

Needlepoint hangs at Mao memorial

Needlepoint shows up in the most unexpected places. A friend of mine just returned from China with pictures of a huge and impressive needlepoint backdrop to the memorial statue of Mao Tse Tung in Peking.

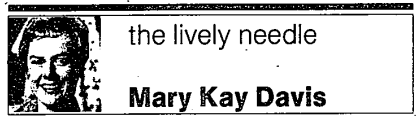
The statue is of white marble and stands 10 feet tall, approximately the size and color of the figure of Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial. Behind it stretches a needlepoint scene measuring 23 by 79 feet.

This is seen in the North hall of the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall, an impressive structure of over 2 million square feet. The whole complex was begun and completed in the nine months immediately following Mao's death.

According to those who have visited Peking, the purpose of the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall is, like Lenin's Tomb, to house the embalmed body of the leader. Mao lies in a crystal coffin surrounded by flowers in the Central Hall.

Long lines of spectators file past — quickly — and are not allowed to stop and snoop. So my friend's impressions had to be gathered on the run.

THE NEEDLEPOINT scene is a bird's-eye panorama of China with mountains, lowlands, surf and sea. No cities appear and the composition is vast and serene. Wool colors are blues,



the lively needle
Mary Kay Davis

greens and muted earth tones with white for accents. The effect is timeless.

The canvas gauge seemed to be 10-12, although my friend couldn't pop behind the statue to measure. The whole piece was divided into smaller squares measuring approximately one-half yard. Each of these was stitched to its

neighbor after completion, rather like a rug. The segments did not appear to have been lapped, but were joined on the edges.

How the individual pieces were blocked, how the whole was blocked, and how they ever mounted it all on the wall were questions that never were answered.

Storytellers meet Dec. 15

Detroit Story League meets at noon, Saturday, Dec. 15, in the home of Dingy Sharp, 31819 North Marklawn, Farmington Hills.

The group carries on the year's theme, "Color Me a Rainbow," with silver and gold as the colors for December.

Storytellers for the day are Jane Prabelo of Livonia; Barbara Brown of Redford; and Alice McCoy of Southfield.

"But there will be a lot of impromptu stories told this month," said storyteller

or Robert Kroepel. "So many stories are offered in December, we usually just dispense with the regular business meeting."

Prospective members who would like to attend the December meeting are invited to call Mrs. Sharp at 553-0135.

Persons interested in arranging a program with performances by members of the Detroit Story League are invited to call Ruth Kroepel, 477-5622. Storytelling programs are offered without charge.

I've seen a few pictures of the room, and the undertaking is both monumental and very effective. It is breathtaking to realize that the designing, stitching and mounting of 1,817 square feet of needlepoint took place in only nine months.

We think of needlepoint as a stitchery of northern Europe, and it seems strange to me to think of it placed in such a prestigious position in China. Why didn't they choose to embroider on silk in a more traditional Chinese technique?

I SUSPECT that longevity and wear had a lot to do with that decision. Needlepoint is tough and the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall was designed for the ages.

The only long-distance view of the building that I saw looked remarkably like the Parthenon with an orange roof. But one hopes that details become more Chinese as one approaches.

The interior, however, looks Hyatt-Regency-modern. There's walk-to-wall carpeting underfoot, acoustical tile overhead, wood paneling on many walls and holes for recessed lighting and air conditioning in the ceilings.

While Chinese calligraphy paintings and embroideries are used as decorations, the effect is one that the last empress would never have recognized — which may have been the whole idea.

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