

# Spider-web confections held together with air

By Melinda Howes  
Focal Point Editor

Cutting paper dolls is one thing. Snip. Snip. A curve at the neck, a couple of long pieces for arms and legs, and the doll is done.

One variety of silhouette making also involves cutting paper—but there the resemblance ends. This intricate art requires hours of work and a high degree of patience, resulting in a work that is both delicate and beautiful.

Mrs. Frederick Luther, a 15-year Mariettan now living in Philadelphia, is a self-taught master of the art. Those who have watched her work or who own examples of her art say she is unexcelled in her ability to translate ordinary scenes into works of great beauty.

Each "white space" seen in her pictures has been cut out by hand—every feather in her intricate doves, each petal of a tiny flower, receives its shape through tiny and meticulous cuts in the black paper. When completed, the work is an airy confection of black paper, held together only by air, which is then mounted and framed.

## "Unpretentious"

Mrs. Luther says the art goes back to the shadow plays of the Near Orient which "have probably been brought to Europe by Italian merchants." The first mention of the art, she says, was in the writings of Oliver Goldsmith. From England, she says, it was carried to France by the Count de Silhouette, from whom it got its name. The name was not considered complimentary at that time, she says, because the French "did not like these unpretentious black pictures."

From France, the art spread to Germany, where it was greeted with great enthusiasm and still is done there today. It also is practiced in Switzerland.

Before photography was invented, Mrs. Luther says, the silhouettes were used just as we use snap shots today.

She began her fascination with the art

when she was only 13 and spotted a painted silhouette in a shop window. She then went home and reproduced the painting, only she used scissors to cut out the silhouette instead of painting it.

Her style of the silhouette art is so different from that done by silhouette painters that no name has been given it, she says. She calls it "scissors art," but says that really doesn't tell the full story.

## Fragile Cut-Out

Each work begins on a piece of heavy white paper which she paints black on one side. On the white side, she pencils a rough sketch. She then works with her scissors, cutting away everything but the basic lines of the sketch, leaving only spider-thin lines of black paper. The fragile cut-out is then mounted with specks of paste applied from the tip of a needle.

"This art takes much, very much, time to do," Mrs. Luther says. "To carry out such a detailed silhouette portrait as I did in Marietta took me about four hours of work as an average. I have also done large pictures which took me weeks, even months to accomplish," she adds.

Mrs. Luther also is an artist in other media, including oils, water colors and pastels. She studied painting at the age of five while she was a child in Russia. After World War I, she and her parents were refugees. Later, when World War II began, she and her husband and two sons were again refugees, wandering throughout Europe.

The family came to the U.S. in 1955 and for 15 years made the Marietta area their home. Mrs. Luther worked at the public library for nearly 10 years, and her husband worked for Mr. and Mrs. Neil Christy before they moved to Philadelphia in 1970.

Mrs. Luther recalls her home in Marietta with much pleasure, adding, "It has been a home for us which we still remember with love."