

Weaving Freestyle

What do the villages of Harrania, outside Cairo, and Hedesundå, in central Sweden, have in common? Answer: in both places children are weaving stories of where they live—of Swedish cottages and churches, trees and birds or of Egyptian camels, streets and date palms.

This is how it happened. In 1960 there was a show of magnificent Egyptian tapestries at the Museum of Modern Art in Stockholm, done by children in Harrania. Teacher-artist Birger Forsberg thought, if children in a rural Egyptian village can imagine and create directly into their weaving without any pattern to follow, certainly children in Sweden ought to be able to do the same.

Birger Forsberg visited Harrania many times and became a good friend of the late Ramses Wissa Wassef, who had been an architect before he began to devote all his time to the Harrania project.

It was only natural for Birger to start a summer weaving camp in his own community of Hedesunda. The children have become more and more interested.

Sometimes other activities are more attractive. . . There are no set schedules. The loom rests until the desire returns. "It is important that the desire to create has free play, without pressures," says Birger Forsberg.

In the Community Center in Hedesunda two walls are adorned with tapestries that abound with happy, poetic pictures. One large one is from Harrania and four slightly smaller from Hedesunda. Their products are not only bought by the locals, but by other county authorities, businesses and private companies—and the Swedish Government has placed a tapestry in their Cairo embassy.

And how does one finance these activities? Well, when a tapestry is sold, half the sum goes to the weaver and half back into the operating and supply costs. The return isn't exactly overwhelming, so the local authorities help out with some modest grants and a little more comes in from various funds that think this is a great idea.



Above: Weaving is done in the inspiring outdoors at the Hedesunda camp, but the dome can be covered if the elements start acting up. The children dye the yarn in vegetable dyes, for soft coloring. Left: Five samples of what nimble fingers and imaginations can do, given the opportunity. Pictures: Rolf Salomonsson