

Silken-Thread Silhouettes — A Cut Above the Rest —

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Margaretha vonGlehn Luther.

She is just a wisp of a woman, and visitors to Glen Foerd in Philadelphia scarcely notice her. But Margaretha vonGlehn Luther, the mansion guide, is one of the rarest of the myriad treasures in the house.

Working without pay, Margaretha conducts as many as 60 tours a month in spring and summer. In the winter, however, when tours are fewer, Margaretha turns to her life's love and work, begun more than half a century ago in Europe.

Miss vonGlehn is a special kind of artist. She uses neither paint nor brush, but with a tiny pair of scissors and some scraps of black paper she creates art silhouettes of such delicacy that her work is often mistaken for pen-and-ink drawings.

Silhouettes or "shades" as they were disparagingly called when they made their debut in the 18th century art world, were once considered the cheapest form of folk art. Yet,

they are a vital part of our national heritage. Simple black-and-white portraiture has recorded the facial likenesses of some Colonial leaders who would otherwise be lost to our visual knowledge.

August Edouart cut profiles of some 3800 Americans, including six presidents and countless military and political leaders. And the 19th century profilist William Henry Brown was best known for his silhouette of Andrew Jackson.

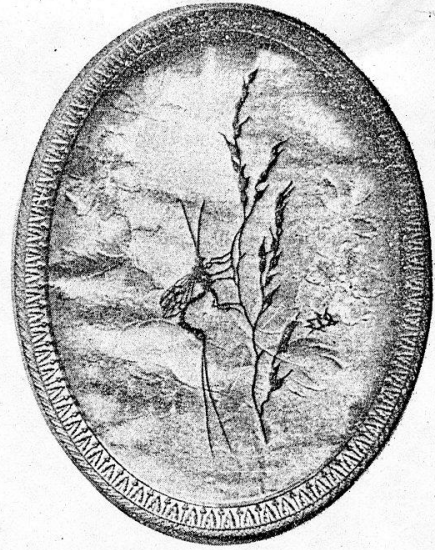
But profiles, according to the 20th-century master, Miss vonGlehn, are child's play. "Anyone with a steady hand and an artistic bent can learn to cut a good silhouette portrait by tracing a profile shadow cast by light," she says. "Or it may be done free-hand, as mine are."

"But then there is *scherenschnitte*." The German word rolls reverently from her tongue. "*Scherenschnitte* is a decoratively-designed silhouette cut free hand. The effect is very light, very lacy."

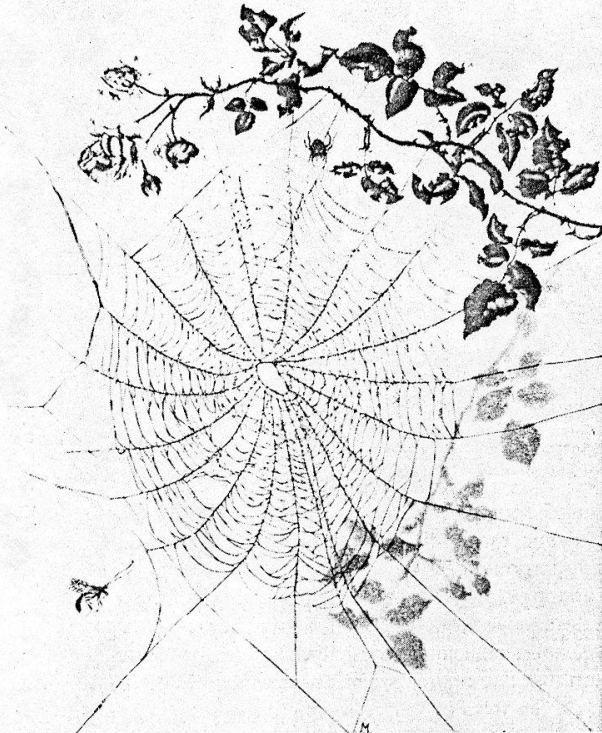
Miss vonGlehn's art is a cut above both categories. It goes beyond tradition. She is the only silhouettist in the world who has achieved a three dimensional effect by sandwiching rice paper between layers of green or gray cutwork and black outline form.

"The interior cutting is what distinguishes my art from *scherenschnitte*," she explains. "I begin in the center of the paper, using scissors made by a German surgical instrument company to fit my fingers exactly. When I am finished, my lap will be full of thousands of tiny paper scraps."

Study Miss vonGlehn's nature silhouettes, and the line between art and reality becomes the finest of all. Jerome the horsefly has his three pairs of thread-like legs set so delicately on a sprig of slender grass that you half expect him to buzz off in the blink of an eye. The arched back of an inchworm measuring a wildflower bouquet undulates toward a hovering butterfly. And the singular specimen of *Epeira* who built her web in a rose bush is licking her lips



Jerome the horsefly, rendered not much larger than life and with biological accuracy.



*One specimen of *Epeira* hungrily awaits the advance of its prey. The three dimensional effect of "Spider Web" is made with the use of rice paper between two segments of black-paper cutwork. The finished work is approximately 16" x 22".*



You have to look carefully at this delicate wildflower bouquet to notice the inchworm who is just about lifesize.