

Creating works of art in thread and yarn

Good fellowship and a dedication to their craft characterize the Embroiderers' Guild

BY JUDY FISCHER
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Even their name tags are examples of the exquisite beauty of their craft, as members of the Suffolk County Chapter of the Embroiderers Guild of America meet at the Half Hollow Hills Public Library.

From delicate petit point and blackwork to bold longstitch, guild members create works of art in thread and yarn. Embroidery covers a vast range of styles, all involving hand-stitching on a base fabric. That fabric may be silk, linen, wool or cotton, fine or coarse, and each type of stitching may range from the tiny to the large.

Founded by Esther Begleiter of Melville in 1973 as the Suffolk County Extension of the Long Island Chapter, the Suffolk group was designated as its own chapter in 1975, and Begleiter still attends meetings with her fine embroidery. Members come from throughout Suffolk County, from as far east as Manorville and as far west as Melville.

As with other guilds, meetings are not just a way of meeting and greeting other embroiderers, they are also a way of learning and studying. At a recent meeting, founding member Dale So-

kolow led the members through the intricacies of blackwork embroidery, which involves stitching outlines and then filling in with fancy geometric stitches. Sokolow is a certified master craftsman in canvas and counted thread and teaches nationally.

Other guild activities have included classes in Brazilian embroidery and cross-stitch; a presentation on Japanese embroidery; a stitch-a-month, in which guild members learn a different stitch at each month's meeting and a thread exchange.

This beautiful craft has deep historic roots. Blackwork, for example, dates at least to the paintings of Hans Holbein in the 16th century. His portrait paintings show decorations on sleeves done in blackwork. Although many embroiderers still use black thread, modern blackwork is often done in other colors.

Good fellowship, workshops, an exchange of ideas, tips and techniques, and a dedication to the beauty of their craft characterize the guild. Some, like Sokolow, work in many different stitches and forms while others concentrate on one or two styles. Members come in all ages and skill levels, and the guild welcomes new members and new learners.

Veronica Wightman of Manorville was working on Hardanger embroidery recently. This involves stitching and cutting out areas that are then filled with fancy stitches. The result is elegant cream on cream embroidery with a lace-like texture. Wightman's work has been exhibited at the Margaret Pearsal Gallery in Louisville, Kentucky, at the national headquarters of the Embroiderers' Guild of America.

Guild members become involved in embroidery in different ways. Begleiter said she learned to do handwork as a student in Cuba, where it is "part of the school program. It was something I grew up with." She began her guild membership with the Brooklyn chapter, but "I moved out here and did not know anyone, and we only had one car." So she began a group that met at her house that eventually became the Long Island Chapter of the Embroiderers Guild of America.

Marge Rogers of Sayville has been "stitching for about 55 years." She began when she was ten years old and learned "about stitching from my mom and through 4-H" when she lived in upstate New York. While she enjoys counted cross-stitch, Rogers' great love is making prayer quilts for Saint Ann's Episcopal Church in Sayville. She has

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— ESTHER BEGLEITER

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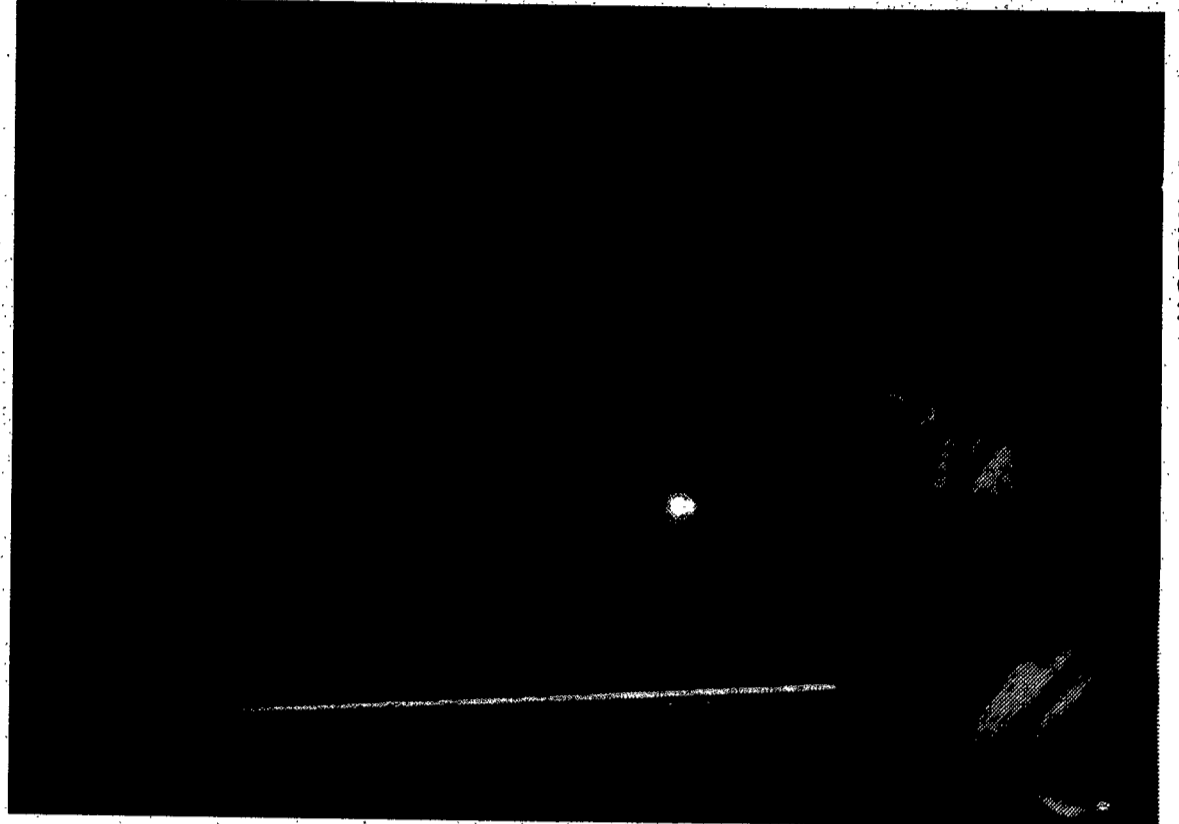
— MARGE ROGERS

'My mother had tried to get me to do needlework, but it took my mother having passed away and my finding pieces from my mother and her mother. I come from a long line of crafty people.'

— BARBARA MACCHIAROLI



Katie Morrissey with her longstitch picture of corn



Guild member Pat Conway with blackwork chessboard done by Dale Sokolow

made more than 550 quilts, which are given to people in need of comfort.

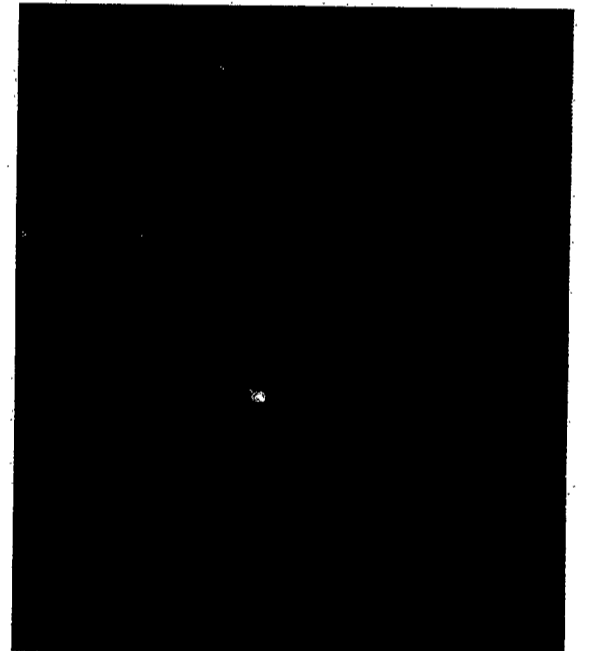
Wightman said she "was doing Erica Wilson [crewel embroidery] kits until they came out of my ears. I branched out from there after visiting a shop in New York City, and the owner asked me why I didn't join a group. I was a nurse and could join a group that met during the day."

Another member, Barbara Macchiaroli of Huntington, is of Pennsylvania German farming heritage. "My mother had tried to get me to do-needlework, but it took my mother having passed away and my finding pieces from my mother and her mother. I come from a long line of crafty people." Although Macchiaroli favors cross-stitch, "I am trying to be interested in other kinds of embroidery."

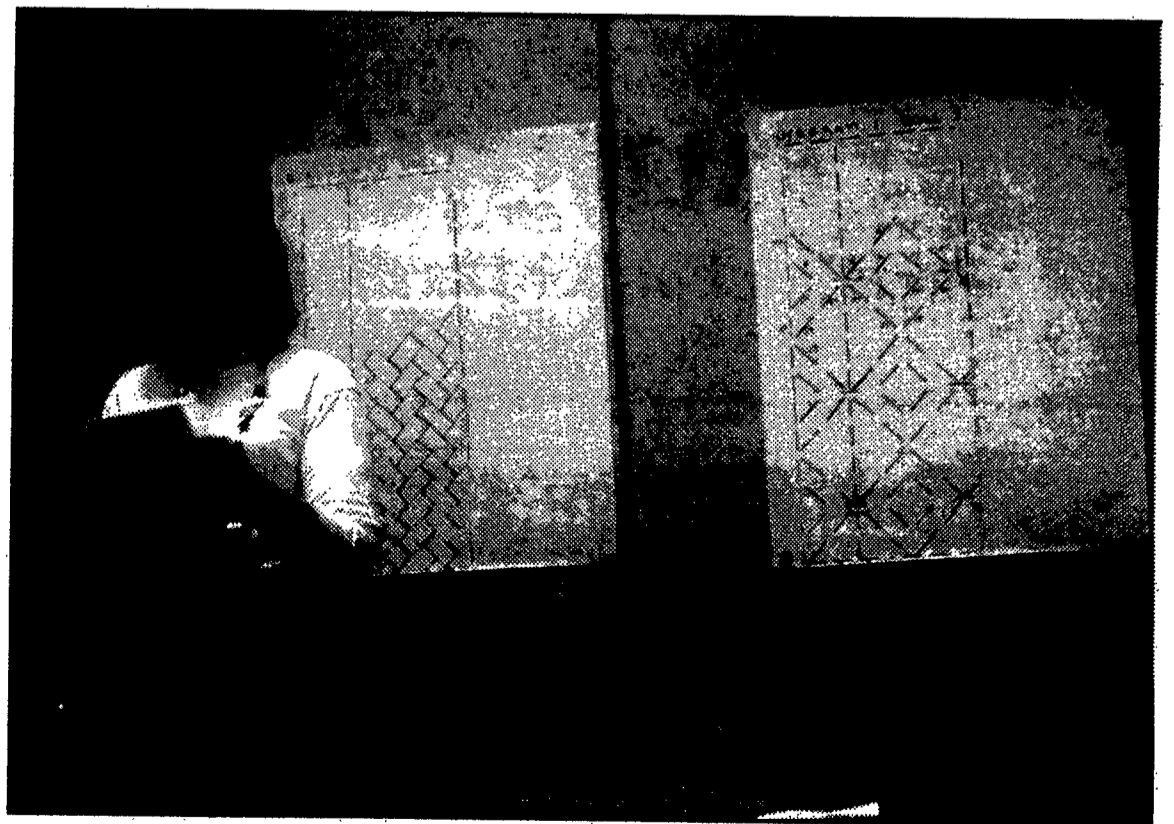
What every member enjoys are the challenges and precision of the art of embroidery, the constant learning of new techniques, and the joy of finishing the beautiful framed pieces, wall hangings, bookmarks, labels, mug fillers, napkins, tablecloths and doilies. They may struggle to understand a new stitch or a new way of handling the materials, but for these women, the ends most cer-

tainly justify the means.

The next meeting of the Suffolk County Chapter of The Embroiderers' Guild of America will meet on Tuesday June 26 at 7 pm at the Half Hollow Hills Community Library, 55 Vanderbilt Parkway, Dix Hills. All level stitchers are welcome. Call 423-3738 or 351-8569 for further information.



All photos by Judy Fischer
Veronica Wightman with two Hardanger embroidery pieces she completed



Dale Sokolow teaching class on embroidery