

The Best of Needlework Books

From *Stitchery, Needlepoint, Appliqué, and Patchwork*.

Icarus, by Norma Minkowitz—Textural and visual innovation in appliqué.

by Hazel Perper

The most enchanting and rewarding occupation that I know of is the practice of needlework. And considering the many needleworking men, women, and children one sees, and the enormous quantities of books one finds on the subject, it seems that everyone else in America is in the grip of a needlework craze. Moreover, an additional benefit to be had from that practice is seldom noted—it offers, and has always offered, a splendid respite from the anxieties of contemporary living. For example: Needleworking is a great way to shut out the welter of gibbering politicians who claim to have mislaid the wrench that opened the valves that set Watergate off and running. Thank heavens we dyed-in-the-wool needleworkers need only to open a book on the craft, and we can run off to enter a serene terrain.

Books on needlepoint far outnumber those on the related crafts. I have started with my top choices, then gone on to others I found interesting, instruc-

tive, and/or useful. (There are always, unhappily, some rip-offs; I've left the current ones to languish in limbo where they belong.)

A PAGEANT OF PATTERN FOR NEEDLEPOINT CANVAS, by Sherlee Lantz, with diagrams by Maggie Lane (Atheneum, \$25.00). Here is a big book—510 pages—beautifully designed, illustrated, written, and produced. It's rich in stitches: Three hundred fifty-one pages are illustrated in large *clear* diagrams, one stitch to a page. A number of the diagrams are two-toned to suggest color variations. All stitches are applicable to canvas mesh; many are adaptable to general embroidery. Every diagram is accompanied by a photograph of the finished stitch and a brief history of the stitch's probable origin and use. Origins range from Biblical Babylonian to nineteenth-century American. One hundred fifty photographs of historical needleworks, with fascinating text, and twenty-five color plates enhance this stunning volume. An awe-inspiring work of research.

STITCHERY, NEEDLEPOINT, APPLIQUÉ, AND PATCHWORK: A COMPLETE GUIDE, by Shirley Marein (Studio Books/Viking, \$12.95). A brand-new, excellent how-to book that fills the long-exist-

ing hiatus between the old and current forms of needlecrafts. Starting with traditional and earlier approaches to the design and application of stitches—and giving well-diagrammed and understandable instructions for both—the author goes on to demonstrate how textural and visual innovations, along with what amounted to a revolution in design and function, have brought contemporary needlecrafts into clear kinship with the fine arts. The volume includes a graphic gallery of earlier works, as well as color plates of original modern works that range from many handsones, to some provocatives, to not-so-successful and somewhat self-conscious strivings for effect. An important addition to the library of present-day needleworkers.

WOMAN'S DAY BOOK OF AMERICAN NEEDLEWORK, by Rose Wilder Lane (Simon & Schuster, \$12.50). Originally published in 1963, this classic gives complete, well-written, clear instructions, as well as dictionaries for *all* the stitches used to work thirteen different needlecrafts. A separate box of full-sized graphs, with color keys for 176 designs of works shown in the companion volume, is available at \$7.50. Looking at the 140 superb color illustrations is as exhilarating as visiting the various American museums where these treasures are preserved. Rose Lane is unequivocally on the side of American needlecrafts, and her book is a marvelous historical and visual documentation of our past needleworking performances. First-rate how-to.

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF VICTORIAN NEEDLEWORK, by S. F. A. Caulfeild (Dover, two paperbound volumes, \$5.00 each). Here is an unabridged version of a celebrated work published in London in 1882, "with upwards of 1200 wood engravings and color plates." Six hundred ninety-seven pages of text and illustrations make this work exactly what the title promises and a whole lot more. The section on embroidery, some thirty-odd pages, is stuffed with how-to information. Finding needlepoint as we know it gave me a bit of difficulty. After a diverting side trip, I found the basic stitches and diagrams under "Berlin work," which led to another cross-reference. (At one spot, I was stopped by a drawing of an odd-looking garment titled "infant's stays." Staring at the article, I finally realized it was intended to secure a Victorian infant's belly button firmly in its

Hazel Perper is the author of *The Avocado Pit Grower's Indoor How-to Book*, *The Citrus Seed Grower's Indoor How-to Book*, and a forthcoming volume on needlework, *The Adaptable Afghan*, due in the fall.

proper place.) Knitting, weaving, macrame, lace—you name the craft, you'll find it. A word on the wood engravings: Those given on crochet not only show how to apply and make the stitches but also reveal the structured form of the stitch more precisely than I would have thought possible. I urge all needleworkers, and any student or fan of the Victorian Age, to buy these two volumes. A stupendous bargain.

ROSEY GRIER'S NEEDLEPOINT FOR MEN, by Rosey Grier (Walker, \$10.00). Mr. Grier's charming designs are accompanied by clear instructions, sensible, helpful advice, and considerable enthusiasm for the craft he plies with such skill. Included is a gallery of needleworks by other men and a number of young boys. I'd like to be able to say welcome to the guild, gentlemen, but there exists a belief that the Bayeux Tapestry—1066 and all that—though designed by Queen Matilda, was embroidered by three Bayeux men who later offered the masterwork to their native cathedral.

THE NEEDLEWORK OF MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS, by Margaret Swain (Van Nostrand Reinhold, \$12.50). This handsome book reads like a calendar of historic and needleworking events in the life of the tragic queen. The author tells us that all the designs were original with Mary, and many are signed with her emblem. Occasionally, she added mottoes, some of which were said to have double meanings. The designs are dominated by heraldic devices, royal emblems, and animals derived from sixteenth-century drawings—the latter most charming. The color plates (some of which are portraits of people) show the wall hangings and other works sent to Queen Elizabeth as gifts. A pathetic mist seems to hover over the pages of this touchingly illustrated chronicle.

LEFT-HANDED NEEDLEPOINT, by Regina Hurlburt (Van Nostrand Reinhold, \$5.50 cloth, \$2.95 paper). This dandy little book—six by eight inches, 64 pages—gives information illustrated by diagrams of essential needlepoint stitches. Added notes on the use of materials and designing make it an excellent primer to launch southpaws into a field perhaps previously closed to them.

ERICA WILSON'S EMBROIDERY BOOK, by Erica Wilson (Charles Scribner's Sons,

\$14.95). I am an Erica Wilson fan. She is endlessly inventive as both originator and adapter of designs, she is a wonderful colorist, and she shares her expertise with her readers, to whom she gives detailed and applicable information in clearly written language. "True embroidery presupposes a background of fabric," says Miss Wilson. This fine, fat book covers the whole field, up to and including needlepoint as we know and practice it today. I've never seen better instructions on how to transfer a design to the working canvas or fabric.

CELEBRITY NEEDLEPOINT, by Joan Scobey and Lee Parr McGrath (Dial, \$10.00). An uneven collection of the needleworks of stars of stage, screen, and life—interesting because so varied. My favorite is a gorgeous peacock by Russell Lynes, which is worked in a kind of pointillist stitching. (Mr. Lynes's favorites are two trompe l'oeil hi-fi speaker covers.) The prettily flowered pattern on the dust jacket is by Julie Eisenhower, for her sister, Tricia.

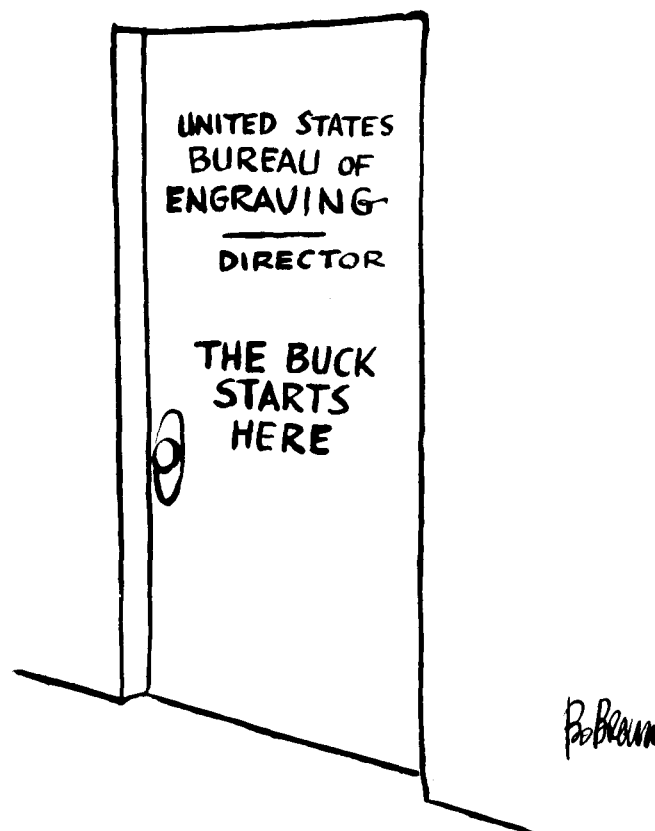
DESIGNS FOR BARGELLO, by Nikki Scheuer (Doubleday, \$9.95). The publication of a single volume on a single needlework stitch is puzzling to anyone—like me—not totally addicted to bargello. But for the passionate practitioner

of bargello, here are "sixty-two new and original patterns in full color," derived from antiquity up to so-called modern art. Good color.

FUN WITH CREWEL EMBROIDERY, by Erica Wilson (Charles Scribner's Sons, \$5.95). Although this book is supposedly for children, I recommend it as an excellent buy for beginners of all ages.

NEEDLEPOINT DESIGNS FROM AMERICAN INDIAN ART, by Nora Cammann (Charles Scribner's Sons, \$9.95). I would dearly love to recommend this book. The sources offer endless, marvelous designs, but there are only a few patterns given here. The diagrams and work instructions are jammed together and not easy to follow.

NEW STITCHES FOR NEEDLECRAFT, by Edith John (Dover, paper, \$2.00). The emphasis here is on perfecting the craft. Mrs. John's no-nonsense attitude demands everything be carefully worked and professionally finished. She is, of course, quite right. However, she also insists that needlework stitches are versatile and that designs should be as original as possible. Suggestions for work habits and directions for making a variety of practical articles are given. Nice buy, nice book. □



Books in Brief

FLYING

by Kate Millet

Knopf, 608 pp., \$8.95

Miss Millet's second work is largely about that—a second work after the first, highly successful *Sexual Politics*. It is a book full of fear about itself, about the process of its creation, and as such, it fairly disarms a reader. For fear of failure is its most interesting and comprehensive theme, and one that makes all the more ironic Miss Millet's choice of tone and style, for the self-indulgence of the former and the willful obscurantism of the latter are not the contrivances of a will to succeed. Her main theme here is, to be sure, about coming out of hiding: The book is a testament to her lesbian life, and it is voluminous in its detail. But it is hard, working one's way through Miss Millet's stream of consciousness, not to believe that it was a style chosen to mask rather than to reveal, that the impulse to hide is still a powerful one in her. Indeed, there is a strange sense of destructiveness that issues from this work, one which becomes stronger with each glimmer of the intelligence and sensibility that is visible every time a thought is permitted its full expression. Then one is aware of what has been squandered and misshapen by evasion, by the impulse to imitate the worst of contemporary journalism; that which has always offered its practitioners the illusion of freedom with a minimum of trouble. She has avoided the doctrinaire here, and the persona that works its way through at times is a richly vulnerable one. Her problem is of another sort. To render ideas complete, and to do so in straight prose, is far more self-implicating than the elliptical style she has chosen. It is a style that hints, breathes, and tells; yet its glancing impressionism is of the sort that

never requires the ego to say "I" to any of it. It is the ego that asserts itself in the declaration of a sentence, not to say an idea, and it is the ego that has been withdrawn when the fragment is so continually made to stand for the whole as it does here.

CONUNDRUM

by Jan Morris

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 174 pp., \$5.95

Miss Morris, who was once James Morris, underwent a sex change, as a great many people in the world must by now know. Miss Morris was, in her life as a man, one of England's most prominent travel writers. She is a lyrical, though somewhat moist, stylist, and while her prose is sometimes winning, one has the feeling that a good deal of old-fashioned wiliness goes into it—the sort that flirtatious women are given to and not the sort that writers confer upon their writing in order to lead the reader. It is neither a plodding book nor a dull one, but it is one whose cloying effeminacy is of a kind to disturb both sexes. Early on in the work, when Miss Morris explains the first stirrings of her feeling that she is a woman born into a man's body, she recalls her life as a nine year old in the choir school at Oxford. Oxford amplified the spirit and made it possible to nourish contradictory ideas in one's self, even of the complex sort a nine year old must hold when he believes he is a girl born into a boy's body. Miss Morris clothes the sexual conundrum with all the grandeur of Oxford. It is a tricky device, but she can evoke a place and a time of youth with skill, so that they stand before one. But the book's virtues are not equal to its difficulties, foremost among them an astounding in-

genuousness about the nature of a woman's mind. Miss Morris learns to appreciate the fact that she has become a woman, after her operation, when she discovers that her view of life has shifted. She begins to look, for example, "less for the grand sweep than for the telling detail." She finds herself "rather less interested in great affairs. . . . I acquired a new concern for small ones." It is, admittedly, only a personal view of the sexes she puts forth here. Miss Morris has come to the belief that women are the superior sex, for she says as much, and it is only left to one to marvel at the evidence she has summoned for her judgment.

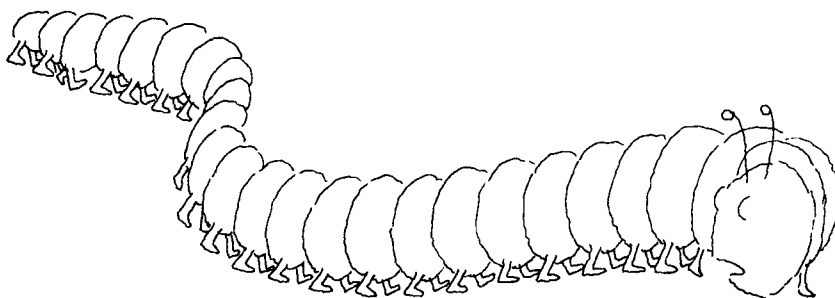
ONE SUNSET A WEEK

by George Vecsey

Saturday Review Press, 256 pp., \$7.95

Mr. Vecsey, a former sportswriter, went to cover Appalachia for *The New York Times* and found there the subject for this slight but often trenchant biography. The Sizemores are a family of eight. The head, Dan Sizemore, had been a mine foreman for thirty-six years, first as a henchman of the owners and now as a self-educated rebel against the bosses. He is a Marxist of a sort, and Mr. Vecsey has not avoided the temptation to insinuate a throb of sentimentality in his story here and there. But the book is too brief for character in depth. Its true interest is in the sociology of the mining community, the politics of the union, and the recent fight for control between Tony Boyle (convicted in the Yablonski murder) and Arnold Miller. Dan Sizemore voted for Miller, but he is, at heart, a man who has lost belief in all but extreme politics: His son went to Toronto to escape the draft, and he himself has become an admirer of Mao. The Sizemores are outsiders in their society, and Mr. Vecsey has produced a chilling document of what such alienation means in a small, closed community. Its prose is sometimes too calculated. Mr. Vecsey opts for unvarnished simplicity, and he wields it with a monotonous hand, for complexity is sometimes required when one is rendering even the simple routines of a daily life. On the other hand, because he has avoided worse things, his work is an informing and straightforward close-up of family and community.

DOROTHY RABINOWITZ



"Twenty-two's out of step. Pass it on."

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