AMERICA *the beautiful*

PANEL TWO OF THE NATIONAL TAPESTRY

by Druscilla Defalque

The five-panel national tapestry, *America the Beautiful*, represents the song, the land, and the stitch. The designer, Judy Jeroy, was inspired by her love of our country's beauty and wanted to see it rendered in needlework as an EGA project. The tapestry, an impressionistic piece, uses nature's flora and fauna against the country's landscape. Panel two (of five) has a geographical section representing the area from the Great Lakes Region to the Tennessee Valley Region, to the Gulf Coast area of the U.S.

Slips

All five-panel coordinators received 24-count congress cloth with copyright-free transfers and transfer photographs of birds and animals for their panel sections. The area to be worked for each slip is no larger than four inches. Naturalistic scale is not considered.

For panel two, I sent threads matching the color range of the transfers to sixteen embroiderers living in the area. Since there were no stitching guides, the needleworkers interpreted the canvas slip they were sent using their own embroidery skills.

Here is an excerpt from a letter by Linda Davenport from Great Lakes Region sent with her finished cardinal:

> *The cardinal project gave me a new dimension in my stitching . . .*
> *Bright red is a challenge to work with.*

The flower additions in the panel were made using different embroidery techniques and then attached to the background with stitching. Examples of these are a stumpwork dogwood, silk embroidered Cahaba lilies, machine-made azaleas. Other additions included surface-work butterflies, plus a silk gauze squirrel and a cotton field.

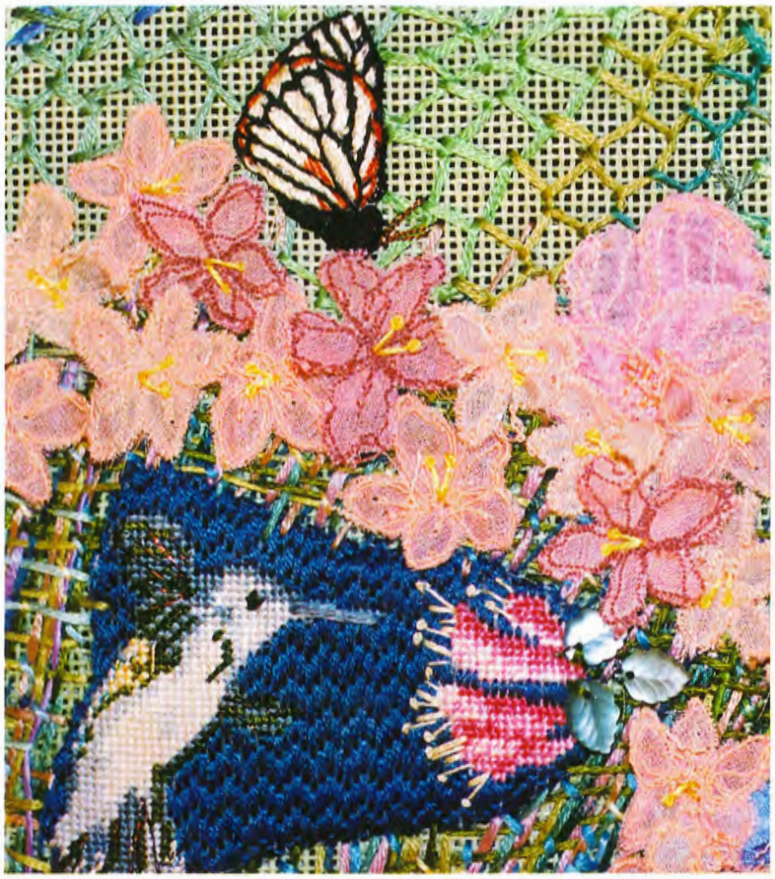
All five panels have trees being machine embroidered by Casey Bradford from New Jersey. Panel two has palms, cypress, and a branch coming from panel one. Northern pine trees will be added. The trees will help to pull panel two together and will help unify all five panels when they are completed.

Stitchers have been working on panel two using 24-count congress cloth and transfers. The choice of techniques and threads are at the discretion of the embroiderers. Linda Davenport, from Great Lakes Region, made a cardinal for panel two (above).

Background

The Birmingham Needlearts Chapter decided to schedule stitch-in dates to work on the panel background landscape.

The 24x48-inch piece of #18 mono canvas was mounted and stretched on sturdy artist stretcher bars so that the entire background could be viewed while color and stitch placement was decided.



Hummingbird: Mary Jackson *Butterfly and azalea: Sarah Seifert*

Cahaba lily: Ray Anderson

To help unify the five panels, Casey Bradford is machine embroidering all the trees, and Canby Robertson designed all the lettering for the tapestry.

Sandhill Crane: Frederica Edwards

At first, some members of the chapter felt intimidated to stitch, but found ways to contribute. They could not have been more intimidated than I felt when the 2 x 4 foot painted canvas and large box of threads arrived. How would we complete this project? We did it day by day and one stitch at a time.

Four people could stitch at the frame. Others pulled and separated threads, filled needles for those stitching, and added to the planning and enjoyment with conversation, food, and laughter. We even told stories about what was happening in the area we were stitching. There are fewer than fifty members in the Birmingham EGA but many talented needle workers.

For example, Sarah and Kathryn Seifert always arrived to stitch with a needle lace leaf or flower to add variety and dimension. Pat Amos kept the piece in her living room for several months while she worked over sixty hours finishing the Gulf Coast beach area started by Carol Norris.

In the fall, five Alabama Chapter members from Huntsville came to Birmingham to stitch on the panel. During one winter

Lettering design: Canby Robertson

Birmingham Needlearts members Carol Norris and Ray Anderson

month, they took the panel to Huntsville. Members who wanted to work on the background stitched during five scheduled meetings that month.

Lettering

Each of the five panels contains wording from the song *America the Beautiful.* Canby Robertson from Annapolis, Maryland, did the lettering design work for all five panels.

The panel two lettering for "America, America, God shed his grace on thee" was stitched by Peggy Hawkins, Alabama Chapter. She used rows of outline stitch on sheer ground fabric stitching with red and blue Needlepoint Silk. The lettering will be attached to the canvas panel with background stitches worked into the sheer fabric. This technique was the same one used with the Cahaba lily area and the pheasant.

Completion

Panel two is about 75% completed. It represents over 2,000 hours of stitching time to date. Members throughout the area volunteered and stitched with enthusiasm. When they received their slip, they placed this work ahead of personal projects and returned the piece ahead of schedule.

As each slip arrived, it was put on the panel ground immediately because it seemed too precious and wonderful to be left unattached. The chapter background stitching became more directed to create an atmosphere for the slips. The sky, mountains, Great Lakes, Kentucky bluegrass, Southern bayou, lakes, and rivers supported and surrounded the birds and animals as they were stitched on.

Panel two will be in the exhibit area at 2005 national seminar in Atlanta and hang with the other four panels in Richmond, Virginia, at the 2006 national seminar, the completion date for the project.

—Druscilla Defalque

NATIONAL TAPESTRY
PANEL TWO COORDINATOR
ddefalque@aol.com

The Birmingham Needlearts Chapter undertook all the background landscape for panel two.

Dogwood stem (see back cover): Kathryn Seifert