



Modern Norwegian Tapestries

by INGEBOURG LONGBERS

Perhaps the most brilliantly executed examples of modern Scandinavian tapestries are to be seen in the new City Hall building in Oslo, Norway. Of the three heroic-sized pieces planned, two are already hanging. The cartoons are by the artist, Kare Mikhelsen-Jonsberg, and the weaving is done by Else Halling, Norway's leading authority in tapestry.

The first tapestry depicts the ancient Legend of St. Hallvard, and life in the modern city of Oslo. As the story goes, Hallvard rescued a maiden from brigands, and then was, himself, shot full of arrows, a grindstone fastened by stout thongs about his neck, and his body sunk in the harbor. By a miracle he rose to the surface, freed himself and escaped, later to be canonized as the Patron Saint who protects the Fjord of Oslo. The good Saint is the central figure in the picture, holding his distinguishing emblems, arrows and a grindstone, along with the rescued maiden; to the left is Science and Law; to the right is Drama and Architecture. Below, social life is depicted, even to children playing, and construction and industry of modern times.

The second tapestry has for its theme the breed of horses for which Norway has long been famous. It illustrates an incident in history when

a sharp altercation took place between country and city folk. The farmers had come in considerable numbers to the city, and were water-



Detail, 17th century Norwegian tapestry, Gudsbrandsdalen, showing one of Magi in "Adoration of the Magi." From Worcester, Massachusetts, Museum of Art, lent for exhibition, "2,000 Years of Tapestry," shown at Baltimore, Maryland, Museum of Art, and Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut.

Tapestry depicting famous breed of Norwegian horses, "Blakken," by Else Halling.

ing their horses at the Market Fountain, when the guards attempted to drive them away. A substantial citizen of Oslo (in white ruff at right center) intervened, taking the farmers' part, and preventing a serious quarrel.

The horses are known as the "Blakken" breed and are light buff, with dark manes and tails. They are native to the rugged west coast of Norway, in the section from Bergen to Trondheim, the cathedral city. They are surefooted on the rough mountain roads and as high spirited and independent as their owners. One of these horses is also shown in the ancient tapestry illustrated here.

These tapestries are some 11 by 16 feet in size. "Den Norske Husflidsforening" (The Norwegian Handicraft Association) had a loom especially constructed for their production, and they were woven exactly alike on both sides, after the Norwegian tradition. Miss Halling had two assistants, chosen for their skill. Only the finest fleece was used, and that hand-spun, to assure the elasticity, so essential for fine tapestry. The colors, clear and clean, are entirely vegetable dyes, and every effort has been made to attain the lustre and quality shown in the work of the Old Masters. The scene in the tapestry of the horses takes place in full sunlight, and the blending and shading of the colors to produce the

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shadows is remarkable. Norway can justly be proud of the decorations in her fine new City Hall.

To reach perfection in the weaving of tapestry is probably the most difficult work on the loom—Miss Halling will take no one in her classes in Oslo for less than a six months' course. However, with patience, love of the work, and diligent study of color blending much can be accomplished with great satisfaction and joy. Dipping into tapestry weaving is so fascinating, and opens such a wide vista to appreciation of all art, that it has become an irresistible challenge to almost everyone who has spent any

Modern tapestry, ancient legend of St. Hallward, by Else Halling.

length of time at her loom. Then, too, there is a natural pride in the knowledge that women brought forth masterpieces of tapestry in the olden days, and therefore, can be expected to achieve that distinction again. Men have certainly encouraged and cooperated with women, becoming, themselves, in many instances, great artisans, but it still remains largely a woman's art.

Tapestry weaving also leaves us free to roam in the sphere of pure beauty of color and design.

Tapestry

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swimming fish, illustrated here, is one of the earliest known pictorial tapestries, from the Near East, probably Ptolemaic period, and is now in the Musee des Tissus of Lyons, France. Here not only the swimming fish, but shadowy depths are shown. This process apparently was developed and then forgotten until rediscovered by the French in the eighteenth century. Norwegian weavers developed a method of running colors into each other called "toothing" which has the same general purpose but keeps a more distinct line.

The ancient Peruvians developed a special method of running a thin, practically invisible cotton weft from selvage to selvage between every two rows of regular tapestry weave, a practice some modern weavers find desirable. Sometimes also they added a secondary pattern superimposed by an auxiliary weft, which is really a form of brocading.

Although many tapestry weavers, ancient and modern, have improvised as they wove, a cartoon of the tapestry designs usually is made first. This may be of a size for the weaver to fasten behind his warp or a larger size to hang before him on the wall. The cartoon may be supplemented by a color sketch. Colors usually are designated by numbers and the cartoon, drawn in black and white, made within the range of the colored yarns available.

Cartoons for many of the great tapestries were made by the most famous artists of the time, often painted in great detail in water color or oil on large linen strips the actual size of the proposed piece. Some of these cartoons are very beautiful in themselves. In order to give the weaver a better guide, the cartoon outlines often were pricked with needles and then placed against the warp strings and a colored powder applied, a process known as pouncing.

Beginning tapestry weavers often are frightened at the thought of designing, but if they will begin with simple forms—many delightful geometrical motifs or formalized versions of flower and animal figures used in tapestry are theirs for the asking—they will soon find themselves at home in this medium. Artist friends may

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