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Textile Original from a Barn

Virginia Wilcox
Iowa State College

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TEXTILE ORIGINALS

from a BARN

FOLLY COVE DESIGNERS

WITH a barn as a studio, Virginia Lee Demetrios began her famous Folly Cove Designs by trading an art lesson for a violin lesson in 1939.

Her first pupil was a local violinist who expressed her desire to dabble in art and came to see Ginny about teaching her. An arrangement was made that Ginny would give her art lessons if the violinist gave her music lessons. Thus it was carried on, until neighbors around Cape Ann, Mass., heard about her teaching art and made it known that they, too, would like to take lessons.

This art lesson has turned into The Folly Cove Designers, a name taken from the locality. Now registered and trademarked, they are a group of twenty-five men and women, who operate like the Medieval Guilds.

Confab of ideas

Each member of the group does his art work in his own home or studio. Then each month all the members meet together for criticism and exchange of ideas. A jury of five passes severe judgement on all the designs.

Although they conform to the general principles of design, each individual is encouraged to develop his own design and express his own personality.

Not only does each designer create his own design, but he himself carries it through the process of cutting a linoleum block or making a silk screen, mixing colors, and printing the block on the material. The designs were block-printed by foot on the fabrics.

The material, finally made, is used for tablecloths, curtains, bedspreads and dresses. Each print is blocked evenly in distinct patterns thus making it possible to take a square or rectangular piece of the material and still get a complete pattern. Because of this the designers are able to create table doilies as well as tablecloths in the same pattern.

Comes to our campus

An exhibit of the work of the Folly Cove Designers was on display in the Interior Laboratory, third floor of Home Economics Hall, the month of February.

There is something gay and spirited about the materials and the patterns the Folly Cove Designers develop. Each design tells a story in itself and each is cleverly titled.

For instance one design is called, "Which Came First?" and pictures big white eggs and little baby yellow chickens, so arranged that at a glance the pattern looks like a big daisy.

Ginny and her husband had a Siamese cat named Zaidee, who during her lifetime produced some 100 kittens. Ginny offered a table set of her hand-blocked textiles to each person who offered to take one of the kittens, so she wouldn't have to drown them. This led to a motif for a pattern now called "Zaidee and Others."

Since many of the people in Cape Ann still do home-baking, this led to the "Apple Pie" motif. Instead of a pattern of a pie or a piece of pie, the designer cleverly arranged a blossoming apple tree, various sections of an apple and finally the seeds into a pie-shaped pattern.

One family of Folly Cove Designers bought a home which was built on a steep hill. The grass was quite long and as a solution the designer bought two sheep and left it up to them to cut the grass! The designer would often gaze out the window and watch the sheep and as a result there was a new pattern for Folly Cove called "Spring Lamb."

More unusual designs

Other outstanding, clever patterns include "Football Idol," with football players, cheerleaders and goal posts; "Grand Right and Left," with boys and girls square dancing; and "Gossip," a clever pattern picturing little women whispering to each other.

Then the everlasting problem of women being overweight served as a motif for another pattern for Folly Cove. The designer started his pattern with a very fat lady and follows her along as she jumps rope trying to reduce. Finally she is thinned down as the pattern ends. The border for this design is appropriately a tape measure.

These designs and many more have become nationally famous in the past few years. They have taken their place in the art world and have made their name stand for inherent craftsmanship, individuality of work and integrity of design.

by Virginia Wilcox

Technical Journalism Sophomore

