

By TUCK SHEPHERD

**THERE'S A FOOL**-the-eye quality to Jaki Ernst's fanciful artistic creations.

At first glance, they look like illustrations or posters reminiscent of Chagall or Picasso — or Seurat's paintings in the pointillism style.

Closer inspection, however, reveals that Jaki's works are stitchery, accomplished with great finesse and subtlety. The viewer is aware of the design, vibrant colors and texture, but not of the stitches, which are usually done with regular sewing thread rather than embroidery thread.

The vivid color accents she uses look like "straight-out-of-the-tube acrylics.

Always interested in art, she started

out studying painting and drawing — the traditional approach — but found herself drawn to stitchery. "It has a tactile sense painting and drawing can't give you," she said in a recent interview. "Stitchery has a more human quality."

**THE FASCINATION** the needle and thread held for her came as a big surprise to the artist, who admits that anything connected with sewing was anathema to her during her growing up years in Los Altos.

"My ninth grade home ec teacher thought I was hopeless," she recalled with a laugh, remembering looking on the sewing machine as the enemy. "I'm so non-mechanical," she continued. "I never cared to sew from a pattern and went off and sewed things by hand. I liked the

feeling."

Her first awakening to the possibilities of thread and fabric came when she was ten and visited Hearst Castle. "There I saw a Flemish tapestry," she said. "The colors were so fantastic. I didn't know it was woven; I thought it was embroidered."

Inspired, she went home to create a tapestry of her own — a picture of a shaggy dog to be executed in ordinary sewing thread for a three by two-foot pillow cover. This ambitious creation, never finished, she still has around the house awaiting completion some long hard winter when she's snowbound.

Growing up around the corner from Awalt High School, she watched the school being built and eventually went there herself. After graduation, she studied one year at Foothill college and then went on to UC Santa Barbara as an art major.

**SHE RECALLED**, with some distaste, a course at Santa Barbara which emphasized "minimal art." When the class assignment was to create an art happening at an expense of less than 50 cents, she was at a loss.

Noticing a campus gardener digging up squares of turf from a lawn, she liberated one square, got an extension cord and ear-plugs. She took this conglomeration to class, plugged it in and "told people to listen to the grass grow." This inanity, Jaki admitted ruefully, was a great success. "The professor loved it."

Realizing that the only options open to someone with a fine arts degree were teaching or the museum field — both crowded — she went on to study interior design under a scholarship at Bauder College in Sacramento.

Furthering her education, she studied at the Universita Italiana Per Stranieri at Perugia, Italy, where she was awarded the declaration "ottimo profitto" for her research in Italian 14th century manuscript illumination, and at San Jose State University for special classes in textile application and modern art.

Jaki has been a professional freelance commercial designer and illustrator since 1977, doing commercial art for the semiconductor industry under her full name, Jacqueline F. Ernst. "That pays the bills and gives me spare time," she said.

On the less business-like side, she operates as Me, Myself and I, creating imaginative works in embroidery, quilting, applique and soft sculpture at her Mountain View home, located on a quiet, tree-shaded street reminiscent of the Middle West.

**THE HOME'S** decorations include her stitchery creations and such offbeat touches as an old white bathtub on claw feet in the living room. Its front has been cut away to form a low loveseat, upholstered with padding of floral fabric — an unusual seating arrangement for short-legged visitors.

Also catching the eye in the living room is a board game Jaki invented and created



The banner at the entrance to the June show is an enlarged version of the artist's applique and embroidery piece, "Among Friends."





Examples of Mountain View artist Jaki Ernst's creations include Tree Farm, far left, a game for the visually impaired; an exuberant artist in a tunic of multi-colored appliqued stripes, left; and "It's Not Nice To Fool Mother Nature," above.

Photos by Amy Huntoon

for the visually impaired. The game, Tree Farm, consists of a colorful fabric board with squares in fabric of contrasting textures — smooth and fuzzy. Velcro on the base of the trees makes them adhere to the board. The object is for the player to get more of the cone-shaped trees than his opponent.

The die, attached to the board by a yard string, features buttons sewed on the six sides to indicate the numbers. The game, which comes with matching stools, can be hung on the wall as a modular sculpture when it is not being played.

Tree Farm will be among Jaki's fibre graphics on display in a one-artist show June 5 through July 3 at Telesensory Systems Inc., 3408 Hillview Ave., Palo Alto.

**BECAUSE** Telesensory makes products for the visually impaired, the show will include a number of fabric creations with the glass removed so they can be touched.

The 21 pieces in the show will include a broad range of representational and abstract fibre collages combining various stitchery techniques.

The public is invited to a champagne reception for the artist 7-9:30 p.m. Friday, June 6 at the Telesensory Gallery. Regular gallery hours are 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. weekdays.

Included in the show will be three pieces which were on display during May

in the Great American Needlework Show at Villa Montalvo in Saratoga. Jaki won a second and a third place in the Montalvo show's category for original designs in hand embroidery by a professional.

One of the pieces, a fairy tale scene entitled "Among Friends," features hundreds of French knots, giving the effect of a pointillism style painting. The most detailed piece Jaki has ever done, it took 240 hours to create.

**A PORTION** of this piece has been reproduced for posters for the show and blown up in stitchery — with the French knots in yarn — for a banner to hang at the gallery entrance.

Her work has been represented in the 1978 and 1979 annual Textile Exhibit at the Olive Hyde Gallery in Fremont, the 1979 Art Affair at Sunnyvale Community Art Center, the 1979 Quilters' Affaire at Canada College and the 1978 Great American Needlework Show at Montalvo.

She has also exhibited in group shows at a number of nearby libraries, galleries and community centers, including Los Altos Library in 1979.

Jaki has been invited to present a solo show in Portland next year.

She is a member of Peninsula Stitchery Guild, Bay Area Arts and Crafts Guild and an associate member of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Los Altos TOWN CRIER - June 4, 1980