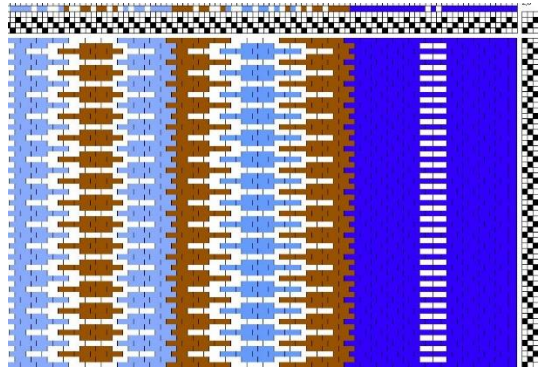


Shuttle-Craft Bulletins: Textiles from Africa

In August 1932 and February 1934, Mary Meigs Atwater wrote about textiles from Africa sent to her by Shuttlecraft Guild members. These were sent from 2 very different regions and done in very different weaving structures. The first one, from 1932 was sent via a pattern of a striped piece woven in heavy linen in an unusual warp-faced weave from Egypt, found in the Victoria and Albert Design Museum in London. I've drafted one repeat of the pattern here:



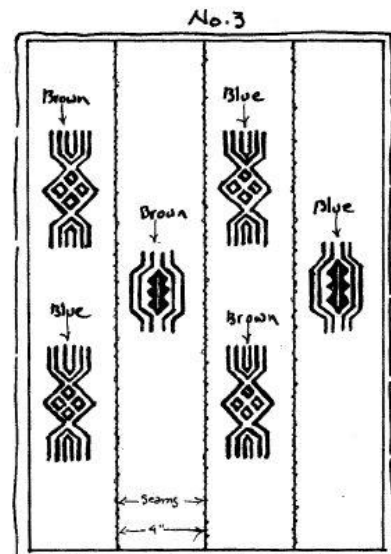
Mary wrote that this old weave held very delightful possibilities for modern weavers; done in heavy linen, it would make a lovely table cover, done in silk or fine wool a handsome bag, in heavy rug wool an excellent rug. Mary wove it up herself in rug wool and offered to send samples to Guild members. She wrote that there were not many warp faced weaves in American weaving and it was a field that would be valuable. The pattern requires only 3 harnesses and she provided a draft with 2 different tie-ups. The warp set up takes more time, but the weaving goes quickly. She wrote up instructions for a small rug and provided a weft faced version, similar to Krokbragd, with stripes running weft-wise. Mary wrote that the simplest things in weaving present the most varied possibilities and require the greatest skill and ingenuity.

In 1934, a Guild member sent three different pieces of weaving to Mary from Sierra Leone in West Africa. The first was tapestry, done in an interlocked weave with simple geometric forms similar to Navajo weaving. The second, Mary called "inlaid" weaving done in coarse colored cotton over a foundation of plain weave. It is done on a twill threading, with the inlay pattern shed formed with every fourth thread in the warp. Mary wrote that the technique would not be adapted to elaborate figures or fine materials, but should be used for bold, splashy effects. This technique is illustrated well by Laverne Waddington on her blog on backstrap weaving:

<https://backstrapweaving.wordpress.com/tutorials/tutorial-supplementary-weft-patterning/>

Mary found the third piece in the Bulletin to be of most interest. She called this technique a simple but effective form of pickup weaving and gave several illustrations of what could be done with it. She thought that the weave would be produced with a series of six shed sticks, typically used with backstrap weaving. This technique consists of weaving a pattern weft across parts of the pattern only. It is woven over a background of a densely set, fine warp. Here is one of Mary's illustrations.

The weaving is done in narrow strips and then sewn together. Mary called the figures primitive and thought them very similar to those used by the modern designers.



She wrote: "Modern art makes the effort to return to simple and fundamental ways of looking at life and succeeds in a measure."

Mary found this manner of weaving to be well done and very effective. She thought that it would be a simple matter to devise interesting figures and suggested designing them on graph paper before weaving. She gives instructions for weaving them on a loom using a 4, 6 or 12 shaft version.