

## Swiss Paper Cutting—a Dying Art in Santa Clara

In this article we want to highlight a form of art that seems to be unique to Santa Clara, Utah—Swiss paper cutting art. Paper cutting or Scherenschnitte (literally, scissor cuts) started in Switzerland and Germany around the 16th century. Unlike Chinese paper cutting, which goes back to the 6th century and usually depicts Chinese characters and zodiac animals, in Switzerland it's more often about symmetry in design – whether the artwork depicts a geometrical design or Swiss pastoral scenes.

This art was brought to Santa Clara, Utah in 1861 with the arrival of the Swiss settlers. They brought their own version of Scherenschnitte. Rather than pastoral scenes, the art they brought depicts beautiful lacy designs, usually layered so it depicts a 3-D effect. If you look on the internet, you'll find many examples of pastoral scenes, homes, animals, farms, etc., but similar lacy designs aren't found. The Swiss who settled Santa Clara came from the cantons in the north-east of Switzerland, Thurgau, St. Gallen, etc., located just across Lake Constance from Germany, and they seem to have developed their own methods and designs for this art



Loretta Frei Adams



Wanda Graf Frei



This paper cutting art has been handed down in the family of Loretta Frei Adams, whose great grandmother, Rosina Reber Tobler brought it with her to Santa Clara when she was just a young girl. Since there were no stores that sold greeting cards, or any cards, her family made their own. Loretta's mother, Wanda Graf Frei, learned the art from her mother, Josephine Tobler Graf, who was the daughter of Rosina Reber Tobler.

The technique brought to Santa Clara includes a bottom paper, cut with a lacy design around the edges, and with a picture of something in the middle—usually a flower, or it could be a portrait, anything. The top layer is cut with a more intricate design. The top is placed over the bottom with some spacing pieces to separate the two layers, creating the 3-D art. The cutting is all free-hand, and no two are ever alike.

This beautiful art is dying out in Santa Clara! The Santa Clara Museum held a class several years ago, taught by Loretta Frei Adams. But busy lives intrude, and, according to Loretta, there is no one besides her, who is now actively creating this art. A video of the class was filmed and can be accessed below.

The Utah State Council of the Arts honored Wanda Graf Frei for her beautiful designs, and her designs and Loretta's are included in the Utah Folk Art Exhibition, and also in the Santa Clara Museum.

Following are more photos from the video, and a link to the video.





Click [HERE](#) to view the instructional video