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# MASTER WEAVER

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## CONCLUSIONS.

It so happens that we may write thousand upon thousand of words, and there is a complete silence - we can only hope that somebody reads our articles, but we cannot be sure. Then something strikes the right chord and there is an avalanche of response.

This is what happened with our articles about Exhibitions and about the Shortcuts. They were both in the same issue, and both provoked a very heated comment.

What they have both in common is the realisation that there is something fundamentally wrong with our contemporary handweaving. On one hand we have completely wrong weaving techniques - on the other a completely wrong appreciation of the results.

On one hand we are forced to weave on very bad looms (unless we design and build our own), and very bad yarns, vulgar and flashy - on the other juries and judges completely innocent of any knowledge of handweaving.

We all know that there is hardly a loom on the market which could be used for normal weaving without at least some corrections and alterations. We all know that there is hardly a source of yarn which could supply both the "S" and the "Z" twist for plain woolen fabrics - to give only two examples. Such conditions would be unbelievable in the 18-th century, but this is what we have to face now.

And then when we try to send our weaving to an exhibition, we find out that the jury has not the faintest notion what they are judging for the simple reason that there are too few (if any) weavers in a jury which is supposed to deliver a judgement upon textiles. And, although this may sound like a blasphemy, one sometimes wishes that the juries for handweaving were made of professional industrial power weavers.

At least they know what they are talking about, when our "artists" and "designers" could not tell a colonial coverlet from a Scandinavian damask.

But enough of this general discussion. We have already exhausted the subject in previous articles. We shall now come down to facts.

Some years ago we were invited to give a prize for handweaving by one of the largest Guilds in U.S.A. We decided on 5 years' subscription to the "Master Weaver" for any piece of weaving with more than 64 ends per inch in the warp, provided that the design will be accepted by the Guild. In due time we had our winner. The piece was a fine multi-block damask technically perfect, and if we can judge from a picture - of a very good, and quiet design. So far so good.

But... the same piece had been sent to an Exhibition, not even a particularly important one, and - it was rejected. Not that it did not get a prize, but it was rejected altogether. This is remarkable, because after all the exhibit was first passed and then recommended for a prize by a rather important Guild of handweavers, only to be condemned in second rate crafts show. It seems that what the jury did not like was that the borders of the project did not match the central theme (there was gradation used in the borders and no such gradation in the pattern). Probably if the borders matched the pattern the jury would say that the composition lacked contrast, or drama, or that it was not dynamic. You can always have it both ways. The first prize in textiles on the same exhibition went to a rug, which looks (again judging from the photograph) like a first sampler of a child of 10 who has never seen a loom before. It could be perfect in colour, but the colour set aside, even the values are pure hit-and-miss (mostly miss), and they do not follow any idea modern or traditional.

Does not this case illustrate what we have said before?

From our own experience we know that it is risky to send to a show pieces which are outstanding technically. Some years ago we have submitted several pieces woven on a draw-loom in an also second-rate exhibition in Canada. Perhaps they were not so good, but they were the only ones of this type ever made in this country. You can guess what happen. They were accepted, then tightly rolled and put away so that nobody could see them.

Why is it so? Possibly the inexperienced jury thinks that there is something fishy about a piece of weaving which has fine texture, straight edges, and an unfamiliar pattern. It looks so different from their idea of a handwoven piece. How do they know it was handwoven? Perhaps it was done by black magic. So it is safer to reject.

Sometimes the verdicts of juries are funny, but often they are not even funny. We have at hand an opinion of another jury in another part of North America. Here one of the jurors (a name nationally known) says in the "juror's comment": "To attain a modicum of success the craftsman must also be an artist". In other words the juror tries to condemn 99% of American craftsmen: you must be an artist, or else. Either the juror does not know what the words: "artist", and "craftsman" mean, or he is trying to destroy the whole American world

of crafts, the whole movement which keeps people sane in this difficult "modern" world. And of course this is not a conscious, un-american, and un-democratic attitude. It is "only" ignorance. No wonder that some 3,000 years ago Hindu philosophy condemned ignorance as the only real sin, from which all other sins derive!

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Now a few quotations from the letters received:

"This letter is to say THANK YOU for your editorial. You have stated very well what many of us had in mind for a long time. It needed to be said. Those of us who have dared to make statements along this line have been condemned and ridiculed. If I could afford it I would have you send a copy of that article to every Museum in the country. They are primarily the cause of much bad weaving..." (Towson, Md.).

"I have just completed the reading of every word of it. I am thrilled with what you have written in regard to Exhibitions. It is one of the finest things on this subject that I have ever read. I think that the Presidents of every Guild should, in preparing for an exhibit, read all of this article to his or her Guild members, and then say: "MEMBERS OF THIS GUILD, THIS IS IT". This is the way this Guild is going to conduct this exhibit. If you wish to enter any of your work on these standards we shall be more than happy to have you do so." I like the last sentence: "IT IS OUR TASK TO KEEP THE FIELD OF EXHIBITIONS CLEAN, AND WE CAN DO IT WITH A LITTLE EFFORT". (Des Moines, Iowa)

"Your May issue of the Master Weaver has arrived and I read it with great interest. Thank goodness you have the courage to throw off all the barnacles some weavers have afflicted themselves with mentally. I think this business needs someone like you with the courage enough to look at these things objectively and not be hidebound by old fashioned traditions. Thank you for your refreshing and sensible approach to our weaving problems." (Kohler, Wisc.).

"Please extend congratulations to Mr.Z. (we are often called Zee people, and we like it) for writing EXHIBITIONS in the last Master Weaver. It is good and I wish every weaver would read it."

(New Canaan, Conn.)

"In my opinion this issue contains some of the most valuable information to all weavers, and especially to those of us who have not been weaving for too many years. ... I think the article on EXHIBITIONS was extremely important. ... your article contains the truth, and certainly I, for one, sincerely trust it will have an effect on this whole field." (Salt Lake City, Utah)

We are also very glad to announce that there are many more Exhibitions which observe the rules:

"For the first time this year the jury at the show of the Pittsburgh Weavers' Guild furnished such information (explanation of the jury's decision). I have been wanting something of this kind for a number of years." (Greenville, Pa.)

Re: Smithsonian show: "We do all of the things you suggest including covering all of the names during judging... We have not given certificates before... but decided to this year. We are also adding the explanation idea. We have developed a rather simple score card, and arranged for an impartial, strange secretary to be present to

take dictation of any comment." This is done by the St.Paul Fiber, Clay and Metal National biennial...(Arlington, Va.)

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We shall close now the discussion. There is no point in repeating the same arguments over and over again. Particularly that so far not a single voice has been raised in opposition. We can only hope that more weavers will start "kicking" against unfair dealings.

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S H O R T C U T S - 3



M U L T I S H A F T

We are not going to discuss at a great length the multi-shaft looms because: 1-st - the weavers who buy them are or should be experienced enough to use their own judgement; 2-nd - the subject is too long and involved for an article; 3-rd - because we are anxious to get down to more practical matters than theoretical discussions of the merits and demerits of various looms.

This is what we can say about multishaft looms:

1. We should not invest in a loom with more than 4 shafts unless we have to, i.e. unless we decided upon weaving certain articles which positively cannot be woven on 4 shafts. Even the best loom of this type is always a disappointment to anybody who is already used to 4 shafts.

In particular we should never be persuaded to buy for instance an 8-shaft loom instead of a 4-shaft one: "because it costs only a little more, and it still can be used as a 4-shaft one". This is one of the many fallacies of our trade.

2. A multi-shaft loom can be specialised, and then fairly efficient, or built for general purposes, and then much less efficient than a 4-shaft one.

3. Specialised looms such as 8-shaft counterbalanced are good only for a certain type of weaving, and cannot be used for anything else. Thus they have a place in industrial handweaving, but are seldom of any use to a hobbyist, unless of course he can afford to buy several looms.