

ON DESIGNING FOR THE ART OF EMBROIDERY

IN every form of art the thing which is of primary importance is the question of Design.

By Design I understand the inventive arrangement of lines and masses, for their own sake, in such a relation to one another, that they form a fine, harmonious whole : a whole, that is, towards which each part contributes, and is in such a combination with every other part that the result is a unity of effect, so completely satisfying us that we have no sense of demanding in it more or less.

After this statement and definition let me proceed to touch briefly upon four points in relation to the matter, as it concerns itself with the art of Embroidery; and the first of these four points shall be this. Before you commence your design, consider carefully the conditions under which the finished work is to be seen. There is a tendency in embroidery to be too uniformly delicate and minute. To be too delicate, or even minute, in something which is always to be seen close under one's eyes is, it may be, impossible; but in an altar-cloth, a banner, a wall-hanging, this delicacy and minuteness are not merely thrown away, but they tend to make the thing ineffective. For such objects as these I have mentioned, the main lines and masses of the design should, it would seem in the nature of the case, be well emphasised; if they are

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On Design- well emphasised, and of course fine in
ing for the their character and arrangement, there
Art of is produced a sense of largeness and
Embroidery. dignity which is of the highest value,
and for the absence of which no amount
of curious workmanship will atone. In
making your design, let these main lines
and masses be the first things you attend
to, and secure. Stand away at a distance,
and see if they tell out satisfactorily,
before you go on to put in a single touch
of detail.

For the second point : remember that
embroidery deals with its objects as if
they were all on the same plane. It has
been sometimes described as the art of
painting with the needle ; but it neces-
sarily and essentially differs from the art
of painting in this, that it, properly,
represents all things as being equally
near to you, as laid out before you on
the same plane. It would seem, therefore,

to be a sound rule to fill the spaces, On Design-
left for you by the arrangement of your ing for the
main lines and masses, with such forms Art of
Embroidery.
as shall occupy these spaces, one by one,
completely ; with such patterns, I mean,
as shall appear to have their natural and
full development within the limits of
each space : avoid the appearance of one
thing being behind the other, with
portions of it cut off and obscured by
what comes in front of it. But in this,
as in so much else, an immense deal
must be left to the instinct of the artist.

Thirdly : aim at simplicity in the
elements or motives of your design ;
do not crowd it with a score of different
elements, which produce a sense of con-
fusion and irritation, and, in reality,
prove only a poverty of invention. A
real richness of invention, as well as a
richness of effect, lies in using one or
two, perhaps at most three, elements,

On Design- with variety in the treatment of them.
ing for the **Make yourself thoroughly master of the**
Art of **essential points, in whatever elements**
Embroidery. **you choose as the basis of your design,**
before you set pencil to paper ; and you
will find in almost any natural form you
fix upon more than enough to give you
all the variety and richness you require,
if you have sufficient natural fancy to
play with it.

Lastly : return again and again, and for evermore, to Nature. The value of studying specimens of old embroidery is immense ; it makes you familiar with the principles and methods, which experience has found to be true and useful ; it puts you into possession of the traditions of the art. He that has no reverence for the traditions of his art seals his own doom ; he that is careless about them, or treats them with superciliousness, or will not give the time and

pains necessary to understand them, but On Design-
thinks to start off afresh along clean ing for the
new lines of his own, stamps himself Art of
as an upstart—makes himself perhaps, Embroidery.
if he is clever, a nine days' curiosity—
but loses himself, by and by, in ex-
travagances, and brings no fruit to
perfection. The study of old work,
then, is of the highest importance, is
essential ; the patient and humble study
of it. But for what end? To learn
principles and methods, to secure a
sound foundation for oneself; not to
slavishly imitate results, and live on
bound hand and foot in the swaddling
clothes of precedent. Learn your
business in the schools, but go out to
Nature for your inspirations. See Nature
through your own eyes, and be a per-
sistent and curious observer of her in-
finite wonders. Yet to see Nature in
herself is not everything, it is but half

On Design- the matter ; the other half is to know
ing for the how to use her for the purposes of fine
Art of art, to know how to translate her into the
Embroidery. language of art. And this knowledge
we acquire by a sound acquaintance
with the essential conditions of whatever
art we practise, a frank acceptance of
these conditions, and a reverential ap-
preciation of the teaching and examples
of past workmen. Timidity and impu-
dence are both alike fatal to an artist :
timidity, which makes it impossible for
him to see with his own eyes, and
find his own methods ; and impudence,
which makes him imagine that his own
eyes, and his own methods, are the best
that ever were.

SELWYN IMAGE.