

ANTIQUITIES FOR THE CONTEMPORARY LACEMAKER

By Aurelia Loveman

Lace is, as has been said many times in a variety of ways, an arrangement of holes in space. Among the great variety of strategies invented for the accomplishment of such arrangements are the so-called "modes" and "jours" of antique tradition. The derivation of these words for use in lacemaking is obscure (Carlier, pp. 33-34). Modes refer to tiny decorative elements meant to relieve the monotony of many large holes in a design, and jours are clusters of modes. This leaves us in a somewhat paradoxical situation, since the creation of holes in space was the lacemaker's definitive achievement. Not to worry, however: modes and jours became the hallmark of value in the laces of antiquity—the more of them featured in a piece, the greater its likely price.

A good illustration of the difference in effect between a series of almost unadorned holes in a design and a similar series decorated with jours can be seen in Lovesey's "Creative Design in Needlepoint Lace." Compare the two butterflies on page 46, or the two roundels on page 105.

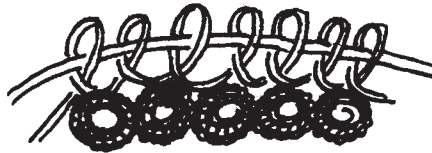
In the eyes of the convinced lacemaker, anything surrounded by buttonhole stitches is already at the acme of beauty; still, it has to be admitted that the jours give a feeling of lightness and sparkle that is most beguiling.

Carlier distinguishes classes of modes, some of which are perhaps too precious or too contrived to be useful to the contemporary lacemaker (the interested reader is referred to the discussion that starts on page 33). However, he emphasizes the ring, the bar, and the picot as fundamental modal elements, and the seed, chain, and star arrangements as basic ways of combining these elements into jours — a brilliant organizational insight which, like all great ideas, now seems almost too obvious to mention.

The contemporary lacemaker will find these traditional resources, the modes and the jours, wonderfully liberating. Having once mastered the techniques and having come to recognize the standard arrangements, the lace artist has infinite vistas opening before her.

For example, a simple circle, buttonholed all around, is brightened considerably when it becomes a frame for a series

FIGURE 1



A Chain Of Rings

of raised rings used as the only decorative element. Rings are often, but not always, made separately one at a time, then attached to the main work. The ring is made by winding the working thread round and round a ring-stick (or, in a pinch, round a coarse knitting needle). This ring of threads is slipped off the stick and buttonholed closely over its perimeter, meanwhile being fastened into place within the frame and among its neighbors. This necklace of buttonholed rings (Fig. 1) is a chained

FIGURE 2

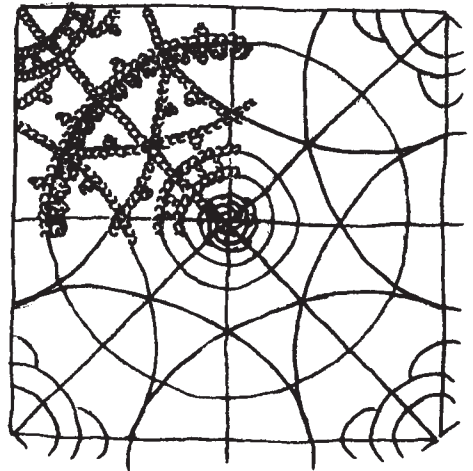


Rings On Festoons

arrangement. A slightly different yet familiar way of using such a chain of rings is to make a row of festoons around the inner buttonholed edge (Fig. 2) of the frame and then attach the chain of rings to that. Rings used in a seeded arrangement rather than a chain will often appear sprinkled over a net ground. In this case they will usually be made, not on a ring-stick, but worked into the net itself, the working thread going round and round a particular mesh of the net and then being buttonholed over.

The bar mode is the same bar known to lovers of whitework—not surprising, when one remembers that lacemaking grew gradually out of whitework, and still retains innumerable reminders of its origins. Like rings, bars are used as an interesting way of decorating an empty area that is meant to serve as a frame. Lines of thread are laid across the interior of the frame, darned or buttonholed into spokes, and used as the foundation for spiders's webs (Fig. 3). Or they can

FIGURE 3



Picoted Bars With Chained Rings

be fastened at their central crossing and a ring laid over the fastening. Or a chain of rings can be laid on top of the spokes, and a secondary set of bars fastened from the frame to the rings and back again.

The star is an elaboration of spokes, the particular version of it illustrated here being known as St. Esprit a Huit Branches (Fig. 4).

Bars need not be laid down as spokes; they can be laid at right angles to each other, in which case the intersections are usually, though not always, the focus for decorative rings. Sometimes it is the spaces between the intersections that carry the modes. Carlier (Plate 16) gives mind-boggling illustrations of this.

Rings and bars go together like fish and chips, or ham and eggs, or any of the other great combinations discovered or invented out of human mischief or inspiration. Both Carlier and Lovesey, who followed Carlier by 60 years, give wonderful examples, intoxicating to the lacemaker.

Picots are ubiquitous, sprouting irrepressibly from rings and bars and enlivening everything. The simplest arrangements of crossed or spoked bars can get the picot treatment and need nothing else (Loveman, page 26), (Lovesey, page 111). And the most com-



FIGURE 4

plex of jours can benefit too.

"The fillings," says Marian Powys, that great lady of lace and most haphazard of didactic writers, "are the jewels of lace, to enrich but not overburden the lace with ornament." And in parting she tells us one more good thing: "The secret of fine fillings . . . is to draw the thread **tight**, and pull the stitches as **closely** as possible" (Powys, page 166).



Aurelia Loveman has been making needle lace since she was four years old. Her 'Irises' won a first prize in the EGA Biennial 1988. Her 'Ortolan Pie' was on exhibit in 1988-89 at the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, and was the subject of an article in *Needle Arts*, March 1989. She taught an individual correspondence course in needle lace for EGA for six years. She is a member and past president of the Chesapeake Region Lace Guild and has been a member of EGA for nearly 30 years.

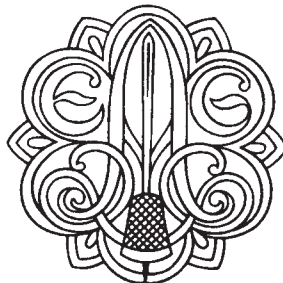
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