

Maxine Brandt

By Sydney Mace

What a privilege it was to have been in a Japanese embroidery class at the same time as Maxine. It was my first class, and it wasn't until I viewed the gallery of her remarkable work that I comprehended how special she was, and how fortunate I was to have observed her in person.

The ordeal and delight, the challenge and joy, and most of all, the beauty and peace, of Japanese embroidery for me are embodied in Maxine's tiger trilogy.

The first one she stitched, *Lady with Flute, and the Tiger* (my naming), was the one she was working on my first time at Callaway. Struggling as I with flat silk, I was astounded at the ease and delicacy with which Maxine stitched the tiger's whisker with *one* suga. Only now do I dimly perceive the depth and power of her skill.

The lady with the flute denotes the student who is tempted by Japanese embroidery, symbolized by the tiger. The student is drawn to the technique, but is wary of its demand and difficulty. The tiger is listening, but is not sure the student is ready.

The second in the sequence is *Lady Patting Tiger with Cub*. By permitting the lady's caresses, the tiger displays her enjoyment in the student's dedication. By allowing the lady to approach while the cub is open and vulnerable, the tiger signals she trusts the student enough to open the tiger's inner heart symbolized by the cub.

The third tiger piece, *Lady Riding Tiger* was, I believe, the last piece she stitched. Here the lady, dressed in joyful and exuberant red, represents the student who is now the master, and is "riding the high".

Having said all that, I must ask, "Is Max represented by the lady – or by the tiger? How would that change the metaphor?"

When I first saw Max stitching on the *Lady with Flute, and the Tiger*, I couldn't help but think of the Blake poem, which is quoted below.

The Tyger

By William Blake (1794)

Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright,
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, and what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? And what dread feet?
What the hammer? What the chain,?

In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? What dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

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What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?