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La dentelle
à l'aiguille

Title Page:

Brigitte Delesques – Dépalle

La dentelle
à l'aiguille

Métiers, Techniques et Artisans
Créer

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To Olivier, Baptiste
And most particularly Charlotte
who reflect, I hope, the needle
which made me dream so much...

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Foreword

Before the beginning of this work, I want to thank all the people who gave their time to me as an opportunity to discuss, then deepen the fabulous techniques of needlelace as well as bobbinlace, and who transmit them today to all those who have the passion.

- Madame Geneviève, director of l'Atelier National d'Arts textiles, professor in the textile department of the l'Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs de Paris, who was my thesis director in 1977.
- Monsieur Jean Coural, administration of the Mobilier National, who opened the doors of the Ateliers Nationaux to me, where I was introduced to the different stages:
 - o Stage in bobbinlace, under the direction of Madame Mick Fouriscot at l'Atelier national du Puy en Velay
 - o Stage in needlelace, under the direction of Sister Marie du Sacré Cœur, at l'Atelier national d'Alençon, where Madame Guimard was my professor.
- Madame Nadine Gasc, Conservateur of the Department of Textiles and Costumes at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs de Paris, who opened the collections to me.
- Madame Eliane Laurence, director *actuelle* of the Centre d'enseignement de la Dentelle aux Fuseaux, who encourages me even today to return to work and publish this book which will, I hope, finally permit enthusiasts to create in a little explored field.
- The following persons who have graciously opened to me the collections for which they are responsible: Véronique Belloir at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs à Paris, Maggy Boulagnon at the Centre d'enseignement de la dentelle aux fuseau au Puy en Velay, Annie Fouillit at l'Atelier Conservatoire national de la Dentelle à la main, Marie Héléne Guelton at l'AEDTA in Paris, Aude Pessy Lux at the Musée des Beaux Arts et de la Dentelle à Alençon.
- Brunto Coulombeau for his computer support.
- La Société d'Encouragement aux Métiers d'Arts which supported me financially during my formative stages, aide without which nothing would have happened.

The quintessence of needlelace lies in the transparence and the perfect freedom of the creator to evolve.

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If the sensations born from the practice of bobbinlace are apparent to those who weave upon seeing the plaiting, those born from needelace to me come close to a child's pleasure in coloring (even if it is a difficult art). Bobbins guide the threads which form sometimes the ground, sometimes a motif, all with fluidity. The needle draws the contour of the pattern with precision, then fills each motif completely with stitches of different densities.

Today, several artists use this technique for the elaboration of their works.

In writing this book it is not a question for me, to pose as an artist. The final purpose to which I aspire is to share the knowledge which I have had the privilege to obtain, and to not only be a catalyzer in the creation.

Before beginning the technical study of needlelace which can perhaps be supported by contemporary research, it seems inevitable to begin with a short historical and sociological study of what this lace was over the course of centuries, in order to locate oneself in time as a knowledgeable creator.

I do not address the styles of lace or the art of their identification in this work, because other works have already done this, particularly the very beautiful book of Anne Kraatz ("Dentelles", 1988, Adam Biro) which benefits from sumptuous illustrations, necessary for a sometimes difficult subject, and which can be hazardous to the eyes not used to it.

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I

Origins

If certain authors place the creation of lace in the 15th century, others explore the existence of closely related practices in even earlier times. Those techniques which one can assign to lacemaking were originally employed for utilitarian purposes: prehistoric man of our countries made filets and collets, the same as the ancient Chinese and Egyptians.

With the evolution of civilization, a more decorative than functional use developed, notably in dress

The Egyptian excavations in Antinopolis uncovered the remains of textiles probably made with braiding techniques using bobbins. The Copts could have passed this knowledge to Italy at the time when Egypt became a Roman colony. These techniques only needed pretext for resurgence in the 15th century.

In Paris, the rich collections in the Musée de l'homme, studied by Raoul d'Harcourt, offer numerous examples of pre-Columbian textiles.

These civilisations used four types of needle-made nets :

figure 1 – the simple réseau

The simple réseau, made with a single thread twined or knotted to itself.

If the simple net used in Peru is not found in European laces, the following nets were used in the execution of the laces of Venice, Alençon or of Brussels :

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pb 1 – Peruvian textile with long tufts of brown wool imitating hair or fur (Peru, south coast, Musée de l'homme, Paris)

pb 2 – Fragment of a needle-made net in wool, back view (Chili, Atacama desert, Musée de l'homme, Paris)

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The réseau 'point de Tulle' is used in several places : it is found in the coastal regions of Peru, central and south, either as a cotton cap designed to support hair for a wig, or to form ornaments and embroideries at the bottom of clothing, or even to form the interior or embroidered motifs.

figure 2 – the point de Tulle réseau

Certain Chinese "embroideries" of the 13th and 14th centuries used this réseau, the thread being stitched into the cloth only at the extremities of the rows formed by the buttonhole stitches. The réseau is worked only from left to right, the return thread passes along the reverse of the cloth in one big step. A change of

figure 3 – Chinese embroidery

color of the thread is thus possible for each row, and allows subtle shadings (see the magazine Orientations, August 1989 'the monthly magazine for connoisseurs of Oriental art, Hong Kong)

- *The present-day Point gaze, made of simple buttonhole stitches, can be seen in the photograph of a small Peruvian bag (ph. 6, p. 15)*

Figure 4 – point de gaze

- *"Point de Venise", This is in effect the stitch that one finds in the work of Venice in the 15th century. The stitch was used to make the "remplies" parts, or solid parts of the work. Faces of certain figures found in tombs along the central coast of Peru are made this way.*

Figure 5 – the point de Venise

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Excepting hunting or fishing nets that still exist, we can see the processes already used to make needle-made nets, principally to ornament clothing, perforated or opaque.

In addition to the possibility later exploited by lace, creating designs by changing stitches, these techniques offered the means to produce forms in three dimensions (which we can call "molds"), as for example, a bonnet. Modifications of colors in the course of work were equally possible.

pb 3 – Purse made of a buttonhole réseau. (Peru, southern coast. Paracas region. Musée de l'homme, Paris)

pb 4 – Purse made of a buttonhole réseau. (Peru, southern coast. Paracas region. Musée de l'homme, Paris)

Among all the possibilities offered to creators, lace "born" in the 15th century was an object of limited choice, dictated by the fashion of the époque, a choice which has perpetuated itself up until our day : a simple fine thread, anonymous, serving only to transpose most faithfully the design into a textile. If such a choice seems to us arbitrary and limited, it is inconceivable to deny the technical developments that followed.

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Pb. 5 – Ornamental funeral coiffure (Peru, southern coast. Paracas region. Musée de l'homme, Paris)

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pb 6 – Small purse. Peru (Musée de l'homme – Paris. Inv. 64.86.227)

pb 7 – Woolen figure, ornamental piece of polychrome wool. The head is in "Point de Venise" réseau and "buttonhole" stitch. The body consists of tassels simulating arms and legs. 22 x 22 cm. (Musée de l'homme – Paris. Inv. 64.86.221)

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pb 8 – "Christophe Colomb" 1993. Silk, copper, lovebird feathers, 61 x 32 cm.

Following the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus in 1492, the colonization of aboriginal peoples resulted in the extermination of the so-called "primitive" civilizations, who in reality possessed a highly valued artistry made possibly by the use of advanced techniques. (*pb. studio Jeanne Trévis – Le Puy*).

Pb. 9 – "La pêche miraculeuse" 1994. Needle-made Réseau of knotted filet, silk and cotton.

The pattern of fish was inspired by a Coptic fabric of the 3rd century (collection of the Musée des tissus de Lyon), itself influenced by roman mosaic art (*pb. Brigitte Dépalle*)

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pb. 10 – Embroidered Filet, 333 x 120 mm. century (collection of antique laces in l'Atelier National du Puy-en-Velay)

Illustration 1 – Punto in aria (Design taken from a lace in the musée Crozatier, Le Puy-en-Velay)

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II

The renaissance of lace

Under what form and why did the technique of lace made with a needle reappear in the 15th century?

The need for or the taste for a certain type of cloth in an époque determined the use of this type of work.

The geographic origin of this rebirth undeniably returns to Venice, premier center of needlework production. Different forms of decorated embroidery followed: drawn thread embroidery, cutwork. Then came needlelace.

Whitework embroidery

Open whitework embroidery was used for pieces which needed frequent washing, because gold or silver embroidery as well as polychromes made of vegetable dyes easily ran.

Despite the use of these complicated techniques, a certain monotony often occurs. Two ways were developed to perform this work: drawn thread embroidery, and cut thread embroidery.

Drawn thread embroidery

Threads are drawn from the base cloth, keeping only those necessary for support, connecting them with embroidery stitches.

Drawing more and more threads of both warp and weft, one then thought to use a very loosely woven cloth: Quintin. Its name comes from the Breton village where it is woven (Bretagne was a great center of cloth production in the Middle Ages).

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The meshes of this light cloth were enlarged more and more until it resembled a veritable net. This is what is called, in France, lacin. Lacin is then ornamented with various embroideries: Some small square are filled with point de reprise or other stitches to obtain, considering the work as a whole, a more or less geometric pattern according to the scale of the mesh. The work could be done in small portions.

Cutwork (Le point coupé)

While drawn thread embroidery results in lacin, cutwork is filled directly with needlelace, with stitches found in two forms:

- In the first, certain spaces between embroidered motifs are cut from the cloth. The embroidered and cut parts, initially less numerous, are, with time, brought more and more close together. For example, earlier a flour is worked on a blank ground cut in the ground, later the motif is in openwork.
- The second is worked with a needle in buttonhole stitch where the designs are composed of geometric figures connected to each other with brides. This work is executed on cloth from which certain parts are cut when the work is finished, finally obtaining the openwork.

In cutwork isolated threads are drawn from the cloth and **sectioned**, this produces a very large scale in reticella. Little thread remains to serve as a frame. It relies on needle work to form the pattern. Punto a reticello is a very fine type of cutwork.

Finally, woven fabric is dispensed with completely. The framing threads are fixed on a rigid support. The intervals are filled

pb 11 – Point coupé. (Collection of the centre d'enseignement à la dentelle du Puy-en-Velay)

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Illustration 2 – Punto in aria. (pattern taken from a lace in the musée Crozatier. Le Puy-en-Velay)

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according to the desired pattern, with more diverse and ornamented stitches. This is punto in aria. We have now arrived at pure lace.

In its ornamentation, cutwork is a prisoner of the straight lines of the framework with right angles stemming from the remaining cloth. Punto in aria, more free, allows the inclusion of wrapped lines, such as in garlands.

Lace made with a needle (needlelace)

Punto in aria produces a form of textile corresponding to the following definition: cloth of open ground, entirely made by the work of a lacemaker.

In the 17th century, the garlands were broadened, grand floral forms and a heavy relief appeared, this was the punto tagliato a fogliama or Gros Point de Venise, followed by point de Rose, Rosellino where the garlands and the flowers were much reduced in size.

Implanted in France at Alençon, thanks to Colbert, the technique was perfected there until it reached its apogee under the reign of Louis XIV. Since then it has not really changed, except that the fine réseau of Alençon has replaced the picoted brides of point de France.

Patterns and styles

Artists were interested in the techniques just discussed very early on, and published several highly successful books which achieved a large distribution made possible by the recent invention of printing. The same designs could be used for filet, lacis, also called réseau with counted threads, and quintin.

It seems that the oldest of these works appeared in Augsburg (German7) in 1523 under the title "Furm oder Modelbuchlein". It survived until 1545 with 33 editions and reprints.

Other works found the same success, such as:

- those of P. Quinti in 1527 at Cologne.
- those of Tagliente in 1528 (29 Venetian editions).
- those of Nicolo d'Aristotile, in 1530.
- those of Le Pompe, about 1557 at Venice.
- Mathio Pagano published numerous works where the idea of support was more and more abandoned.
- those of Dominique de Sera, in 1584, the first work published in France (plats by Jean Cousin).
- those of Vinciolo, in 1587 (20 editions).
- those of Jacques Foillet in 1598, at Montbeliard (more a French style).
- finally those of a Roman woman, Isabetta Catenea Parasole.
- Three books of Danieli, of Bologne, where the

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patterns follow the baroque style of Louis XIII.

England also did several publications.

During the reign of Louis XIV, Le Brun and Berain designed original patterns for Alençon which could then moved away from the Venetian compositions.

One could easily follow the evolution of lace styles by examining portraits of grand persons who are painted dressed in their finest laces. This evolution is equally valuable for the ornamentation of cloths, furniture... (see the table below).

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Style Table

Classical	1550	Henri II (1547-1559) Catherine de Médicis (d 1589)	Drawn thread embroidery, cutwork Lacis – Réseuil – geometric Quintin, symmetric
Mannerism	1600	François II (1559-1560) Charles IX (1560-1574) Henri III (1574-1589) Henri IV (1589-1610)	Gothic – bobbinlace (North) Curves – needle <i>Continuous movement without symmetry</i>
High Baroque		Louis XIII (1610-1643) Regency of Anne of Austria (1661-1715)	Large garlands (Gros Point de Venise) Narrow garlands (Point de Rose) (same evolution in style for needle and bobbinlaces) <i>Start: continuous movement - “rivers”</i> Opulent geometric forms – progressive development of the ground through inclusion of motifs – quite opaque
Late Baroque	1700	Louis XIV (1661-1715) Regency of Philippe d’Orléans (1715-1723)	Milieu: no movement – reappearance of the axis of symmetry – vertical accentuation; Narrow and symmetric garlands (candelabra style) Symmetric flowering branches fill the ground <i>End: taste of movement</i> Separation of the form and the background <i>Symmetry</i> – tendency toward a reunion of form and background.
Rococo Baroque	1750	Louis XV (1723-1774)	<i>Rococo</i> : oscillates between symmetry and movement. Clear separation of form and background – appearance of the réseau fin of Alençon and the modes needed to relieve its monotony.
Classical	1800	Louis XVI (1774-1793) Revolution Directoire Napoléon I Louis XVIII (1815-1824) Louis Philippe (1830-1848)	Accentuation of the vertical – symmetry – small motifs emerging strongly from the ground, Disjoint garlands: speckled tulle Rigid designs – floral motifs without variety arranged along the border in uniform rows – <i>united field</i> – Little or no modes
Baroque revival	1850	Napoléon III (1848-1870)	Return to the style of Louis XV with foliage interspersed with small bouquets Shading effects in Point d’Alençon

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pb. 13 – Counterpane in filet brode (pb. R.N.M. Musée d’Écouen)

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pb. 14 – Punto in Aria, detail of acounterpane (pb Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris)

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pb. 15 – Cap said to beong to Charles Quint (pb. R.N.M. Musée d’Écouen)

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*pb 16 – Four motifs to decorate an altar cloth, beginning of the 20th century
(pb. Centre d'enseignement à la dentelle du Puy-en-Velay)*

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III

Around Lace

Where are the artists of the present day located?

With the exception of the Ateliers Nationaux in which are preserved and conserved the technique in its purest state, it is hardly conceivable today to think of exercising the art of the lacemaker in an independent fashion and, therefore, fully earn a life in making laces whose utilization has been reduced to those pieces executed in preceding centuries.

The contemporary lacemaker, if not content with a leisure activity, although completely respectable, must be a creator. She must break the constraints that were justified over the years during which time this technique supported a lucrative industry.

We will examine successively what that meant for the fabrication of lace, for the workers, the fabricants, the intermediaries, the merchants and finally those who used the end product.

For love, for love of God!

We realize the difficulty engendered by the creation of lace and the very long time that its execution takes. Working with extremely fine thread needs, in addition to good vision, an immense patience and a great ability to focus : sometimes the work reaches almost seventeen hours in a row.

It is therefore indispensable to be extremely motivated.

For the love of a man

As we relate the legend of the birth of Point de Venice as given by Miss Bury Palisser :

"In the islands of the Lagune there still lingers a tale of the first origin of this most charming production.

A sailor youth, bound for the Southern Seas, brought home to his betrothed a bunch of that pretty coralline (Fig. 20) known to the unlearned as the mermaid's lae. The girl, a worker in points, struck by the graceful nature of the seaweed,

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*pb. 17 – Dress for an infant or a church statue: mixed lace, needle-made brode. Spanish? End of the 17th century.
(pb. R.N.M. Musée de la Renaissance, Écouen, Ecl 9283)*

with its small white knots united, as it were, by a "bride," imitated it with her needle, and after several unsuccessful trials produced that delicate guipure which before long became the taste of all Europe."¹

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For the love of God

Very often from the shelter of the convent, in which one was free from exterior cares, the lacemakers was permitted in the future to consecrate herself entirely to her work, particularly during the experimental phase, where one makes, undoes, remakes, pursuing without discouragement a precise idea which cannot take concrete form without a long period of execution. More, the result could be totally disappointing.

One can conceive thus a mystical feeling forming the basis of such a willingness to work, which will not necessarily lead to a result redeemable for cash.

If one always searches to create more beauty and more richness to realize the greatness of one's faith, the offering of such works of art to statues of saints strengthens the richness of the Church,

The interest of the Church is therefore two-fold:

- Riches and power

¹ Transcribed from Palliser, 4th Edition, 1902. Palliser uses the word 'taste', but she probably meant 'toast'.

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- Moral occupation particularly of gentlewomen, which can easily be controlled while teaching them an art which will ensure their subsistence.

Restrictive Laws

How did lace develop so rapidly from the state of a religious textile needing a grand fervor on the part of the executor, of whom it demands a very long, hard time of work, to that of a textile used in profusion and which is an object of the most excessive extravagance?

In France, certain pilgrimage shrines, like Le Puy en Velay, one of the departure points on the road to St. Jacques de Compostelle, big draws for jubilees or pilgrimages, were very important not only for pilgrims but also merchants and particularly for haberdashers (see the chronicles of the Medicis).

This procession rapidly turned into fairs and people came to the holy places not only for pilgrimage, but to buy merchandise such as passementeries, embroideries and laces, not to make an offering, but for personal use.

These haberdasher merchants, who traveled extensively accompanied by their families, brought the first points de Venise back to Italy. These points then knew a great vogue in France.

This infatuation led to such unreasonable extension and led to the kings Henri IV and Louis XIII to impose restrictive laws. But, if these imposed a certain morality in forbidding the exhibition on the part of the nobles of such a profusion of luxurious objects, they also deprived a great number of lacemakers of employment.

The sumptuary edicts followed one another, 1629, 1633, 1634, 1636, 1639, 1640, 1660, always too ineffective because the consumption of lace continued unabated, causing capital to flee abroad in order to obtain the most beautiful laces in fashion. Colbert, in giving work to the French people through the royal manufactures, re-equilibrated through this effort, the commercial balance.

Establishment of the Royal Manufacture in Alençon

In this region of Normandy, cutwork was made for a very long time (it permitted young girls to gather a very important dowry). This facilitated Marthe Barbot, called La Perrière, the imitation

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of point de Venise for the first time in France, which was then very much in fashion at the Court, and for which nobles spent considerable fortunes outside French territory.

A letter from Favier du Boullay, intendant of the region of Alençon, to Colbert dated September 7, 1665, reported that the imitation of this art is rapidly expanding in the region. The drafting of this letter was motivated by very violent riots which were engendered by the creation of a Manufactory, with an exclusive privilege of 10 years, which compromised the future of the local production.

... La Perrière, already expert in these works (cutworks), several years ago developed the means to imitate the points de Venise with such perfection, and did not depend on foreigners. Each collar is sold for 1500 to 2000 livres.

The students then teach it to others and form their own workshops : "8000 persons work in Alençon, in Sées, in Argentan, Falaise and in all the surrounding parishes, as far as Fresnay, Beaumont, Menars (today's Mamers?). Even children as young as 7 years old have found a way to earn their living and others to feed their fathers and mothers and entirely sustain their families; Old people work at it to earn their keep. But what must be considered is that in all the parishes the tally is only partially paid immediately when the work is done, when a buyer is found the rest is paid. That is what presently creates misery, because all sorts of people do not own the works that they want to do, and the children are frustrated and turn away, because they are not clever enough to work on the very fine points ; and all of them who earn their lives and their subsistence will never get there, since they are accustomed to working the larger points, of which nevertheless they have at present a debt ; openly they are resistant to these establishments (manufacture du point de France) believing that they earn their bread and the means to pay their debt. The little bergerette of the field work their tasks."

What was Colbert's vision in organizing such a Manufacture?

If it was only to intervene on economic consideration, it would have been sufficient to levy a customs tax to penalize importations.

But it must be said that the artistic level of the French production was very inferior to that of certain foreign countries, and that France could never offer the consumer a product that could compete with point de Venise, for example.

Therefore, Colbert decided to establish the manufacture of Point de France in several cities where a pre-existing lace industry offered a favorable field of action. The manufacture of needlelace or bobbinlace, with privileges, were established in Aurillac, Sedan, Reims, Le Quesnoy, Alençon, Arras, Loudun, etc... Certain of these, despite the efforts of Colbert, failed.

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When in Puy, the consuls, to whom Colbert proposed the manufacture in order to improve production, responded that it was the very coarseness of the work that assured the flow of commerce. With the most beautiful merchandise, the high price would not attract any more foreign merchants. Le Puy therefore benefited only from exemption from taxes.

To teach the lacemakers all the processes, workers from Flanders were brought for bobbinlace technique, and from Italy for needlelace. Now these last, when threatened with death for leaving their country, and their families ran the risk of confiscation of their

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possessions, were received by the population of Alençon with insults and blows. Despite all the advantages which the manufacture offered to future workers (higher salaries, liberal apprenticeships: young girls in pension for three years, with workshops in the countryside to avoid having them travel), the director could only engage 700 workers instead of the 8000 provided for : the population of unemployed was reduced with the help of merchants, quality houses, and convents, through a resistance movement done in secret and illegally.

Despite this very understandable resistance, the manufacture prospered. The shareholders multiplied and profits increased. However, Colbert did not renew the privileges when they expired in 1675 : the funds were made and paid out. The purpose was obtained because without help, the French workers could compete with foreign products which also suffered in quality, as for example, Venice.

The imported laces were considered countreband (ordonnance of 1684). Certain manufacturers personally tried in vain to recover the name of the royal manufacture.

The organization of work

The working of needlelace is done in several operations. The distribution of labor was broken up geographically in order to assure the fabrication secrets (no worker knew how to execute any portion of the work other than their own), and it was more possible to get a great facility which could only be had by automation of hand movements. This specialization was transmitted from generation to generation.

Thus the entoilage was executed in the communities of Laq Lacelle, Carrouges, Ciral. Pré-en-Pail : the rempli at Roche-Mabile : the modes and brodes at Damigny : the brides at Argentan...

The work could also be done in an atelier, in charitable communities, or in hospitalier establishments.

The fabricants

Their role is roughly the same for all the lace manufacturers, bobbin as well as needle.

They concerned themselves with the choice of patterns. At Alençon, the fabricant had a happy influence on their taste. They were no longer content to just copy, but searched for an expression which better addressed the taste of the country.

The principal fabricants each had their own designs. In 1680, they received authorization to prosecute copiers. They made an appeal to artists, but those did not know the art or its constraints, th pattern needed retouching, sometimes so much that they lost interest. The fabricants produced them if possible themselves, or made an appeal to specialized designers. The designs were made by men.

The intermediaries

These are of two sorts : one managed the communication between the fabricants and the workers at home: the other were the equivalent of representatives of today's business, the fabricant could not make contact with all the houses which sold lace throughout the entire world.

The factors or the leveuses

We have seen that lace spread over vast regions since it offered peasants a supplemental income during the time between agricultural work. The fabricant, incapable of

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Designs 1 to 6 – 1560 - 1565 – 1580 – 1610 – 1625 - 1629

spending their time on the routes between the diverse villages, let such collection work to persons, most often women, which were called 'leveuses' in le Velay, and 'factrice' in Normandy.

These intermediaries (generally old laemakers) received instructions from the fabricant, who charged them to execute the order by women chosen for their knowledge of techniques, to allocate the pieces, to provide supplies (making a slight profit), to monitor the advancement of the work (they were responsible for mistakes and delays directly to the person who gave them their task). A price was agreed on with the fabricant, and they were charged with paying the workers as agreed, sometimes with abuse.

When the fabricants were important they did not do business with a single intermediary, but with a series : principal agents, regionally and locally.

In the times of the royal manufactures, the country bureaux were monitored by committee, and were paid daily, yearly, or on commission.

The commercial intermediary

We understand that commerce in the rich laces was delicate. These forced the fabricants to use a broker to whom they gave a commission when they sold the works entrusted to them. But most of these agents did not know the value of the lace which they sold, and, since they worked with several manufacturers, there were often misunderstandings that lead to lawsuits.

A contract with a fabricant mentions 2% commission which was not much since brokers faced many risks and were forced to undertake long trips. According to an ordinance of 1673, they had to take oaths (post bond?) and keep records of the goods they were given to sell.

The use of such intermediaries seems to have been abandoned after 1808. At that time business was not flourishing and the fabricants did it themselves. It was the practice for a long time instead of using a broker, to have a house in Paris.

The commerce

Business was not immune from politics and events of all kinds affecting the country.

Colbert, of course, was interested in the business of lace : he organized a protective system (tariff of 1667). He encouraged investors to found a new *Compagnie des Indes* in 1664. The King encouraged his subjects to participate, according them privileges, even for the nobility which would not forfeit titles by engaging in commerce. Despite these advantages, the number of investors was not sufficient. The King had recourse to his authority to bring the most recalcitrant nobles into the company. The merchants and the fabricants were not the only ones to occupy themselves with the sale of lace, during their stay in Alençon, officials took workers with them to execute works which they had ordered.

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Designs 7 to 12 - 1630 – 1670 – 1680 – Fontages -1685 – 1710

The revocation of the Edict of Nantes gave a great blow to the fabrication of lace, not because the manufacturers had emigrated as was previously discussed (they were in the majority Catholics), but because there was more trade abroad than in France, because of internal struggles, the wars which devastated Europe and the misery that followed. The rich protestant buyes took with them the fruit of their capital.

The protestant religion was attacked even though it facilitated business in India through the Company.

Several lace fabricants were ruined by the Scottish financier John Law and his system of bank bills.

Moreover, to be involved in lace commerce it was necessary to have a large reserve of money, since clients, if they liked to adorn themselves, dragged their feet to pay. The merchant must make advances to the workers, and no one agrees without guarantees. In Alençon the business is in the hands of women whose husbands were prosecutors, lawyers and balifs... Several nobles such as d'Ocagne, saw the lace industry as a means to reconstitute their fortunes compromised by the wars of religion. The trade also had to face foreign competition, and, although each country defended its borders by restrictive laws or heavy tariffs, frauds were numerous.

Miss Buy Palliser enumerates several:

"When the body of his Grace the Duke of Devonshire was brought over from France, where he died, the officers, to the anger of his servants, not content with opening and searching the coffin, poked the corpse with a stick to ascertain if it was a real body m: but the trick of smuggling in coffins was too old to be attempted ; forty years before, when a deceased clergyman was

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*conveyed from the Low Countries for Internment, the body of the corpse was found to have disappeared, and to have been replaced by Flanders lace of immense value- the head, and hands, and feet alone remaining.*²

Another sort of fraud was practiced between Belgium and France: *“At a certain time, Belgium introduced much lace into France in fraud with the aid of dressed up dogs. The dog was fed handsomely in France, then taken to Belgium where he was chained, abused, and barely fed. After a time the skin of a larger dog was fitted on it, and the intervening space stuffed with lace. The dog was then released and made its way back to France with its cargo, guided from the memory of better times. This maneuver was repeated until eventually French customs was alerted and took steps to stop it ; but it lasted several years, and from 1820 to 1836, no less than 40,278 dogs were destroyed, after a bounty of 3 francs per dog was offered.”*

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Type of Lace	Period of Production	Centers of Production	Motif Laces executed
Venice	16 th century 17 th century 1665 18 th century 19 th c : 1845 1872	Ragusa (Dubrovnik) Venice (Burano) Venice Alençon Belgium Venice reduced arrived in Burano attempts at revival	Fast pattern, geometric Straight lines in the work With drawn threads and cutwork Reticella Gros Point de Venise Foliated scrolls, heavy borders Point de Rose : small motifs lightly embellished rosettes in relief copies of antiques
Imitations	Beginning of the 20 th century		Swiss and Saxon work (chemical embroidery)
Point de France	1665 Louis XIV	Alençon Alençon and royal manufactures Argentan	Imitation of Gros Point de Venise and Rose Point Point Colbert accentuated with picoted or plain brides
Point d’Alençon Point d’Argentan Point de Sedan	Louis XV Louis XVI Revolution Empire 2 nd Empire Beginning of the 20 th c End of the 20 th c	Alençon Sedan descent revival of Alençon Alençon survival	lighter, rivers and bouquets appearance of the modes seedbed, antique inspiration fast, repetitive Motifs in the style of Louis XV, lighter Attempts at shading Maintain the techniques at the Atelier National d’Alençon
Point Gaze or Point de Brussels	18 th century Louis XV 1786 Beginning of the 20 th c	Brussels Brussels, Malines Almost all Brussels Brabant, Gand, Audenarde, Grammont, Alost Termonde	Design in mat Jours : chainettes, boulettes, Étoiles, rosaces Cordonnets along the contours, Pattern obligatorily light because the ground is not very resistant Roses, iris, marguerites, peonies

² Taken from the original English Palliser work, a somewhat longer quote than used by Dépalle.

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Ground	Thread type	Thread size	Aspect	Utilisation
bars	linen linen cotton	Very large medium and downy	Flat that of crochet a lot of relief	Products of the convents go to the church <i>frilled edges</i> Collars, sleeve ruffles, reserved for nobles 19 th c : women's dress: collars, berthas, inserts, flounces, rabats, quille, Various garnitures Expensive : not for furnishings Very good imitation Apparel : collars, insertions, Furnishings, decorations on net
barrettes large réseau, more and more regular at first picoted, then without picots then twisted réseau fin	linen	fine	sumptuous	Large flounces, collars, cuffs, cravats, lappets, sleeve ruffles, <i>tournantes</i> Priest's rochets Winter lace for the nobility Furnishings at the court
réseau fin	linen	very, very fine n° 300 to 6000	Light, very <i>much</i> in contrast <i>nervous</i> contour	small shawls preference for muslin, gauze <i>vomants</i> , cravats large flounces, wedding veils small medalions, corners of handkerchiefs State gifts, orders from the Mobilier National
brides réseau The réseau is no longer executed at the same time : Point d'Angleterre	Cotton	Very fine N° 25 to 300 thread and 420 to 440	Resembles Point d'Alençon with less work vaporous	flounces, dresses, shawls always feminine toilette wedding veils, large flounces handkerchiefs umbrellas, rabats, scarves fans and other garnitures

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Designs 13 to 18 – 1740 – 1750 – 1775 – 1780 – 1789 – 1805 chérusque

Salaries

If the commerce in lace flourished for the fabricants, it was less so for the lacemakers, except in the Alençon region. The only revenue available for women and children were manual laor and laundry washing. One can understand why the lace industry had such a success. The lace of Alençon demanded a perfect quality of execution, and the earnings were a little more than those of other regions. Thus, at its appearance in 1659, young girls who worked at it, could accumulate an important dowry from their work. These larger salaries were maintained during the époque of the Royal Manufacture, which had in 1665 8,000 workers in Alençon (1/10th of the population) and in the surrounding environs.

If the salaries seem to have been high during certain époques, it is necessary to know that the length of the workday was sometime abusive.

Here, for example, are the terms of a contract of employment in 1664:

Summer : start between 4 and 5 AM

Winter : 7 AM

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End of the day at 10:30 or 11 PM

That is 16 to 17 and a half hours of work each day, with 2 to 3 hours for a meal.

Use of lace

We have seen that the first use of lace as it appeared in the XV century was religious. When the cutworks appeared, this was replaced by dress ornamentation, and since then laces have had an ever-growing success leading to frightening abuses by the nobility as they swallowed up immense fortunes. Louis XIII, under the impetus of Richelieu, whose purpose was to lower the nobility, published the edict of 1629 in which it says, *“all other ornament on collars, cuffs, or other linen of point coupés, laces, passements and other pillow made works for men and for women, manufactured in the kingdom may only have a value of 3 livres”*.

The edict was in vain. Laces were put everywhere, collars, cuffs, gloves, breeches, boots, pieces of furniture, carriages... it was said : *“The great sell their lands to wear lace and women lose their minds”*. As we have seen previously, the new edicts

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succeeded each other without much success, the last having inspired Molière to have a replica of Sganarelle in *“School for Wives”* :

*oh! three and four times has this edict
by which the luxury of clothes is prohibited
sentences for husbands will be more if large
and women will have a brake to their requests
oh! I know the good king grants these decrees
and as for the rest of these same husbands
I wish we had the coquetry
of lace and embroidery*

At the court of France, Louis XIV accorded an important place for this luxurious textile; it is above all a mark of wealth, therefore power. The nobles perpetually outbid one another.

It is not limited to masculine or feminine clothing, but anything is garnished with the richest lace, mixing styles, origins, without preoccupation of the functional aspect : toilette table, bathroom. Even servants were covered with it (*berceuse* of the Duc d'Anjou, nurse, *teneuse*...). It suffices to contemplate portraits of the époque to see the display of riches. Under the reign of Louis XV the réseau fin of Alençon appeared which lightened the style of lace. Etiquette demanded that in winter one must wear points, very rich and sumptuous, very stiff, and in summer laces made on the pillow, light, supple, airy. For men, the wearing of long hair was abandoned for the frilled collar bordered with passements, for the rabat collar garnished with *point Colbert*. Fashions changed, however less fast than today, and a work of lace could be transmitted from mother to daughter without seeming out of fashion. Certain fashions were born from an accidental negligence : the coiffure à la Fontage came about when that duchesse lost her hat during a hunt and tied up her hair with a handkerchief garnished with Point de France, which was remarked on by the King. The same with the fashion for cravats a la *Steinkerque* born following a battle in which the princes carelessly knotted their cravats.

Under the name *pleureuses*, long sleeves turned back over the hand, and young cheaters could make their cards disappear. When they were worn flat, the laces were very opaque and the design sumptuous. Little by little, they were worn flounced, and the design became simple, the function being that of a tulle. It was this aspect that Marie Antoinette appreciated, a charming aspect, not magnificent.

The Revolution condemned the wearing of this textile, which was noble and dangerously luxuriant.

Under the First Empire, Napoleon, desiring to reestablish a rich etiquette, very much appreciated lace, for which he made great commissions. The neo-classical designs were stiff and repetitive. Under Louis-Philippe, during the Second Empire, lace was again much worn with a very floral style of design. Pieces were big : the *Point de Bruxelles*, more vaporous than that of Alençon, was appreciated as well as black *Chantilly* bobbinlace, for which the first mechanical imitations appeared in 1833. Lace does not wait for cheap imitations to be popular : at all times, the peasants save significant funds to afford a real lace cap within their means, but which does not allow them access to the most expensive pieces of needlelace.

The appearances of the tailored suit and hat marked the end, in clothing, of artistic lace made by hand, lingerie is content with valuable mechanical imitations.

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Attempts at renovation

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At the beginning of the 20th century, the luxurious etiquette of a court no longer existed to give employment to the lacemakers of the countryside, these preferred the higher salaries offered by factories in the city. Towards 1900, in Alençon, 200 lace workers made a precarious living.

Attempts at renovation were successively organized. But the purpose was not the same as that of Colbert in 1665. It was a moralistic attempt to prevent the depopulation of the countryside and keep families in their homes.

Honoré Bayzelon, in his thesis, explained the attraction of the city for young girls who could not stay on the family farm, it well describes the ideas of the époque :

“those with some education are leaving the underpaid jobs that the government has reserved for women, others go to the city; the happiest eventually get married, producing abundant offspring, but doomed to an incurable misery and degeneracy : others, abandoned to themselves, without support and strength succumb to temptations and do such as is deemed irreparable to degrade and place themselves outside the framework of regular company that facilitates many falls and disqualifications, but which never completely forgives... could perhaps the peasant industries, if they exist and are prosperous and able to provide a sufficient retribution, retain in a protective family in a healthier milieu a great number of these women or young girls who cannot use their arms for working the land?”

These attempts at renovation which took place in diverse countries (Italy at Burano, Austria, Sweden, England...) took on the appearance of good works patronized by ladies of high society.

The deputies were equally involved as they show us in a plea dated 1903: *“Lace is good for everyone. It employs the feeblest hands and uses all spare times. Good for the country, it allows workers to leave their trade to work in the fields when needed ; for the family : women will stay in the villages and men can raise a family without emigrating: for health : it does not crowd women and girls together in unhealthy factories.”*

The attempts at renovation which survived focused on training with little concern for artistic character and outlets for production. We see them only under a sanctimonious air. M. Drouet said as much in his work *La dentelle en Normandie*, dated 1913 *“To revive the demand for luxury lace enough to revive the trade, we should educate the female population, teaching classes in the different lace stitches annexed to the schools, and encourage the use of various genres, in publications showing the work of women, so as to penetrate the thoughts of the mothers of families, the idea of making lace with a needle, bobbin, or with a very fine crochet hook, rather than this or that fantasy work without utility or special charm... Furthermore, the natural production of lace thus fabricated, it would be appropriate to organize the sales of these articles at charities and take advantages of lotteries or raffles at Christmas, cotillions, to offer the works of debutants large and small...*

... In a charming article by l’Eclair, titled La mode in Paris, Madame Annie advises women, with a certain persuasive elegance that they have a secret, needle works, embroideries

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pb. 18 – Detail of a point d’Alençon, (pb Musée des Beaux-Arts et de la dentelle – Alençon)

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pb. 19 – Atelier de dentellières à Argentan. Mason Lefébure. (pb. Centre d’enseignement à la Dentelle, le Puy-en-Velay)

The international exhibitions at the beginning of the century were the inspiration for superb creations, in both technical and artistic quality.

pb. 20 – Central motif of a tablecloth, a copy dating from the end of the 19th century, of an ancient reticella

(pb. R.N.M. Musée de Cluny)

L’Æmilia ars de Bologne made a similar copy in 1913.

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by way of intelligent occupation, hygienic, physically and morally, in salons of all kinds, and especially in the most aristocratic mansions : it is not possible, concluded Drouet, to express a thought more noble, more philanthropic, and more patriotic.

In terms of artistic character, some confined themselves to copies of ancient models. So well that sometimes, especially in Italy, there was a false trade in antique lace that was artificially patinated : starting with the best moral intentions, but a diversion into this route was very profitable.

Breaking with the sentimental patterns of the 18th century, the Bauhaus began designing lace according to its style.

In 1914, the war was fatale to the renovation movement born in 1903. Whereas in Puy, bobbinlace center, the director Pierre Farigoule died, and the students of the school of Alençon were abandoned by the fabricants. Competition from machine lace was blamed. Johannès Chaleyé, who led a new revival movement in 1942, denied this. While certain handmade laces, simple in

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most cases, could be disposed of, certain other combinations of bobbinlace (like with needlelace) could not be duplicated by machine.

Unhappily the hand labor was not qualified enough. He also denounced fabricants of the period who assisted in the disappearance of the use of lace on clothing, and did not know how to reconvert it for furniture with new designs : blinds, curtains, table linen, centerpieces and placemats.

Johannès Chaleyé died on February 1960. The Departmental Conservatory of hand made lace disappeared with him.

In 1974, Mick Fouriscot saw her efforts rewarded and became present of the New Conservatory of Handmade Lace, whose purpose was : *"Maintenance of tradition, practice and teaching of handmade lace. Safeguard the lacemaker's heritage: pillows, bobbins, tours, patterns, pins, demi-aunes, plaques, chaleils, and all the material that belongs to the art of lace with the view that they would form a regional museum."*

The Conservatory spread over the years to various cities in France. The financial aid of all kinds was cited.

On July 1, 1976, the State created l'Atelier Natinoal whose unique purpose as to safeguard techniques at their highest level, the production of official lacemakers by returning for guardianship to the Mobilier National, for the patrimony and to provide official gifts. A similar Atelier was founded in Alençon where the school created by the Chamber of Commerce in 1902 had managed, despite many difficulties, to maintain and safeguard the technique in all its quality.

The Centre d'Enseignement of handmade lace n Puy, retained its freedom. Eliane Laurence, who succeeded Mick Fouriscot in 1992, thought to link the apprenticeship of needlelace with that of bobbinlace, thus opening doors wider to its creation.

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pb. 21 – Fan, in mixed lace technique; (pb. Centre d'enseignement à la dentelle du Puy-en-Velay)

pb 22 – Fan in Point de Bruxelles ; (pb. Centre d'enseignement à la dentelle du Puy-en-Velay)

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Le Point de Tulle

Before studying in detail the different phases in the creation of a traditional needlelace, we should mention the corrézienne lace which has very happily been safeguarded over the course of centuries.

The practice is done in two phases : first a square meshed filet is executed, knotted at the four corners (a technique which was known since remote antiquity) of which each side only measures 1.6 mm to 2 mm.

In the second pass, the meshes are embroidered according to a very precise pattern of work.

In the 17th century, the Point de Tulle is held in esteem at the court of Louis XIV thanks to Etienne Baluze, a favorite of Colbert.

Over the course of the centuries, the manufacturers who produced it, knew the highs and lows of fashion.

Very happily, the technique has been preserved until our day and is now definitively safeguarded in writing. (Le Point de Tulle, Suzanne Delmas-Marthon, 1990.)

pb. 23 – Point de Tulle "Autumn Wind", Suzanne Delmas-Marthon

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Execution of the réseau or filet

This is made with the aid of a fine iron shuttle around which the thread is wound, and a gauge or template of steel, wood, or bone (cylindrical or flat) that will determine the mesh size.

1 – Form a loop at the extremity of the thread, and fix it with the aid of a pin on the working support.

Keep the gauge between the thumb and index finger of the left hand. Pass the thread behind the gauge, index, middle, and ring fingers, and pass it behind the middle and ring fingers. Then slide it under the first joint of the thumb. Figure 6

2 – Bring the thread down behind the four fingers. In front, the shuttle is slid upwards into the loop surrounding the hand, under the gauge and then passed in the starting loop. Figure 7

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3 – *The shuttle is pulled up by releasing the thumb, middle and ring fingers. Only the little finger keeps the last loop. Tighten until a knot is formed at the top of the gauge. Now press the index finger against the gauge. Release the little finger and strongly tighten and draw the shuttle toward the bottom – the first mesh is formed. Figure 8*

4 – *Place the gauge under the thread and make two meshes in the first mesh : for the execution of a square piece, start at an angle and increase, then decrease a mesh in each row.*

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The embroidery

When the filet is finished, it will be ornamented with embroidery stitches forming a more or less geometric pattern. To facilitate the work, it is mounted on a rigid framework which will keep the meshes open during the work.

The technique of tracing the pattern is absolutely different from that of filet brode. That is executed with counted stitches in the horizontal and vertical sense with the help of a pattern formed by staircase lines. For the execution of Pont de Tulle, it is imperative that the chosen motif be placed on an angle under the réseau, so that the lines of the pattern are curved or straight. These lines are thus traced in a continuous fashion on the réseau. The borders they define are filled with different stitches made with a needle. Numerous stitches are possible, having for a basic model, one or more square mesh :

- Flat points de reprise, where threads are laid parallel in the direction of the base filet.
- Circular work around a node on an angle
- Reliefs with stretched threads, of the style “*point d’esprit*”

The point de Tulle uses six embroidery stitches :

- the coarse
- the **legal**
- the rosette
- the point d’esprit
- the picot
- the cordonnet

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IV The creation of a needlelace

There are two ways to approach the creation of a needlelace.

In the first case, the thread first reads and deciphers the pattern, then assists the idea of the dominate base.

In the second case, it is the thread that writes, which expresses its freedom, its material, its color.

In the two cases, the technique is at the service of the expression. This leaves us to address the different stages of manufacture, and the different stitches that we can use for the realization with the needle. Since I personally had the chance to study the technical phases which I will describe in the following pages at l'Atelier National d'Alençon, it is unthinkable for me, as well as for those who will come to use them, to call the results of these creations Point d'Alençon. That name is reserved solely for local production, executed with a particular thread of great fineness (linen thread n° 6000), and using a strictly defined style. With a few variations, the techniques used in Point gaze or de Bruxelles are similar, except for the simpler ground, the brode which is replaced by a cordonnet, and several different fillings. The thread is coton, larger than the linen of Alençon lace. In the first half of the 20th century, works were done with much larger thread of cotton or linen, designed for use with furniture, buffet cloths, table centers, napkins... But the use of color was rare, and the third dimension nonexistent.

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Design technique

The design of a needlelace traditionally is made with ink on a simple paper. In addition to the constraints of fashion of the era, the designer must respect those imposed by the lace execution as well as by those of the future use of the work. It must meet a limit of solidity and dimensional stability : it must, if possible, predict the rempli fillings within the borders of the work.

In an atelier, the pattern is produced in triplicate :

- One for the pattern record notebook
- One which is given to the worker so she can more easily follow the curves of the pattern, these are not always very legible on the parchment pricking which supports her work. With this guide, she works with the designer or manufacturer to decide which stitches to execute in each part of the pattern, eventually designated with letters (this method of design only came into service toward the end of the 19th century thanks to P. J. Baume).
- The third copy is used to prick the design (pilage)

Square, 135mm x 155mm, by Mme Hildeova Palichova, Checkslovakia (collection of old laces of l'Atelier National du Puy)

A little humor: "The Leeks", design for needlelace, B. Dépalle

Preceding page: pattern for point d'Alençon, B. Dépalle, reduced scale

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Pattern reproduced from a pricked parchment (19th century, coll. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris) (scale reduced 90%)

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Le piquage

The support for the work must undergo very intense handling, it must be made of a material both supple and resistant.

For the traditional fine needlelaces, one uses parchment : first used in the times of Gros Point de Venise, a calfskin parchment, hence the name 'velin' has been retained for Point de France, and 'velineuse' for the worker. The name is still in use even though calfskin was rapidly abandoned (it was incompatible with handling threads of extreme fineness) in favor of the more supple sheepskin.

The leather is tinted green, which is a restful color for the eyes, and easier to follow the path of the white thread.

To execute the piquage of the pattern, one fixes two or three parchments stacked together on a hard cushion. The pattern is solidly pinned to the parchments, and the pins must be equally precise through the three layers. For this one uses a steel pin mounted in a vice. Care must be taken throughout the operation, keeping the pin perfectly perpendicular to the surface of the pattern so that the spacing between holes is the same through the three parchments. Care must be taken in placing the holes about a millimeter and a half in Point d'Alençon, at angles, and at each point where two lines meet. Two consecutive holes too close together can cause a tear in the velin, too far apart will create too long a stitch.

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More recent creations have abandoned parchment, which becomes too costly for works with less fine thread. After the beginning of the 20th century a fine waxed cloth called 'architectural linen', which combines a lightweight, flexible handling with a smooth side which prevents the needle from unintentionally penetrating the support.

Stitching at this point has become unnecessary, since the execution of the 'trace' which builds its stitches directly according to the pattern traced on the support.

For contemporary work, all this disappears: piquage, trace and bati.

The thread is king, and the artist dream support.

Scale reduced (75%)

Pattern reproduced from a pricked parchment (19th century, coll. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris).

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Photo 26 – Work in progress of a lace in the Renaissance style, beginning of the 20th century (coll. of the author)

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The preparation of the work

Preparation of the support

In the case of a traditional lace on parchment, architectural linen, or waxed cloth (for working with very large threads), one fixes the support with the aid of running stitch through two layers of coarse cloth. The lace will be freed when finished by cutting the threads of the trace with the aid of a razor blade. *see figure 10*

Protection

In order to protect the work from eventual dirt, one can add a paper with a hole as large as necessary to permit access to the work.

Washing the hands is obviously recommended, as often as necessary, along with a good drying because moisture is just as harmful.

Certain historical documents also mention the necessity for works who work with velin to have good breath in order to preserve the whiteness of the thread.

Fixing the thread on the needle

In order that the needle does not become unthreaded during the work, one can make a knot at the position of the eye. *see figure 11*

The joining knot

Throughout the execution of a needlelace, one must avoid introducing a lump when joining two threads : it is a point of weakness. However, a short thread, or a thread which breaks away from an edge can be repaired by joining in another thread. This is done with a reef knot, well smoothed, and the two free ends cut flush to the knot. *see figure 12*

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The trace

This is the frame of the work. The quality of the future lace depends on its solidity and on the precision which which it follows the pattern line.

The trace is made with two threads:

- *a trace thread*, which is doubled and follows the line of the pattern without ever penetrating the support, unless it is the beginning or ending point. It is on this foundation thread that the worker will build the rempli, réseau, etc., on the surfaces defined by these lines. This requires that the trace is properly tightened and securely maintained by :

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- *the couching thread*, a simple thread which now tensions the thread of the trace by passing a loop around it, leaving and re-entering through the same hole in the piquage. This thread should be taut, especially when changing direction, but not so much as to pull the trace through the surface of the work. It must let the trace lie on the surface.

For traces which need to backtrack over themselves, one avoids the superposition of two double threads. Only one of the two threads is used, which alone goes out and comes back. The couching thread starts at the farthest point, and proceeds to the junction point. *figures 16 and 17*

The couching thread is brought to the most distant point by several couching stitches executed on the cloth at the end of the work.

When one completes a closed curve in the pattern, to ensure perfect solidity to the work, one overlaps the first and last point, and a few stitches are taken on the wrong side of the work. For the record, joining threads together should be avoided, as the knots will be a nuisance later on.

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Some tricks

1. Undesirable twisting

When one uses very fine thread like that in the case of point d'Alençon, the thread of the trace is a single thread folded in half at the needle.

In the course of the work, the doubled thread can have a tendency to twist, causing loops which can cause undesirable knots.

To remedy this, let the needle hang free so it can turn by itself, and the twists disappear.

2. Meeting two traits of the trace

- If the thread is linen, no inversion is anticipated. The brode and the filling stitches will maintain this fragile condition.
- If the thread is very large, an intervention is possible in order to strengthen the future soundness of the work, especially if a brode is not planned.
 - o 1st case : two threads of the trace meet
The needle of the trace thread executed for the first path slides under the first thread of the trace, at the location of the junction of the lines. A couching stitch maintains the threads in place at the intersection. Two couching stitches are this realized in the same hole : those from the first trace and those from the second. *figure 21*
 - o 2nd case : a trace thread meets the end of another trace.
One slides the needle of the trace thread in the loop formed by the thread of the doubled end thread. A couching stitch is newly done in the hole at the junction of the two trace lines.
 - o 3rd case : a ending trace meets a trace thread. *figure 22*
In this case, one does not work anymore with a doubled trace thread. A trace thread is made with two simple threads threaded together with the needle.
At the point of meeting which interests us here, one of the two threads is removed from the eye of the needle. The needle with the remaining thread is slid, as in the first case cited previously, under the first thread of the trace, at the place where the two lines meet.
This thread is doubled at the base, the remaining thread waits and is reunited with the first and the work proceeds. *figure 23*

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- o 4th case: junction of two terminated traces.
One proceeds as in the third case, and the needle carrying the single thread slides under the looped formed by the first ended trace, then doubled in two. *figure 24*

Preliminaries

Interpreting the work

In all cases, the direction of the rows of meshes is chosen before the beginning of the work, taking into account the ease of execution, the deformation of the future work, and the maximum length of a row of stitches permitted by a threaded needle. The sense of the *various filling stitches* such as the rempli, the gaze Claire, etc., can therefore be varied. We must consider the aesthetic appearance they create, particularly when using relatively coarse threads.

The senses of execution of the *réseau* is very strict : never on the diagonal for a traditional lace, s for example a flounce where one keeps a parallel direction, or more often, perpendicular to the border. In the case of a large flounce as was made in the

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19th century, one always arranged, in the tracing of the pattern, dots or dashed lines along its length, the rows of the reseau, permitting thus the **change of the needle**.

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Anchoring the thread into the base

When the direction of execution has been chosen, the thread is fixed to the base with two or three overcast stitches around the starting point, without superposition to avoid any buildup. *figure 25*
The thread is definitively fastened with a simple buttonhole stitch.

Position of the Hands

Unlike embroidery, needlelace is worked with the needle pointed in the air. *figure 26*

It is important for every stitch to keep the thread coming from the preceding stitch under the middle finger until the last moment before the formation of the new stitch. This keeps the thread from tangling on itself and forming an undesirable knot which is sometimes very difficult to eliminate. *figure 27*

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The principle stitches used

In the following steps, only three basis stiches are used.

Pb. 28 to 30 – The position of the hands.

Figure 28 – Le Point coulé (overcast)

Figure 29 – Le Point de feston simple ou Bride simple (simple buttonhole stitch)

Figure 30 – La bride tortillée simple, double ou triple (simple twisted stitch, double or triple)

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Chapter 5

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pb 31 – Gros point de Venise, de3tail of a collar, 17th century, 405mm x 362mm. (collection of antique lace of l’Atelier National du Puy–en-Velay)

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V The Basic Stitches

It is these which form the **groundwork** of needlelace.

They **remplissent les pleins** and materialize the voids in the pattern, playing with opacity and transparency, or emphasize the contour of the motifs to accentuate their sharpness.

The order in which I introduce the different stitches that are used in needlelace is that of a chronological order.

In order to learn the technique, it is necessary to choose another order of understanding the steps, that which will give the necessary dexterity and permits one to gradually approach the difficulties.

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The Brides

The brides or barrettes are particularly used in the guipures or for motifs which far outweigh the ‘field’, that is to say, for grounds that are not regular or connected.

The principle use of barrettes was primarily in the Points de Venise of the 16th century and the works at the beginning of the 20th century.

The Charpente (frame)

FOR A SIMPLE BARETTE

Common to all types of barettes :

- *One places the threads in the appropriate areas, doubling or tripling as needed. figure 31*

FOR A TRIPLE BARETTE

Junction of three barettes : one lays a firswt thread AB, which is doubled if necessary. Then one makes a stitch at the point of junction O.

The thread is fixed with a simple buttonhole stitch and changes direction toward point C.

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THE COVERING

1 - The Simple Bride

The covering is made by the introduction of a thread simply wound around the base. The appearance of this is one of a cordonnet. figure 35

2 The Buttonholed Bride

The base is covered with simple buttonhole stitch, tightly worked. In the case of a junction of barrettes, the leg from A to O is covered in simple buttonhole. figure 36

The thread is fixed at B. Cover the thread with buttonhole stitches from B to O.

Cover the distance OC with buttonhole stitches.

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3 The Picoted Bride

The length of the barette can be decorated by one or several picots formed with the aid of :

- *a pin placed at the tip for support*
- *a supplementary smooth thread, for example, horsehair*

1 - The base is covered with buttonhole stitches up to the place where we want to make a picot. The thread is passed under the horsehair or around the pin. figure 39

2 - A bride tortillée is made. figure 40

3 - Two simple brides are made on the bride tortillée. The covering of the leg of the base is resumed.

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pb 34 Alb flounce in Point de France needlelace, Louis XIV époque, 0.60 x 3.20 m., square picoted mesh. (collection of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs)

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p 35 - Detail of a needlelace in the style of Argentan, with decorated meshes. 18th century. (collection of the centre d'enseignement à la dentelle du Puy)

The Field of Buttonholed Brides or Picoted Brides

With the years and changing tastes (the laces were worn less flat), the motifs become sparser, and the field of brides becomes more important and organized into regular hexagonal meshes :

- picoted for the Point de France where the meshes remain relatively large.
- simply ornamented and smaller, toward 1700, for the early laces in the style of Argentan, which was in reality fabricated principally at Alençon.
- Finally twisted for productions done in Argentan a little later. Toward 1770 this genre of items whose execution was more rapid, and therefore of a lower cost, enjoyed great popularity.

The Framework

The technique is common to all three variations. Relatively delicate to realize in a regular fashion, the responsibility of **couchage** arranging the threads was given to specialized workers.

Under the reign of Louis XVI, in order to facilitate the work, manufacturers used copper plates to imprint the design of hexagonal meshes on the parchments.

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figure 43

- 1 - *Two layers of parallel threads are made. They cross each other to form losanges (diamonds). The directions of the layers is obtained by crossing at the midpoints of the future hexagonal meshes. figure 43*

figure 44

- 2 *The hexagonal mesh is formed by working horizontally with a new thread. It will flatten the sharp angles of the lozenges. Start at A on the upper third near the acute angle. Join this with B with a buttonhole stitch. Figure 44*

figure 45

- 3 *Now proceed to point C on the lower part of the lozenge 2, and close the sharp angle by uniting C and D by a buttonhole stitch. Continue this work until the end of the row. Figure 45*

figure 46

- 4 *Execute a new row of identical work starting in the lower third of lozenge 3. Hexagonal meshes are formed. figure 46*

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The Covering

The field of picoted meshes of Point de France

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This is also known under the name *'brides à nez (nose)'*, *'brides à écailles (scales)'*, *'brides de Point de France'*.

- 1 – The work is done in horizontal rows with simple buttonhole stitch. Depending on the size of the mesh, one or two picots can be worked on each side of the hexagon. For example, one works side AB, then side BD, with buttonhole stitch with a picot in the middle. The picot is made like those of the picoted bride (page 64). figure 47
- 2 – One attaches the thread to D. figure 48
- 3 – Then one descends along DC to execute a row of buttonhole stitches with a picot in the middle. figure 49
- 4 – The same work is continued over the entire row, then the next row up is worked in the same fashion. The hexagonal meshes will be entirely covered with buttonhole stitches.

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The field of meshes buttonholed in the Argentan style

The work is the same as for Point de France, but the smaller meshes do not have picots. *figure 51*

The meshes in the Argentan style, firm and solid, comprise 15 to 20 buttonhole stitches on a side, which gives them their name of brides bouclées.

The field of twisted meshes (brides tortillées)

Here one does not make the buttonhole stitch, but just twists the thread around the base.

The conduct is always horizontal, but the result is very deformable in the preceding case : to obtain a regular tension of the meshes, one can place a pin at the high point of each hexagon, giving it the name bride épinglée. The placement of the pin is sometimes printed on the parchment to facilitate the regularity of the work.

When, in the case of a flounce, one chooses the direction of the rows to be parallel to the border, one always begins the execution of the first row along the foot : no motif interrupts the regular order of the meshes. It is only later in the work that the rows of the réseau are divided up by the solid parts of the design : at that moment, the rhythm of the meshes is already acquired, in the arrangement and size.

Pb 35 – Needlelace, style Argentan with brides tortillées. 18th century (collection of antique laces in l'Atelier National du Puy-en-Velay)

Pattern reproduced from a pricked pattern for a lace in the Argentan style, 19th century, (collection de Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris)

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Field of Brides from the 20th century

At the beginning of the 20th century, women's work, as attested to by the Encyclopedia of Thérèse de Dillmont, was greatly in vogue. For these leisure time creations, the technique of the field of meshes just seen in the preceding pages seemed too complex to execute. More, it appears likely that since the art is no longer practiced in Normandy convents, it has been lost to the public of amateurs we are interested in here.

Several possibilities for the execution of the field of hexagonal meshes are encountered. We shall study two :

- Base and covering are done in two stages
- Base and covering are done at the same time. The work is done in both directions, sometimes from left to right, then right to left for the next row.

If one observes the direction of the buttonhole stitches on the work done in this fashion, we see that the work is not always done with the needle pointing in the air : **the ancestral gesture is not out of date.**

Similarly, the mesh shaped obtained is not the same as in past centuries, the hexagons take more the form of **scales/chips/flakes.**

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First version

1- *Mark the angles of the hexagons with tacking stitches. Figure 52*

2- *The meshes are formed by sliding the needle along the surface through the tacking stitches. Figure 53*

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- 3- *The thread is doubled along the upper sides in order to consolidate the work and equalize the thickness of the base. Covering with buttonhole or twisted stitches is done as previously described.*

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Second version

- 1- *After having fixed the thread at the initial point A, go to point B to give the first mesh its form. Then double back along line AB. Cover BC with buttonhole stitches. Figure 53*
- 2- *From C, carry and fix the thread at D. The loop of the base is doubled by returning to D. Figure 56*
- 3- *Cover the length DE with buttonhole stitches. The same work is continued until the end of the row. Figure 57*
- 4- *Execute the second row in the opposite direction. Cover FG with buttonhole stitches. Figure 58*

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- 5- *Carry the thread from G to H. Return again to G, which doubles the thread. Cover IG with buttonhole stitches. Figure 59*
- 6- *Cover GK, then KL with buttonhole stitches. At L, carry the thread to I. Double the thread, then cover NL with buttonhole stitches. Finish the row. The third row is made identically, but in the opposite direction. Figure 60*

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pb 38 – Point d’Alençon (collection of the centre d’enseignement à la dentelle du Puy)

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The Réseau Fin (fine ground) d’Alençon

Under the reign of Louis XV, a solid ground (réseau) gradually replaced the brides of Point de France. Again, the greatest difficulty comes from the regularity of the meshes.

The first row that will give the height of the meshes at the location of the starting point on the trace. A buttonhole stitch must be perfectly placed, **the following stitches will share this base**. It is the same to the end of the row, and is necessary to maintain a strict parallelism from one end of the row to the other.

To ensure a lightness to the réseau, where the thread is doubled back to the point of beginning (this is not done in the case of point gaze de Bruxelles), the workers of Alençon must use a thread of extreme fineness, no 6000 in linen, well **made**.

- 1- *The thread is solidly fixed to the departure point. Figure 61*
- 2- *The first row of regularly twisted meshes is executed. Figure 62*
- 3- *The thread is solidly fixed at the end of the row. Figure 63*

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- 4- *The return row is executed by passing the needle three times in each mesh. Figure 64*
- 5- *After the return row is ended, the thread is fixed to the base, and is done the same way for the second row by fixing the departure point with a buttonhole stitch. The parallel rows are of the same height. Figure 65*
- 6- *The work is finished by linking the last row of the base with three stitches in each mesh. Figure 66*

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*pb 39 – Point d’Alençon, Empire style
(collection of the centre d’enseignement à la dentelle du Puy)*

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The Réseau of Brussels Point or Point Gaze

This is a very light réseau, but very fragile, like that of Alençon. It is in effect made of twisted meshes not consolidated by a row of overcasting, but executed the same in the return row, that is to say, the same in both directions.

The réseau obtained is vaporous.

Faster to execute than that of Alençon, since it goes twice as fast, it allows the execution of less onerous laces. What is more, for an equivalent mesh size, the thread use can be bigger and of cotton.

The meshes obtained are hexagonal, while those of Alençon are more square.

- 1- *After having fixed the thread solidly at the departure point, a first row of twisted meshes is executed. Figure 67*
- 2- *The second row is made in an identical fashion to the first, but in the reverse direction. The direction of the twist is the same. Figure 68*
- 3- *The meshes formed are hexagonal. Note that the meshes obtained when doing a row from left to right have less twist than those of the right to left rows. The motion of the hand and needle is however, identical. Figure 69*

N. B : If one wants to obtain an equal number of twists for all the rows, it is necessary to reverse the direction of the wrapping of the thread around the needle.

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*pb. 40 – Detail of a fan in point de Bruxelles, 19th century.
(collection of the centre d’enseignement à la dentelle du Puy)*

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The Rempli (clothwork)

This stitch is used for the opaque parts of the work.

The meshes should be regular in size and spacing (as for all other stitches), although pushed next to ether other to ensure the desired opacity, but not too much as this would lead to a swelling in the work. Increases or decreases needed for curves in the pattern need extra stitches or modifications on the structural outline, at the beginning and end of the lines.

In order to show this, see the photo Pb. 41 on the righthand page, the rempli is somewhat shadowed (ombré) by spacing, row upon row, the stitches of the rempli.

N.B. For point d’Alençon, linen thread n° 1450 is used.

- 1- *A row of twisted stitches is made from A to B, very tightly worked together. Figure 70*
- 2- *Stop at the end of the row with two or three simple stitches, and similar to the starting point, a buttonhole stitch made at the same level as the end of the row. Figure 71*
- 3- *The return row is made by passing the needle once through the last mesh, then regularly each five or six meshes (according to the thickness of the thread and the length of the rows) until the beginning of the preceeding row. Figure 72*

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- 4- *The thread again is fixed to the base structure by a buttonhole sttich at point C, beginning the new row of stitches. Figure 73*

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5- *An area of rempli is terminated by fixing, through a return row, each mesh to the base structure. Figure 74*

pb. 41 – Flounce in point d’Alençon, with ‘ombré’ rempli, 19th century (Musée Conservatoire des Beaux-Arts et de la Dentelle d’Alençon).

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Les Mouches (the flies)

These consist of small decorations executed in a part of the work made in rempli. The main one is to jump over several meshes (leaving a hole).

The mooches can be used in isolation or in quantity, alternated in several rows to create an openwork pattern in an otherwise solid part, or even an entire region of regularly perforated patterns.

1- *Work the rempli up to the location of the mouche. Figure 75*

2- *Make the jump from B to A, taking care to insert the needle into the three meshes which will be skipped in the following row. Figure 76*

3- *The mouche is made by skipping the three prepared meshes. Figure 77*

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4- *Make the jump from D to C by passing the thread three times in the mouched made in the row below. Figure 78*

5- *‘Close’ the mouche by making three meshes of the rempli in the prepared work. Figure 79*

6- *The mouche is finished. Figure 80*

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pb. 42 – Point de Sedan with picoted brides and moucheté re0-35s. 17th century, 103 x 56 mm. (collection antique lace of l’Atelier National du Puy-en-Velay)

pb 43 – Small collar in point d’Alençon, Empire style, 190 x 48 mm. (collection antique lace of l’Atelier National du Puy-en-Velay)

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The Openwork Stitch patterns

These stitches stitch patterns are made by alternating, with a regular and predictable order (pattern), areas of solid and holes, that is to say, earlier with buttonhole stiches, later with twisted brides with holes made by skipping several stitches.

Likewise, one can envision the inverse effect with opaque mouches, made with several rempli stitches in a transparent réseau.

- *Les Quadrilles (a diamond pattern)*
- *Les Point Mignon (a ‘dainty’ pattern or alternating small squares)*
- *Le Point á Trou (oval holes)*
- *Le Réseau moucheté (réseau decorated with spots)*

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*Pb. 44 – Needlelace, Belgian work
(collection antique lace of l’Atelier National du Puy-en-Velay)*

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La Gaze Claire

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This translucent stitch is intermediate between the opaque rempli and the transparent réseau. It uses a variation of the rempli to modify the solid parts of the design.

This is a **deformable** stitch, as light as one prefers in the rempli for the zones at the edge of the work. The return thread is taught and visible through the mesh, and can be done in contemporary work with a second thread of a different color, or even of a different material.

- 1- *The thread is fixed as for the rempli or réseau at point A.
A row of twisted stitches is executed, more open than those of the rempli stitch, but closer together than those of the réseau. Figure 85*
- 2- *Return to C, which is situated a little above point B, arriving at the beginning of the first row. Figure 85*
- 3- *A second row of stitches is made by taking the stretched thread at the same time as that of the mesh in the first row. Figure 87*

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pb. 45 –Detail of a flounce of needlelace, Argent style, with square twisted meshes. (collection du centre d'enseignement à la dentelle du Puy-en-Velay)

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La Brode (the raised border)

This is a feston (decoration) which is going to cover all the length of the trace, and which, by covering itself and attaching the working thread to the main work, will give a perfect precision and a light relief to the contours of the design.

The brode of Point d'Alençon is made of closely covered brides that hide the base thread. That of Point Gaze is loosely made, and the cotton base thread is visible.

In addition Point d'Alençon is distinguished by a brode external to the work, picoted and defined by a white horsehair which is used in the picot fabrication. If the hair resists the ravages of time and eventual bleaching, with gives the lace a special **hold (tenu)**.

Regarding the brode in relief, such as in Venetian Gros Point, it plays a very important role in the aesthetics of the design. It's weight is not negligible, the same for the relative rigidity that it transmits to the work.

Simple Brode

1 – The lacemaker begins by stretching the cord upon which she will execute the brode and which must follow the motif : now, with the left thumb, one end of the cord is placed on the contour of the pattern in front of herself, and she fixes the other end (or ball of thread) at her right, for example at her belt : a knot is made through which is fastened a safety pin, which allows a mobile fastening as desired, as well as a regulable tension of the thread, the essence of the brode. Figures 88 - 89

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2 – After having fixed the thread at the point of departure similar to the other stitches, she works three buttonhole stitches on the trace, alternating with two buttonhole stitches worked only on the stretched cord. Figure 90 – 91

4 – The brode of Point Gaze leaves the base cord visible by only fixing it to the trace with a buttonhole stitch once every millimeter. Figure 92

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*pb. 46 – Flounce in point de Bruxelles
(collection of antique lace of l'Atelier National du Puy-en-Velay)*

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La Brode Picotée

In addition to the contour cords worked by the preceding instructions, it is necessary to use a horsehair (for the fine traditional laces) or a more or less large, smooth nylon thread : it will serve to support the execution of a picot. **It is fixed by the thread.**

1- *Form a buttonhole stitch by taking up the trace and the cord. Figure 93*

2- *Make a single buttonhole stitch only on the cord. Figure 94*

3- *Repeat step 1. Figure 95*

4- *Pass the working thread under the horsehair. Figure 96*

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5- *Make a twisted stitch. Figure 97*

6- *Make two buttonhole stitches on the twisted stitch that you just made, below the horsehair. When the picot is on an angle of a motif, one can work three to better mark the change in direction. Figure 98*

Placement of the fingers

- *The index finger is placed on the work, on top of the horsehair.*
- *The middle finger holds the horsehair.*
- *The ring finger holds the thread during the work. Figures 99 – 100*

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pb. 47 – lappet in point d’Alençon, Louis XI style

960 x 75 mm.

(collection of antique lace of l’Atelier National du Puy–en-Velay)

pb. 48 – lappet in point d’Alençon, Louis XI style

250 x 95 mm.

(collection of antique lace of l’Atelier National du Puy–en-Velay)

p 95**VI****Les Modes (fillings)**

At the beginning of the 18th century, the ground of brides picotées of Point de France, heavy and majestic, was little appreciated at the court of Louis XIV, and was replaced by the actual réseau of fine meshes of Point d’Alençon : the tastes of the century of Louis XV went toward laces toward more gauzy laces, which were no longer worn flat, but ruffled.

The designs changed, more feminine : bouquets, **ribbons (rivières)**... But it became necessary to embellish the stitches, varied and subtle, to break the monotony of the réseau : the ‘modes’ appear. Their technique is taken from techniques of cutwork : the threads of the framework are extended and covered a second time with **festons** and picots. The combinations are infinitely varied, provided that the worker is skilled and imaginative.

The jewels of lace, they taken a relatively long time to produce, and much ingenuity. Their cost is high, which explains that over the centuries, their great initial variety has sadly atrophied.

We are going to study in detail the steps of working the basic modes which can serve as a basis in the realization of more complex older modes, and are amenable to the development of ‘imaginary’ modes.

p 96**Le Rateau (grid)****The Framework**

1 – Fix the thread at the beginning point A. Figure 101

2 – Position the first thread which will determine the general orientation of the grid.

3 – Return to the initial point after doubling the thread of the framework. Figure 103

4 – Secure the thread well before carrying it to point C.

Continue the work thus until the surface is covered with parallel, equidistant lines. Figure 104

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5 – Work the same exercise in the perpendicular direction, along AB in respect to the xy axis of symmetry : a regular grid is obtained which will serve as the support for the mode. Figure 105

Execution of the mode

This is based on the principle of a picoted bride, and necessitates the use of a horsehair or other slippery thread (like a nylon thread), and is of a size that depends on the work in progress.

The thread is fixed to the side of the work with a **double pin**.

Begin by working the grid of structural threads which were made in the first layer, and are found to be blocked by the second layer.

1- Fix the thread at the point of departure : work three buttonhole stitches close together. Figure 106

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- 2- *For the execution of the picot, keep the horsehair along the thread of the entire grid with the thumb and middle finger of the hand that holds the work. Figure 107*

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3 – Execution of the picot :

a – Slide the needle under the horsehair. Figure 108

b – Work a twisted stitch only on the structural thread. Figure 109

c – Make three picots on the twisted stitch which you just formed between the structural thread and the horsehair. Figure 110

4 - *Separate each picot by five buttonhole stitches. Figure 111*

5 – *When the row is ended, attach the working thread for the mode to the trace thread on the pattern, and attach the horsehair by dragging it into position. If the mode thread is long enough, begin at D as before, and slide the needle under the structural thread of the second layer, and fix it at C. Then execute the second row of the modes. Figure 112*

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- 6 – *One must ensure that the picots executed on the second layer of structural threads respect, where applicable, the symmetry of the motif (here the xy axis). Figure 113*

Pb 49 – Detail of a point de France, Alençon or Sedan (pb. R.M.N. Collection du Musée d'Ecouen, Inv. Cl 14340)

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Les Cristaux (the crystals)

The Framework

The execution is the same as that of the râteau.

Execution of the mode

1 – *Cover the first layer of the structure with buttonhole stitches (brides simples). Figure 114*

2 – *Similarly, cover the threads of the structure in the second layer with buttonhole stitches, but making a crystal at each crossing.*

3 – Le Cristal

a – Make a buttonhole stitch with horsehair on the two threads of the framework. Figure 116

b – With the aid of a horsehair or equivalent slippery thread, make a picot (twisted stitches covered with 5 buttonhole stitches). Figure 117

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c – Make another buttonhole stitch as in a. Figure 118

Turn the work a quarter of a turn, and remake the three preceding operations perpendicular to the first picot Figure 119

The four picots of the crystal being complete, resume covering the framework with the simple brides until the position of the next crystal. Figure 120

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Pattern reproduced from a priqued parchment, dated 1812 (collection of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs – Paris)

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Les Bobines (coils)

These are executed on a réseau ground and formed around a single mesh in the ground.

- 1 – Chose the place to place it with precision according to the design. Figure 121*
- 2 - Surround the chosen mesh with a **frame** made by circling the thread three times around the mesh. Figure 122*
- 3 - The frame is ended, and covered with buttonhole stitched grouped in threes. Figure 123*
- 4 - Finish the work with a buttonhole stitch close to the starting point. The working thread is cut flush, as well as the initial frame thread which is hidden by concealing it with a few of the final buttonhole stitches. Figure 124*

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Les Venises

For these, as well as for most of the modes we will study in the following pages, the principle of the base is that of the picoted brode made with the aid of horsehair.

The Framework

- 1 - Fix the thread at the beginning point A. Figure 125*
- 2 - Position the first thread : its orientation will be determined by the opening angle of the 'V'. Figure 126*
- 3 - Continue the positioning of the framework by sewing alternatively to each side of the motif, ensuring that the work has a harmonious progression of opening angles. Figure 127*
- 4 - Double the thread of the framework by re-sewing the needle in the same places but in the inverse sense. Stop at point A. Figure 128*

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Execution of the mode

- 1 – As in the case of the râteaux, space each picot (made of 3 knots) by 5 buttonhole stitches. Fix the thread at B and withdraw the horsehair. Figure 129.*
- 2 – Triple the thread of the framework BC by brining the needle to C. Cover the segment CB in the same fashion as AB. Figure 130*
- 3 – Having fixed the thread at B, make a buttonhole stitch, taking up at the same time the framework threads AB and CB. Figure 131*
- 4 – Fix the thread at B and bring it to D with overcast stitches worked on the trace. Fasten the needle at C, which triples the thread of the framework. Figure 132*

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- 5– Execute a buttonhole stitch, taking up at the same time, the framework threads CB and CD. Figure 133.*
- 6– Repeat the same operation from 1. Figure 134*

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Pattern reproduced from a pricked parchment of the 19th century (collection of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris)

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L'Etoile à Double Nez (star with double nose)

The Framework

1 – Fix the thread at the beginning point. Figure 135

2 – Make a twisted stitch by sticking the needle in the trace at the places where the points of the future star are found. Figures 136-137

3 – Circle the thread three times around the meshes which form the center of the star. Figure 138

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4 – Tighten the circle. Figure 139

5 – Strengthen the framework of the star by sewing the thread alternatively in the center, then in the support point for the next stitch. Figure 140

6 – Stop by sewing into the beginning point, and fix the thread. Figure 141

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Execution of the mode

The execution of the mode is based on the principle of a picoted brode worked with horsehair.

1 – Alternate five buttonhole stitches with a picot on the framework. Figure 142

2 – When the work reaches the center, pas the thread through the hole, then return by making a row of picoted brides on the other side of the arm of the star. This row alternates with

- 2 buttonhole stitches*
- 2 buttonhole stitches on the other side of the picot from the first pass*
- 1 one picot. Figure 143*

Les picots alternate from side to side of the framework. The horsehair is only withdrawn when the arm of the star is finished.

3 – The work is the same for all the other arms, except for the last one. Figure 144

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4 – Make the picots on the first side of th last branch. Figure 145

5 – Here, make the center of the star by passing the needle through the center, and working buttonhole stitches between the arms of the star (2 to 4 according to the spacing). Figure 146

6 –Finally, work the row of picoted brides on the last side of the last arm. Figure 147

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La Fleur (the flower)

The Framework

1 – Work large buttonhole stitches by sewing the needle in the edge for each petal.

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2 – Circle around the center of the brides three times to form the heart of the flower, as in the case of the bobine. Figure 149

3 – Then pass the needle in the center of the flower, and inserts the threads of each mesh. Then carry the needle to each border of the petal, all to consolidate the framework (doubled thread). Finally fix the thread at the beginning point A. Figure 150

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Execution of the mode

1 – Make a single buttonhole stitch at the foot of the petal by taking up the four threads of the framework. Continue by alternating a picoted bride with five buttonhole stitches executed only on one double thread of the framework. Figure 151

5 – When the center is reached, pass the needle through it from underneath. Figure 152

6 – Then execute a buttonhole stitch by taking the double thread belonging to the framework of the next petal, along with the double thread of the petal just covered.

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7 – Continue the work of covering the framework for all the petals. When the center is reached for the last time, cover it as was done for the bobine (two to three stitches per petal). Figure 154

8 – Finish by covering the remaining unfinished side of the first petal. The flour is finished. Figure 155

Pb 50 – Detail of a lappet in Point d’Alençon.

(Collection du Musée-Conservatoire des Beaux Arts et de la Dentelle, Alençon)

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L’O à Nez (O with noses)

The Framework

1 – Fix the thread at the starting point and make four twisted stitches in a manner that the segments opposite each other are perpendicular to the center of the motif. Figure 156

2 – Sew the needle into the starting point, then, as in the case of the star, circle the thread three times around the center. Figure 157

Execution of the Mode

1 – With the same thread that was used for the framework, work by passing the needle through the center :

- 2 buttonhole stitches
- 1 picot with three knots
- 1 buttonhole stitch
- 1 picot with three knots
- 2 buttonhole stitches

2 – Withdraw the horsehair which supported the execution of the picots, and work the same pattern on the next side. When the four sides are covered, terminate with a tight buttonhole stitch as in the case of the bobine. Figure 159

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Les O en chaînette (a chain of O’s)

The Framework

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This mode is made in a long, narrow space, the framework is made of two rows of twisted stitches worked opposite each other. Figure 160

Execution of the Mode

Returning to the starting point, link the last mesh formed at the beginning which is opposite, with two or three overcast stitches. Work an O à nez at the intersection of the meshes and the line formed by the junction of the two rows. Figure 161

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La couronne d'O à Nez (ring of picoted O's)

The Framework

This is made along a circular or oval base. It is made with one or several concentric rows of twisted stitches.

1 – Work a row of twisted stitches regularly spaced around the base of a circle. Figure 162.

2 – Finish by wrapping the thread several times around the meshes, as for the framework of the star with double picots, but leaving free a sufficiently large central space. If this space is big enough, a second ring of meshes can be worked upon the first.

Execution of the Mode

Cover the framework with O à nez according to the previous directions. Work these O à nez by sliding the needle between the thread of the meshes and those of the large ring.

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Les Ecailles (the scales)

The Framework

These are made in rows of well spaced buttonhole stitches, stabilized by doubling the thread of each row on the return. The rows are arranged alternately, like the scales of a fish.

Execution of the Mode

The meshes are covered with picoted brides worked with the aid of a horsehair as for the râteau. The stitches which secure the meshes are kept open by passing the needle into the loop of the bride and making several buttonhole stitches like those for a small bobine. Figure 167.

Les pavés avec Cannelille (cobblestones with purls)

This mode, as with the ground of Argentella, is made in part with a hexagonal mesh ground, but whose contours are done with a trace thread.

The Framework

The contour of the hexagons, pricked on the parchment, is worked with the aid of two threads which are used for the execution of the trace. Figure 168

Execution of the Mode

1 – At each point of the hexagone, work a twisted stitch. Figure 169

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2 – Wind the thread three times around the center as for l’etoile double nez. Figure 170

3 – Decorate the central hole with an O à nez. Return the thread towards the trace by twisting it round the side of the first twisted mesh, which was kept single. Work the same way in all the hexagons.

4 – Finish by working a row of twisted stitches, not too close together, along the traces of each hexagon. Figure 172

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L’Argentella

The Framework

Argentella is made on a field of buttonholed meshes, or on a framework similar to that of the preceding mode.

Execution of the Mode

1 – At the tip of each point of a hexagon, work a twisted stitch, not so big that it restricts the central space. Figure 173

2 – Strengthen the central hexagon by passing around a second thread, and marking the angles with a buttonhole stitch. Figure 174

3 – The central hexagon is filled with point de rempli. Figure 175

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And several other modes...

Les mosaïques (the mosaics) Figure 176

And variations Figure 177 and photos 51 to to 59

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pb 60 – Gros point de Venise (collection du centre d'enseignement à la dentelle du Puy)

pb. 36 – Point de Bruxelles, worked in relief, detail. (personal collection of the author)

VII

The Relief And the Third Dimension

The Relief

Already presented for the making of the brode, it can be voluntarily accentuated.

1 – The padded brode

To make a “padded” brode like that of Gros Point de Venise, work over a padding made of combed wool : this supple and elastic material (coton was not used in the 17th century) facilitates an increasing and decreasing progression in the smooth shape, without irregularity. Figure 178

2 – Work “in the air”

On a first row of stitches normally executed on a trace, or stretched between two rows of the pattern trace, work one or several rows of meshes in ‘free’ fashion, in addition to the fat work. The work is wispy, frothy, like the Point à la Rose of the 17th century. Figure 179

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The raised surface

This procedure is used relatively frequently in the Points de Bruxelles of the 19th century, specifically for the execution of roses with superimposed petals.

The supplementary petals are worked on separate parchments. Once completed, they are de-mounted from their base of support, then placed on the principal work, and fixed to the flour. Sometimes one upper edge is left free to assure the maximum realism in the relief. Figures 180-181

The third dimension

Contrary to the idea one might have, this is not linked to the contemporary epoch. Precolumbian civilizations, as we have seen at the beginning of this work, used this technique for utilitarian objects. A circular work, with progressive augmentations of meshes similar to knitting, allows the realization of objects such as bonnets, bags, wig grounds...

Pb. 62 – “Rivage” (shoreline) , nylon, silk, rayon, copper threads. Brigitte Dépalle.

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*pb. 63 – Point de Viense, called “à la rose”, cuff, 17th century,
(collection of the Musés des Beaux Arts et de la Dentelle d’Alençon)*

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pb 64 – Christopher Columbus, 1993, detail, silk and copper, Brigitte Dépalle

The characters symbolizing the local people and their culture (Quetzalcoatl) are made of bright and contrasting colors; colonization is represented by the central figure in grey colors. (*pb. Brigitte Dépalle*)

Pb. 65 – La mer (The Sea), 1980, coton : 8.5 x 12.5 cm. B. Dépalle. (pb Centre d'enseignement à la Dentelle, Le Puy-en-Velay)

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VIII

Color

Color can be employed relatively easily, even if it was not used in traditional needlelace.

It remains a supplementary element which should not be used irrationally in blurring the effect of transparency achieved with the stitches.

Without embarking on a long and profound lecture on the science of color, we must juggle with the three basic elements of composition :

Tonality (red, green ...) : All the colors can be placed around a circle called the "chromatic circle" (Figure 182), where the three primary colors (red, yellow, blue) are equal distance apart, with the other colors placed between two tones, and are a combination of those two hues.³

Luminosity : dark to light tones...

If a color is placed alongside a gray scale from white to black (Figure 183), we can see that by blinking one can associate it with a particular color of gray.

The Saturation is determined by considering whether the color is pure or more of the corresponding gray.

Bright tones, medium tones, neutral tones : Several sample may be associated with the same tone and the same gray, but fall in the scale between the two. The bright tone is the most saturated.

The texture: in the following chapter we will show that the color is related to the background supporting the lace. The reflected light is returned brilliantly if the fibers are smooth, or absorbed if the fibers are fluffy.

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It is easier to achieve a harmony if the choice between the following parameters is limited : tint, luminosity, saturation, material, transparence. The simultaneous use of these five elements may cause confusion and lack of restraint.

1- Solid Colors

Each zone defined by a thread of a closed trace is colored by the work of the thread. The execution of the rows and the other stitches from the threads of the trace must be perfect, especially if, as in the case of the lace "Christophe Colomb" (pb. 64) the trace will not be covered with a brode.

If the stitches used must give a transparent result, the thread of the uncovered trace must be of the same color as the corresponding rempli. In the case of a polychrome work, the thread of the trace will not be continuous along the contours, but partitioned into zones.

Figure 184 : the solid colors

pb. 66 – Lighting from the front

pb. 67 - Lighting from the back

³ lsw – this applies to combinations of light, not pigments. Combinations of pigments result in various shades of gray.

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The choice of the color for a brode which delimits two differently colored spaces is linked, as well as the choice of the direction of its execution, to the position you want to give them in relation to one another : for example, in the case of a flower, the brode defining two petals will have the color of the upper petal, and will be worked by by working taking the needle from the top petal toward the lower petal (see the photo below “the butterflies”). (ph. 68)

2- Stripes

The realization of stripes can be envisioned as done in other techniques which use rows of stitches : knitting, crochet... But here, it is not envisioned that the thread of each row will be cut. This kind of termination at both ends of row will cause an unsightly thickening on the trace. It is therefore necessary to be moderate in changes of color, and if this is repeated, slide a colored thread around the trace to the future starting point. The subtlety of a striped work depends on good management of the colored rows of stitches and their return rows.

3- Color and transparency

The technique of lace offers the possibility of reversing the effect of the structure depending on whether it is lighted from the front or from the back, giving a transparent effect.

- When the light comes from the face, the colors are readable, nt heir luminosity determined by the clear zones.
- When the light comes through the back the values are determined by the degree of opacity of the stitches used.
- This reversal of values, when next to opaque areas made of plain threads or transparent cells, gives rise to dark threads.

pb. 68 – Les Papillons (the butterflies), 1993, cotton

pb. 69 Work in progress, silk and silver thread.

Notice that the thread of the trace is the same color as the thread of the rempli which is going to be built upon it. (*pb. Brigitte Dépalle*)

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pb. 70 – Rivage (shoreline), 1993, nylon, silk, rayon, silver thread: needlelace and bobbinlace (fish) technique. Ø 15 cm. (pb. Brigitte Dépalle)

pb. 71 – Réseau of a lace in modern materials

IX

The Material

In the preceding chapters we have shown the traditional working method used since the end of the 16th century, with white linen thread. If the first works were done with a bigger thread (n° less than 100), the laces of the middle 17th century used a much finer thread. This very sudden evolution is due to the improvement in the cultivation and spinning of flax. The very long fibers of this material permitted the production of an extremely delicate thread with a maximum of strength. In Normandie, as in Belgium, regions producing quality linen furnished Alençon and Argentan with skeins of thread n° 300 to 6000 since the 18th century.

The first spinning machines started production in England in 1741.

Cotton didn't arrive in Europe until later. If the lacemakers of Alençon stayed faithful to linen (some tried their luck with cotton for the rempli stitches, but with inferior results), the point de Bruxelles or point gaze adopted this new material. Their réseau, using the working technique which we have previously seen, needs only a single thread, while the réseau of Alençon uses two : the thread used could be twice as large as that for a mesh of identical size. Cotton, whose fibers are shorter than those of linen, allows work with threads n° 250 to 440. The lace worked with cotton loses its solidity but gains in flexibility. The point de Bruxelles is more vaporous than the point d'Alençon.

Silk has both the qualities of linen and cotton : its fibers are long (almost continuous) and the thread is solid and remains supple. The fashions of bobbinlace Blondes gave rise to a few work of point d'Alençon in silk, without great success.

The Italian "copies" of Burano use cotton.

pb. 72 Thread label

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The material today

In our day, if the purpose is not to obtain an authentic point d'Alençon (which is hardly possible outside specialized workshops of this artistic city), a relative freedom in the choice of materials is offered to us. A material with short fibers gives a thread a fluffiness which is quite twisted : it absorbs the light. The color can be matt. A material with long fibers gives a brilliant aspect, especially if it is not much twisted : the light is reflected. The color sings.

Several technical constraints will be imposed:

1 – The thread of the mesh

The working of meshes with a thread that twists around itself prevents the use of stiff and brittle material and catches or the buttonholed thread doesn't slide, preventing the formation of the mesh. A non expert hand must therefore avoid materials such as metal or various curled materials such as wool, lurex...

A flat thread, such as gold thread, can rapidly suffer from friction resulting from the formation of the mesh.

2 – The returning thread

This thread suffers less, or not at all. In the working of the gaze clair, the return thread is stretched and not twisted, if it is not to be attached to one part of the other of the trace. The choice of materials is therefore quite vast, giving free reign to the imagination. The effect obtained remains subtle because it is not plainly visible, but shines through the thread of the mesh.

pb. 73 – Soleil (Sun), 1977, cotton, lurex, copper. Brigitte Dépalle. 10 x 15 cm.

pb. 74 – La nuit (The night). 1981. Cotton, lurex, copper. Brigitte Dépalle. 9.5 x 13.5 cm.

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X

Finishing

When the creation of a traditional work is done, we still have to release the lace from its support, and appropriately assemble the different parts that make up the final work.

1 – L'enlevage (the release)

The two thicknesses of cloth upon which the parchment or waxed cloth is fixed are discarded. With the aid of a razor blade, the thread of the frame which holds the trace is cut. The lace, free from its support, shows its transparency. Figure 185 and pb. 75.

2 – L'éboutage (trimming)

The small pieces of thread of the frame still in the trace are withdrawn with tweezers. Figure 186

3 – Le régalage (repair)

I think this operation is unnecessary for contemporary works, especially since the creator, who is not bound by the contingencies of profitability, has the time to make everything perfect.

pb. 85 – Finishing

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Unhappily this is not the case for the workers in the past.

Repair consists of fixing parts possibly neglected during the execution, or broken during the process of release.

The 'régaleuse' must know all the stitches, which as we have seen, was not the case for other workers who specialized in the interest of secrecy.

4 – L'assemblage (assembly)

A large work cannot be made in one piece. It must be divided into various parts according to the drawing (for example, it is necessary for a band of lace, which is divided according to the pattern of the motifs). Assembly must be done invisibly. In the 19th century, the designer often provided a string worked on a thread of the trace at the location where the two parts should be joined together.

5 – L'afficage (cold pressing)

For point d'Alençon, this is done with a lobster claw or wolf's tooth. This 'cold pressing' of the plain parts of the lace is for the purpose to give the design a sculptural quality, and a certain luster. Figure 187

Passed from hand to hand, the work of a traditional lace is now finished. This work of art is ready for sale to beautify nobles and the haute bourgeois.

Immaculate in its conception and realization, it can achieve fabulous sums.

But this long and difficult work can be soiled : beware of dirty hands and fetid breath which oxidizes the thread.

The points de gaze were sometimes regrettably coated with white lead : this substance is an oxide, and unhealthy for the person who wore the lace.

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XI

The Apprenticeship

The order in which the different steps for making a needlelace are presented is more historical than pedagogical. The training of the hand and the new movements needed by the lacemaking technique are presented progressively.

- 1- La trace
This necessarily comes first since is the obligatory support for the other steps.
- 2- Le rempli
This permits acquisition of the movements needed to work 'the needle in the air'. The closely packed stitches can be done without too much trouble, and automatically enforces the regularity in spacing and mesh height.
- 3- La gaze Claire
The spacing and height of the meshes now comes into play. The tension of the thread controls everything. The regularity of the height of the rows, especially in the return, is important.
- 4- Le réseau
Whether it is point d'Alençon or Brussels, all must be controlled. The movements must be perfectly regular and smooth.
- 5- La brode
Work with a second thread is introduced.
- 6- La brode picotée
It is necessary now to juggle with three threads at the same time. The hand is precise and supple.
- 7- Les brides et brides picotées
- 8- Les modes et les champs de mailles
Dexterous, regular, supple : the fingers are the those of a fairy!

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Thread used : DMC cordonnet n° 80
Creation of Brigitte Dépalle

Symbols

Design and implementation of the trace

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XII

The Codification

Born of a desire to transmit and communicate in writing, there has been no reason to do this before our time. In my view, one of the interesting aspects is how to designate a possible path for the trace, one which maximally avoids the thread breaks that add fragility to the work. In past times, the designer indicates the name of the stitches needed for working on each part of the lace, as well as the direction they should be worked.

An example : The Maple

This piece of lace is made from two modules assembled with into a hexagonal grid. Figure 198
These very simple modules allow a basic initiation in the basic technique in a very short period of time. Repeating the execution of the same motif offers the opportunity to improve one's knowledge while at the same time having the pleasure of creating an already important work. In effect, once completed, the modules are connected together by a fine thread at the junction sites, and bars are used to connect the ends of the seeds and leaves.

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Pb 77 to 82 – the swallows

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Thread used : DMC cordonnet n° 80 Pillow corner
Creation of Brigitte Dépalle

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pb. 83 – Application on machine-made tulle, needle and bobbinlace. (collection of the centre d'enseignement à la dentelle du Puy)

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XIII

Mixed Techniques

Each textile technique creates an appearance unique to itself. If the effect of bobbinlace is that of a watercolor and generally flat, needlelace clearly highlights the motif contours, allowing a relief, a flight toward the third dimension.

Bobbin and Needle

The cohabitation can take several possibilities :

- A brode of needlelace giving relief to certain pillowlace motifs
- An alteration of parts made with bobbins and parts made with the needle. This choice may stem from an aesthetic desire, or else to facilitate the execution.

pb. 84 La forêt (The forest), mixed lace, B. Dépalle

Top, pb. 85 – Mixed lace, border of bobbinlace flowers, ground of needlelace ' 300 x 72 mm ; collection of l'Atelier National du Puy

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- Applique :

The ground is worked in by a continuous bobbinlace (for ease of execution) and the motifs done in needlelace which are applied on it, sometimes in relief.

When the ground is machine-made, which minimizes the cost, the motifs are worked by hand (ph. 83 p. 138). Large pieces, such as wedding veils, were made his way. As well, the application de Bruxelles, could be made on white or black machine net. The motifs worked in bobbin or needlelace were attached by a specialized worker called a 'striqueuse' in Belgium.

In the caswe of point d'Angleterre, the flowers were made in bobbinlace and connected with a needlelace réseau.

- Renaissance lace or Dentelle Irlandaise or Luxeuil

Very much in vogue at the beginning of the 20th century, it is considered among the easiest to execute.

It is made of machine-made lacets (tapes) bought by the meter, which are fixed with point de bâti on a waxed cloth according to a pre-drawn pattern, and which are connected with brides and various stitches (pb. below)

The machine tapes are not necessarily connected, but can have jours, even plaitings or relief similar to those executed in bobbinlace. The regular frequency of these variations will not allow this lace to be confused with an entirely hand-made work.

Needle Weaving

Without referring to the practice of embroidery, for me, a weaver and lacemaker, it is conceivable to merge these two techniques in their essence.

Weaving allows one to work the important surfaces, opaque or transparent, in two or three dimensions with relative rapidity.

The creation of motifs in lace, needle as well as bobbin, allows a very supple interaction, **and provides a framework to work the motifs on the support cloth.**

pb. 86 Renaissance lace or Luxeuil, machine-made tapes with needle work. (personal collection of the author)

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pb. 87 – Désespoir de Paix (Hope for Peace), 1994, mixed technique, doves : silk needlelace, ground : double weave, wool and copper. 24 x 24 ccm. Brigitte Dépalle. (pb. Brigitte Dépalle)

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And now...

As this book comes to an end, I can only give these last reflections the name of a conclusion. In effect, this work is meant to open doors to the imagination, a dream which in the morning gives birth to a technique at once both simple and rich. Time and passion do everything...

I will permit myself only a few personal remarks on lace, not only to see it survive, but to affirm it in the contemporary world. It is not necessary to relegate lace in a circle of futility which was its lot over the centuries, but to elevate it wholly to a mode of artistic expression.

The word 'lace' suggests to us a technique. It also evokes a decorative textile, or the expressive function that a textile must have: either under the aspect of a utilitarian fabric for apparel or furnishings, or of a form that can resemble a tapestry. And the technique permits affirmation of ideas in a non-neutral cultural context.

About whether there is in the design something that respects the precious and delicate aspect that has always characterized lace : not the trivial patterns with which the lacemaking technique means nothing. It is risky to reproduce a single elephant with the idea of lightness. But if that animal is only a decorative element, an accessory to the expression, why not? A design is taken in a cultural or ethnic context that it represents, and one can say beautiful things with a simple piece of cloth...

It seems regrettable to me to see that there is now a tendency to mount recent works on opaque grounds which kill the transparency and the joy of light, all crushed beneath a glass mount. The recently born lace is doomed to death.

If it is acceptable for an older piece to be frozen as a museum exhibit and preserved as a witness to a bygone era, even an innocuous modern work should not be subjected to the same fate, as it is the only witness to the life of the lacemaker who made it.

Preciosity, lightness, transparency...

Fairy fingers, passion, patience...