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# MASTER WEAVER

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Z - H A N D I C R A F T S . F U L F O R D . Q U E B E C . C A N A D A

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## MODERN WEAVING

There is a strange tendency among the younger weavers to weave only "modern" textiles. Their demands are so hard to satisfy, that perhaps it will be worth while to think a little about this subject of both "modern" and "contemporary" weaving.

Let us start with the easier problem of things "contemporary". We may assure all weavers, that whatever they weave - whether it is a copy of old chinese silk, a colonial coverlet, or a place-mat of cellophane and cat's hair - is always contemporary. No matter how hard they try - they cannot do anything else, - because contemporary means only that it has been woven in our times; except when we write and speak about past ages, then the same word means a piece of work executed in those times, because the whole expression should be always: contemporary with. Its colloquial meaning when the "with" is omitted is about the same as "present" and may extend as far back as one year when one speaks about cybernetics, or 50 years when one speaks about art. So really there is no problem here - rather a misunderstanding.

"Modern" is anything which conforms more or less to the requirements of the contemporary style, or fashion, or methods, or way of life - provided that it did not exist for too long a period of time. For instance the habit of eating, although prevailing, is not modern. However if something has been abandoned as a bad job, and then much later on re-discovered - it can be modern again. Thus Hindu Yoga is, or was modern not long ago, even if it is thousands of years old. The same can be said about so called "texture" weaving: it was "modern" some ten thousand years ago, and is modern again. With hats, length of dresses, and colour of cars it does not take quite so long. Things of this kind are modern on and off. So here we have a real problem.

It seems that most things which at any time have been called modern - do not last. The word has been used for the first time not so long ago, and we cannot think about anything to which it has been applied, and which would survive more than a decade or two. Modern physics of the 20-ties are pathetic to us, modern music of the same period became classic if it survived at all, and modern dresses as old as that are completely ridiculous.

A very small percentage of things which at any time were modern survives, but on the condition that they won't be modern any more, they become classic instead, and are generally recognised as being valuable - whether rightly or wrongly is another story.

Looking at this problem from purely statistical point of view, it seems that whoever engages in the pursuit of modernity has very small chances of achieving anything of value. His work may create sensation for a time, but it will be forgotten in a decade.

Why then the general trend to be modern. This trend is just one component of our tendency to create. To create useful and valuable things. There is creativeness even in reproducing, or copying, as long as the final product is good. But there is much more creativeness and proportionately more satisfaction when the product is improved in some way. This improved product is new, and it is modern. Thus a modern car is at least from a certain point of view better than an old model. The same applies to a modern radio, modern telescope, modern typewriter. It won't last because there will come still better, newer, and more modern products, but it has played at least for a short time an important role of a step toward a higher stage.

Thus we come slowly to the definition of "modern". It is something new and better at the same time. Not just new. In my opinion we often abuse the term by applying it to things which are only new, but in no way better. This confusion of terms results often in creating completely worthless products whose only claim to modernity is that they are different and therefore new. In technology such an approach would not work. If we designed a new car which would run only sideways, it certainly would be different and new, but not necessarily modern.

In arts and crafts such a distinction is not as easy as that. One might say that anything new is modern here. But is it? Even in pure art there must be some justification for being different, for not following the tradition. This justification may be purely subjective, but it can not be completely dispensed with. If the artist is really happier when painting one eye under the nose, he has got something, because after all people are not so completely different from one another and there is a chance that some of his admirers will feel the same way as the painter. But if he works in cold blood and tries to be original only to increase his chances to sell, he can not hope to fool all the people all the time.

In weaving the criterions are simpler. A piece of weaving must serve some practical purpose. Even a piece of tapestry hanging on the wall must conform to many requirements, besides its artistic value. And if it has claims to being modern then in some respect it must be better than other fabrics made for the same purpose. It may be stronger, or cheaper, or fit better a modern interior, or be easier to clean - but in some way it must be better. Otherwise it is only different.

There is a third category of modern weaving. This is: copying another modern weaving.

Thus we have a choice between: modern because better, modern because different, and modern because similar to another modern weaving.

Of these three the first has still only a small chance of survival, but without it there would be no progress. The second has none, and the third is too absurd to be mentioned. Copying old masters can teach us a lot, even if the copy has no value in itself. But copying pioneers who are still groping in the dark, and will be decimated before their efforts will be noticed, is not even funny.

We do not attempt to give advice to the pioneers, except that they must be equipped with perfect knowledge of both industrial and hand weaving, and of many other things from physics to psychology. Otherwise they are not pioneers at all, and they belong in the second group of those who are different for the heck of it. And anyhow who can advise the pioneers, who are supposed to be the leaders?

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## FROM THE CLASSICS

### "Of the Boiling and Cleansing of Linen Yarn."

by Alexander Peddie, Glasgow, 1822.

Linen yarn before being put into the loom, requires to be boiled for the purpose of softening and emptying the yarn of all impure substances which adhere to the fibers of which the threads are composed, and also to increase its firmness and tenacity; by which operation, the weaver is enabled to put his cloth closer together, and it also retains its closeness after it is weaved, throughout the process of bleaching. A spyndle of yarn, weighing 1 lb 8 oz before it is boiled, will weigh only 1 lb 4 oz after, which is about the sixth part lighter; and if the stuff from which the yarn is spun be of bad quality, it will empty still more; very coarse yarn is seldom boiled, as it would be expensive, but is only put into a steep from twenty-four to forty-eight hours, in order to make it soft, and more flexible for the operation of weaving.

To boil Linen yarn, first steep it among soft water for the space of twenty-four hours, then take it out of the steep, and lay it on a rack to drain off the water from it, and wring it; (and in the interim, have the boiler with a sufficient quantity \*) of Pot ashes brought near the boil,) then make it up soft, and put it into the boiler, press it down with a pole, but not hard, as that would cause the yarn to be very unequally boiled; or as it is termed among Boilers "spotted", and when the yarn is new put in, it ought to be particularly attended to, to make the fire burn brisk and strong, which will prevent the spotting in a great measure; make it to boil three hours, (but previous to putting in the yarn have an iron hoop cross warped with cords laid in the bottom of the boiler, to prevent it sitting to the bottom, and burning the yarn;) then take it out, and let it lie till about lukewarm, put it into the boiler again, with a sufficient quantity of Pearl ashes, and boil it for an hour and a half, then take it out and wash the lee out of it in clear running water, then wring it, and let it lie booked in the wrung state, and lastly put it upon poles, shake and dry it, and if the day be dry, the oftener you go over it, the better, as it tends to open the yarn, and make it clear and free.

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\*) ca 10% of Pot ashes, and later 1% of pearl ashes by weight of yarn. The difference between pot-ash and pearl-ash is that the first is crude and the second purified Potassium Carbonate.

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