy marriage of good design and excellent color blendings.

While Mrs. Roosevelt has adapted some of her works from the sketches of an artist, she has contributed much from her own feeling and experiences which the medium of needlework requires. These contributions introduced the changes in the designs which have resulted in a lovely personal and artistic success.

Great difficulty was met while working on a panel in the Philippines. Color was difficult to match when it had to be imported from far-away England. In one instance the particular robin's egg blue of the shade desired for the sky effect in the design was found to have turned to a yellowish tinge before the second half of the panel was completed. The untiring and sincere effort which Mrs. Roosevelt put into her work caused her to rip out unhesitatingly every bit of the offending coloring, substituting a reliable blue which has proved wearable. Such thoroughness is a great asset toward the perpetuation of the fine tradition which embroidery has held through the ages.

In order adequately to express the thought of our age, with due regard for that long line of illustrious works in artistic embroidery which have endured through the centuries, we need to use great thought and care in the selectivity of our quota. It seems to me that Mrs. Roosevelt is doing just that. Already there are some twenty-five needlework panels to her credit, and judging from the plans she is making for future work her contributions should be particularly interesting. Her designs will be drafted from small sketches of incident, personal experience and observation; and the result, I feel sure, will be of historical value in the study of American needlework. In pleasant anticipation, we hope we may have the opportunity to see these completed designs next season, at a one-man show of Mrs. Roosevelt's work in a New York gallery.