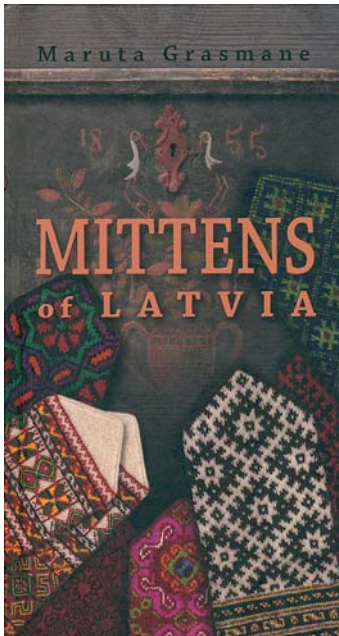


The Last Word

JENNA FEAR



In Latvia, mittens have served a much greater purpose than simply keeping the hands warm. In *Mittens of Latvia*, Maruta Grasmann explores such mittens as a record of the past. Their symbolism is widely evident in Latvian folklore. Perhaps you have heard the story of a man who lost his mitten in the forest. Animals of all sizes began to find a home there, but when a rooster jumped into the mitten with a startling “cock-a-doodle-doo!” the creatures were frightened and jumped about in such a way that the mitten was destroyed. Latvian mittens also offer another world filled with knowledge for knitters and culture enthusiasts alike. In the introduction to this book, Grasmann quotes Latvian poet Imants Ziedonis: “For Latvians mittens are rooted so deeply in customs, traditions and mythology that they have become an attestation of our identity.”

Grasmann reveals these aspects of identity in the specific knitting traditions of the five large ethnographic regions of Latvia. Vidzeme, Latgale, Augšzeme (Selonia), Zemgale, and Kurzeme all are then divided further into smaller geographical regions. She examines 178 Latvian mitten patterns from various centuries and describes their regional characteristics with a full-page image of each mitten accompanied by a chart on the next page. Each region has special traditions in style, symbols, and even colors of mittens.

This is not only a book for knitters, though they have much to gain from the patterns, and the author hopes that the explanations of the designs will inspire knitters to create new ornamental patterns of their own. It is also a book for artists, who will find inspiration in rich colors, patterns, and symbols, and for readers of all kinds who are interested in unique aspects of culture and history.

I especially liked the mittens from the Kurzeme region of Latvia because of their large, bold designs, usually made with three or more bright yarns. Hallmarks of Kurzeme mittens are very narrow cuffs with fine multicolored bands; some also include a characteristic wider cuff following the narrow cuff. Of the geographical regions within Kurzeme, the mittens of the Southern Kurzeme region are particularly striking. The overall pattern is formed by a geometrical rhombus shape, and the centers of the rhombuses are always filled, often by symbols revered in Kurzeme, including the star, the cross of crosses, and flower-shaped rosette-type suns.

This book is one of the richest and most detailed accounts of Latvian mittens across regions and through time. Grasmann’s research has come together in *Mittens of Latvia* to present an enchanting culture of symbolism, color, and creation.

JENNA FEAR is the editorial assistant for *PieceWork*, *Spin Off*, and *Handwoven* magazines.

Mittens of Latvia

MARUTA GRASMANE

2012. English ed. Riga, Latvia: National Costume Centre “Senā Klēts,” 2015. Hardcover, 435 pages, \$43.99. ISBN 978-9934-8555-1-1. Available from Schoolhouse Press, Pittsville, Wisconsin; (800) 968-5648; www.schoolhousepress.com.

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