



Eva Forsberg at her loom

Every child an artist

At 16, she's been a weaver 10 years

By Beth Ashley

Eva Forsberg is only 16 years old, but her art has been exhibited in the galleries of Paris, Stockholm and other major European cities.

She is a weaver. She has been a weaver since age 6.

She is one of 20 young weavers on a project founded in Sweden by her father, Birger Forsberg, modeled after a similar project in Egypt. The theory behind the two projects, enunciated by Egyptian founder Ramses Wassef, is that there are creative talents inherent in all young people, simply waiting to find an outlet.

Eva Forsberg, an exchange student at Francis Drake High School in San Anselmo, has brought weavings with her from Sweden showing the remarkable compositions of youngsters as young as age 8.

In brilliant color they tell the stories of the little town in which they were woven, or the imaginative experiences of the children.

Her own tapestries portray the lakes, cows, school friends and festivals of her land; one shows such fantasies as her dream house, her impressions of Harlem, and a sprinkling of U.S. musical figures such as Billie Holliday and Janis Joplin.

She worked on that last one for two years.

She has a loom in her home in San Anselmo, where she is living with Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Jacks and their daughter Wendy; she spends long hours weaving "because I do not know so many people here and there is more time for me to weave."

Her work is being shown at the Student League Art Gallery in San Francisco this month through Jan. 7 along with the work of 40 other young people from the textile arts classes taught by Olene Sparks at Drake High.

The weavings of the children of Harrania, Egypt, caused a sensation when they came to this country last year. They were created under the tutelage of Wissa Wassef, who bought land in Harrania near the Giza Pyramids in the early 1940s, built a workshop, and recruited village youngsters at random — without tests for aptitude or talent. The children learned to create their pictures directly on the loom, without drawing or a model. The weavings show the earthen colors of Egypt, the Bedouin tents, the birds, animals

and flowers of that nation

Swedish artist and art professor Birger Forsberg, who is Eva's father, saw the weavings at an exhibit in Stockholm in 1960. He was deeply moved by their spontaneity: "the walls were just flowing," says Eva. He could not get them out of his mind, and when later he went to Egypt to paint, he visited Wissa Wassef in Harrania and learned the dimensions of the project.

On 1963, the village of Hedesunda, where Forsberg was born, was building a community house, and invited him to do some art for it. He proposed that the community instead use part of the money allocated for art to purchase a tapestry from Harrania, and that the remainder go for a second tapestry, to be created by the children of Hedesunda.

"The townspeople jested at the idea," says Eva. "The teachers said, 'if we can't even interest children in their regular school work, how can they do weaving?'"

But Forsberg prevailed. He bought looms, learned how to dye wool and to weave. Then he went to the school and invited the children to come and try it. He said, "I will be there at 7 in the morning till 5 at night every weekend, and every day all summer." Ramses (Wissa Wassef) came, and gave very good help, and soon the children were coming and learning how to weave.

From the beginning, the children were paid for their work: when a tapestry was sold, the children got half the price, the remainder went into the workshop expenses. The children dyed all their own wool.

They were never told what to portray. They were never pressured. "Do it when you want," was Forsberg's maxim.

"It was important to keep parents away," says Eva. "If the child makes a blue ball on the tapestry and says it is a bird, it IS a bird. It's important that parents not say, 'No, it's not,' so the image will be destroyed in the child's mind."

"A child has his own life, and he must express it. What he does, he knows, because he has experienced it. It should be good for a child to express his feelings in his own way."

When a tapestry is to be sold, Forsberg and the child consult as to its price; "the child must say what it is worth." Eva said her fantasy tapestry, about 2½ by 5 feet, would sell for around \$1,500. Forsberg him-

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Independent-Journal, 17

self receives no money for his work; he continues as a professor of art at the Konstfack School in Stockholm, commuting weekends to Hedesunda and spending his summers there with the youthful weavers.

For Eva, weaving has become the central focus of her life. When she completes her schooling in Sweden — she has three semesters to go — she expects to work at it full time, lecturing and writing about the project and continuing to weave for her own gratification.

At 16, she is an embodiment of Wissa Wassef's philosophy, stated before his death last year: "I had this vague conviction that every human being was born an artist, but that his gifts could be brought out only if artistic creation were encouraged by the practicing of a craft from early childhood."

The student art show, at which Eva's tapestries will be featured, can be seen Monday through Friday from 1 to 5 p.m. except during school Christmas vacation at the San Francisco Student League Almond Rod Art Gallery at 2165 O'Farrell Street, corner of Divisadero. Admission is free.



Tapestry by Eva Forsberg shows her fantasy view of U.S. Harlem (lower part of tapestry), with Billie Holliday at right; it progresses upward to a version of her dream house, with her and a friend at the window; at top is her interpretation of a rock festival, with Janis Joplin as central figure in group at right. Also prominent in weaving are the lakes and greenery typical of her native Sweden.

(Photos by John O'Hara)