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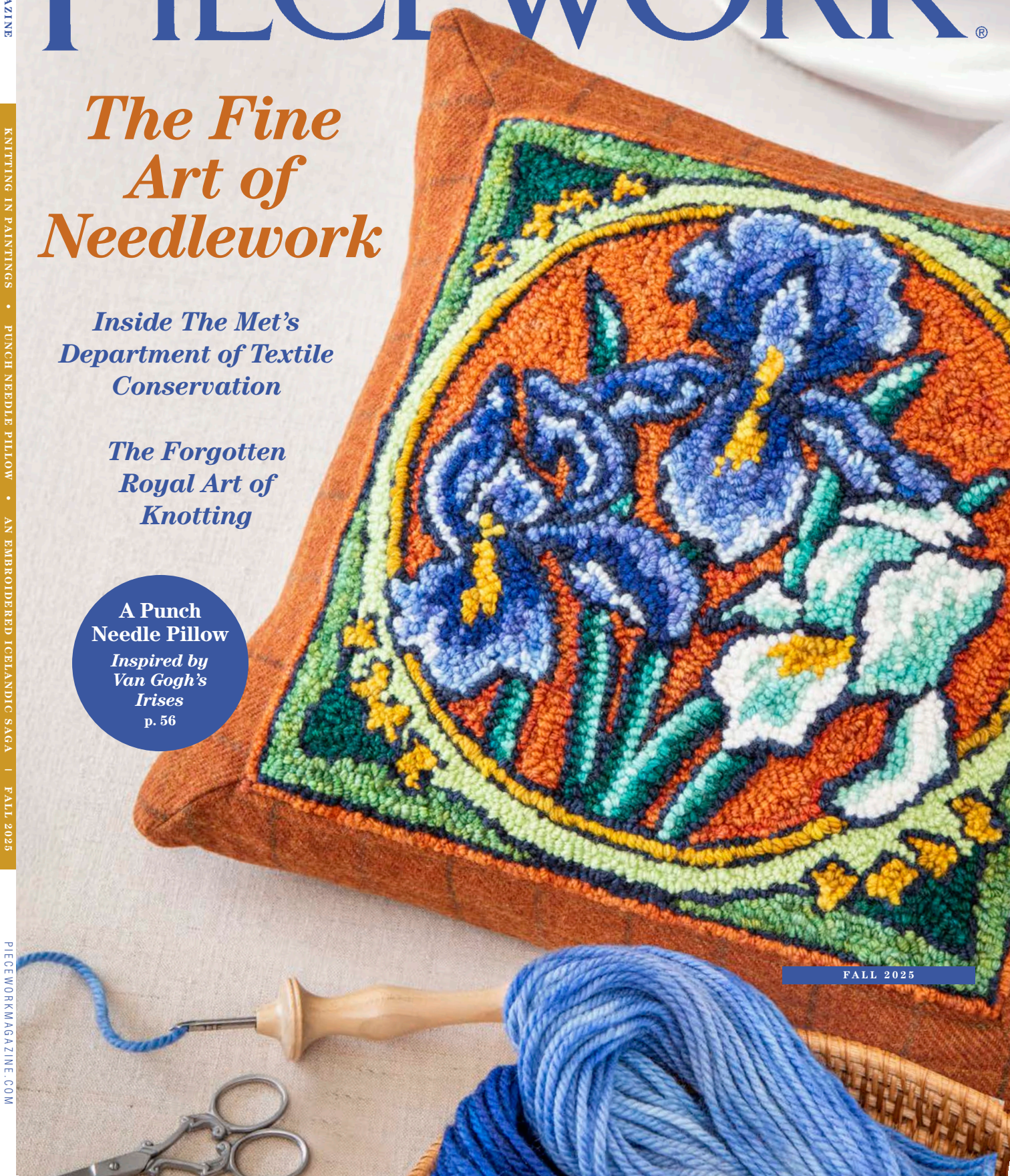
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The Forgotten Royal Art of Knotting

A Punch Needle Pillow
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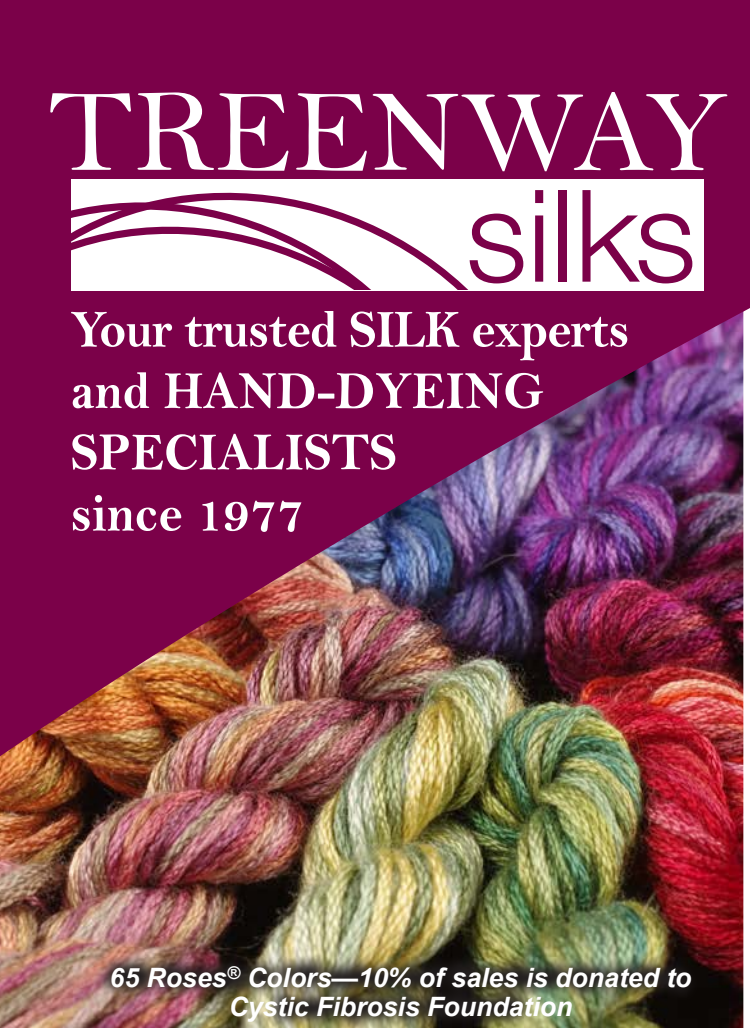
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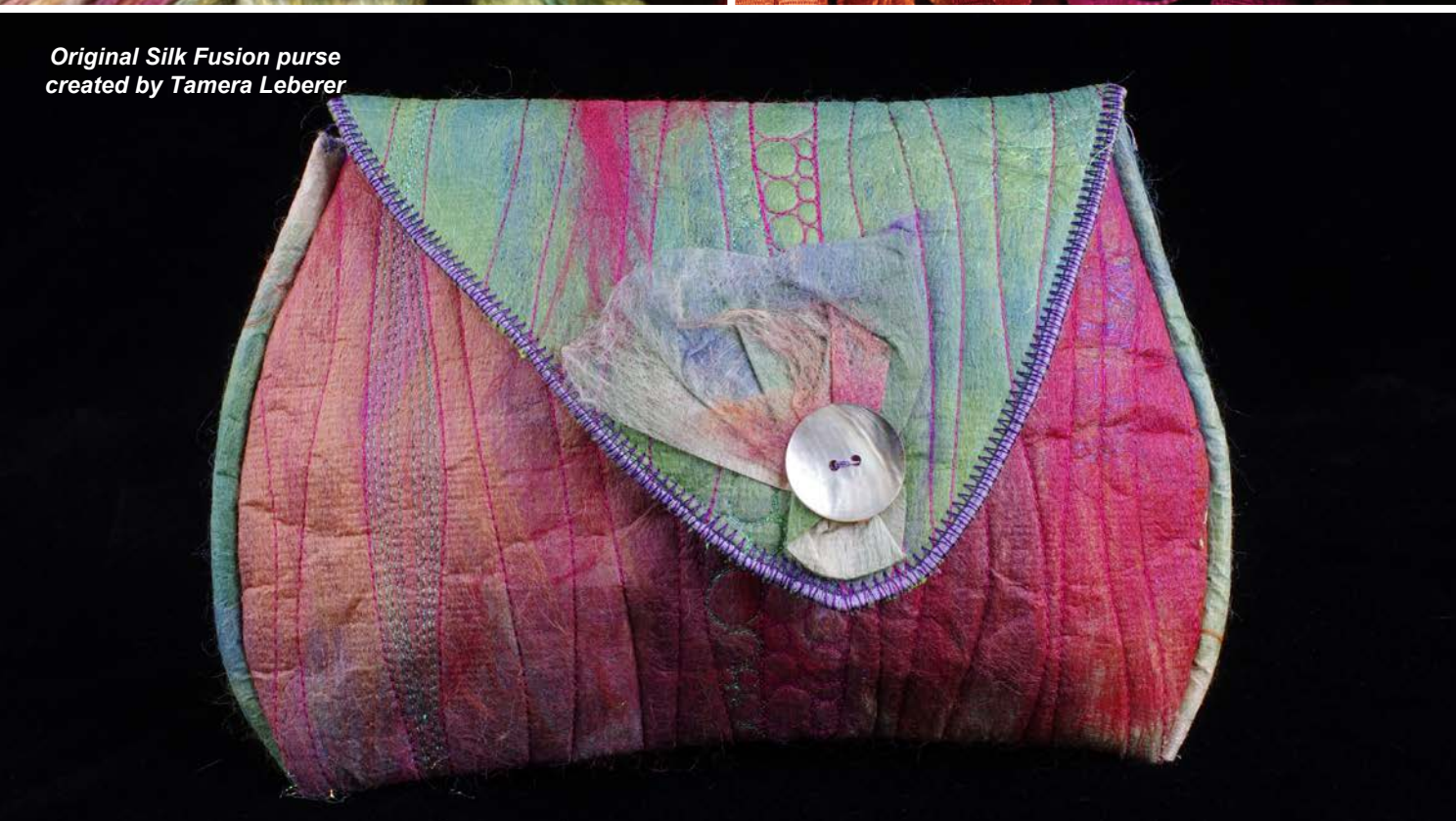


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Photo by Matt Graves

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On the cover:
Simone Vojvodin captures the subtleties of Van Gogh in her punch needle pillow. Photo by Matt Graves

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Notions

"Look with your eyes, not your hands."

You might hear parents in art museums around the world whisper this phrase to their children when they get too close to a painting (or a statue, or something in the gift shop). In this issue of *PieceWork*, we are delighted to say, *Touch all you like.* Here is your chance to get close to prized artworks and even explore them with your own fingertips.

Needlework wears out and disintegrates more quickly than other historical items, and we have no idea what fine and fascinating textiles have disappeared in time. Fine art, though, can tell us about these crafts. For example, Susan Holloway Scott finds knotting, a largely forgotten needlecraft, preserved in paintings of eighteenth-century royalty. Carol J. Sulcoski follows the history of knitting through paintings in three different eras. And Karin J. Bohleke explores the daily life and social causes connected with needlework in one intriguing canvas.



Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Whatever Mary Cassatt's sister was making as she sat working in the garden has been lost, but the painter's brush has preserved the crocheter's hook. *Lydia Crocheting in the Garden at Marly* by Mary Cassatt (1880). The Metropolitan Museum of Art (65.184).

Although painting and sculpture might come to mind first when we think of fine art, the needle creates visual art every bit as significant as the paintbrush. Two of the articles in this issue celebrate embroidery as a major artistic medium: one tells the story of an ancient Icelandic saga, and another explores the significance of steel mills.

And while we can't recommend poking at Monet's *Water Lilies* or Van Gogh's *Irises* as they hang in a museum, you can find the joy of exploring those paintings and three other celebrated artworks with your needles.

With this issue, *PieceWork* passes into new hands: Karen Elting Brock, who has served the publication in many roles in the past, joins as Editor. On behalf of all the editors who have had a hand in this issue, please enjoy this feast for the eyes.



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Correction: In the Summer 2025 issue, Dr. Alejandra Mayela Flores Enríquez's name was listed incorrectly in the resources of "'De mano de': The Making of a Mexican Sampler." The editors regret the error.

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❷ A Helping Hook

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❸ Mark the Spot

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❹ A Magnetic Personality

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Stitches from Paintings Past

What Art Can Tell Us About Historical Knitting

CAROL J. SULCOSKI

Long before there was photography to record images of the world, artists captured glimpses of their times in painting, tapestries, and other forms of art. As we research the history of knitting, art can fill in gaps left by spotty historical records. Wool yarn and wooden needles decompose, but an oil painting has staying power. As one art student put it, "Art from the past holds clues to life in the past. By looking at a work of art's symbolism, colors, and materials, we can learn about the culture that produced it."[1]



Courtesy of Museo Poldi Pezzoli

Baby Jesus holds a spool of yarn and grasps Mary's knitting needles in *The Madonna of Humility* by Vitale da Bologna (circa 1353). Museo Poldi Pezzoli (1574).

Knitting Madonnas

We don't know exactly when or where knitting was "invented," and it may well be that the craft developed at different times in different places. By studying early works of art, however, we can glean information about knitting in past times.

Take, for example, the category of artworks christened "knitting Madonnas." Several pieces of medieval art depict Mary, mother of Jesus, with knitting needles in her hands. Perhaps the best known was painted in the late fourteenth century by the German master Bertram of Minden. The image is part of an altarpiece triptych and shows a seated Mary knitting a red shirt. She appears to be nearly finished with the garment, ready to bind off the neckline stitches.

Several Italian artists also depict Mary in the act of knitting. In *The Madonna of Humility* by Vitale da Bologna, Mary sits on a red bench with baby Jesus by her side. In one hand, the baby holds a bobbin or spool of yarn; his other hand grasps the end of one of Mary's knitting needles. Although a little more difficult to make out, Mary's knitting features a swirling or floral pattern in gold against a green background.

The knitting Madonnas are generally regarded as the earliest known representations of knitting in art. From them, we can deduce a few things about knitting history. First, we know that, by the 1300s to 1400s, knitting was a well-known craft in Italy and Germany where these artists worked. We also know that the artists were familiar with knitting in the round, with the work divided among four or five needles. The floral pattern knitted by the Madonna of Humility suggests that knitters were using more than one color in the same piece of knitting and could indicate that stranded patterning was being done at this time.

We can also learn, as historian Richard Rutt pointed out, about the technical process that fourteenth-century knitters used. Mary knits by holding the working needles under the palms of her hands, with the working yarn held in the right hand. Her needles are straight, not hooked like needle sets found in Türkiye (formerly Turkey) and the Middle East around the same period.[2]

The religious and symbolic aspects of these paintings tell us a few things about western European



In *The Buxtehude Altar* by Master Bertram (circa 1400–1410), Mary knits the neckline of a red shirt, working the stitches with double-pointed needles. Hamburger Kunsthalle (501 c).



Courtesy of the Saint Louis Art Museum



Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Top: In *The Knitting Lesson* by Jean-François Millet (1869), a woman teaches a girl to knit a sock. The curly yarn appears to have been knitted and raveled already. Saint Louis Art Museum (106:1939). *Bottom:* Standing near her flock of sheep, the young woman in *Shepherdess Seated on a Rock* by Jean-François Millet (1856) works on a large stocking on double-pointed needles. Metropolitan Museum of Art (1983.446).

culture. Mary was a role model for Christian women, the ultimate symbol of virtue, femininity, and motherhood. Knitting embodied these ideals. One knitting historian points out that certain translations of the Bible suggest that Christ wore a seamless tunic at his crucifixion, leading to the folk belief that seamless garments provided special protection or power to the wearer.[3] The symbolism of a seamless garment may explain its prominence in these depictions of the Madonna and does not necessarily suggest that circular knitting was dominant or especially popular.

The fact that knitting is shown in the context of religious imagery also makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the social context of knitting at the time. We don't know which social classes knitted, how widespread knitting (or at least circular knitting) was, or how expensive or cheap needles and yarn were.

Knitting's Role in Women's Lives

When I searched for paintings that depict knitters, the French painter Jean-François Millet was inescapable. Millet was part of the Barbizon school, a group of French painters who gathered in the rural areas near Fontainebleau to paint natural scenes. These artists were Realists—they depicted everyday life and landscapes with a focus on details and accuracy. Their approach was matter of fact rather than emotional and idealized as in the works of the Romantic artists.

Millet frequently painted rural workers in their natural landscape, using muted colors and a somewhat gritty style. Consider *The Knitting Lesson*, painted in 1869, depicting a mother who has put down her own work to help her daughter with her knitting. The plain clothing, the mother's hands gnarled by work, and the tender age of the knitter tell us that this knitting was not done for pleasure but was necessary household work. Notice how dark the room is, making accurate knitting more difficult. The daughter appears to be knitting a sock on four needles with the white yarn tensioned over her right index finger. Millet painted several versions of the scene, each underscoring the mother's devotion, handing down a traditional and necessary skill without ignoring the rough reality of their lives.

Another favorite subject of Millet was a shepherdess knitting while her flock grazes nearby. *The*

By studying early works of art, we can glean information about knitting in past times.



Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

The fashionably dressed knitter in *Young Woman Knitting* by Berthe Morisot (ca. 1883) sits in a manicured garden, head bowed over her work. Metropolitan Museum of Art (67.187.89).

Knitting Shepherdess (1856–1857) stands by a small copse of trees, intent on her sock knitting. She's finishing a large stocking in dark brown yarn, probably for a husband, brother, or father. Millet imbues her with grace and dignity, but there is also a gentle melancholy, a loneliness, about the work.

Compare the Realists' treatment of knitting with that of the Impressionists, particularly Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot. Cassatt frequently painted scenes of women engaged in needlework—crochet, knitting, embroidery. But Cassatt's and Morisot's craftswomen are shown in a strikingly different milieu. Morisot painted the women she saw around her in casual, often intimate scenes. In *Young Woman Knitting*, Morisot's subject is a woman clearly of the bourgeois or middle class, knitting something small and white while seated on a gold chair on a garden path. No practical socks for these women; they are absorbed in their work, but their handiwork is of the artistic or fancy rather than pragmatic or rustic kind.

Cassatt and Morisot focused on subjects considered "proper" for a gentlewoman to paint, so their paintings were inspired by sisters, nieces, and women in their households. As one commentator remarked of Cassatt, she "highlighted the

Some paintings from this period are so detailed that a knitter could create a chart of the pattern simply by looking at the painting.



Courtesy of Museum Stavanger

The crisp detail of *Setesdalsgutt* by Carl Sundt-Hansen (1904) shows every stitch of the colorwork pattern in the young man's sweater. Museum Stavanger (SG.0214).

agency, intellect, and inner lives of women by showing them deeply engaged in their pursuits."[4] Knitting in a light-filled room or garden for pleasure is a far cry from Millet's dark rooms and muddy landscapes. Luminous colors and the serene feel of the scenes show that for bourgeois women in France, needlework was a pleasure rather than a necessity.

A Treasury of Norwegian Knitting Patterns

Art can also tell us some very concrete things about knitting design, including a visual record of specific patterns. In mid-nineteenth-century Norway, a movement called *Nasjonalromantikken* (Norwegian Romanticism) sought to define and celebrate Norwegian national identity. Painters such as Adolph Tidemand (1814–1876) and Carl Sundt-Hansen (1841–1907) studied Norwegian folk life and depicted Norwegians wearing their folk costumes or everyday clothing. Tidemand, historian Annemor Sundbø explains, "became a type of researcher into ethnology and ethnography."[5]

The Norwegian Romantics tended to cast their subjects in a rosy light so that buyers would enjoy seeing them on their middle- or upper-class walls. Apart from the pleasing aesthetics, Tideman hoped to encourage Norwegians to be proud of their heritage, writes Sundbø.

At a time when photographs were only black and white, these paintings capture the bright colors of many knitted and nonknitted garments and offer clues about the development of certain Norwegian knitting traditions.

Some paintings from this period are so detailed that a knitter could create a chart of the pattern simply by looking at the painting. Sundt-Hansen painted a young boy from Setesdal in 1904 wearing a blue sweater with white patterns at the cuff. You can see rows of checkerboard stitches divided by horizontal stripes, with zigzag colorwork close to the cuff.

Likewise, Sundt-Hansen's *Setesdal Peasant with Pipe* (1900) is nearly photographic in its rendering of the stitchwork. A classic lice pattern appears on the middle portion of the sleeve, there are horizontal shoulder bands with zigzag patterning, and bands at





Courtesy of the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design

Left: The smoker in *Setesdal Peasant with Pipe* by Carl Sundt-Hansen (1900) wears a classic Norwegian colorwork sweater with lice patterns and geometric motifs. National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design (NG.M.02915). *Right:* The young knitter in *Portrait of Syneve Larsdatter from Vikør* by Adolph Tidemand (1873) has pinned the ball of yarn to her skirt to keep her hands free to work. National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, inventory no. NG.M.02915.

the top of the shoulder create 90-degree angles with the shoulder bands.

It isn't easy to discover the history of knitting traditions or techniques. Thank goodness for these talented artists who left clues in their works for us to follow. ❖

Editor's note: An extended version of this article including several additional paintings is available for subscribers at LT.Media/Knit-Paintings.

NOTES

1. "Why Study Art from the Past?" Metropolitan Museum of Art, January 20, 2012, metmuseum.org/perspectives/studying-art-from-the-past, accessed December 28, 2024 (author identified only as "Kristen").
2. Richard Rutt, *A History of Hand Knitting* (Interweave, 1987), 50.
3. Annemor Sundbø, *Knitting in Art*, trans. Carol Huebscher Rhoades (Torridal Tweed, 2010), 116–18.
4. Antonia Smith, "5 Things to Know about Impressionist Mary Cassatt," Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, September 19, 2024, famsf.org/stories/5-things-to-know-impressionist-mary-cassatt.
5. Sundbø, *Knitting in Art*, 41.

CAROL J. SULCOSKI is a knitting author, designer, and teacher. She has written seven knitting books, including *Knitting Ephemera* (Sixth & Spring Books, 2016), which is full of knitting facts, history, and trivia. Her articles have appeared in publications including *Vogue Knitting, Modern Daily Knitting,* and *Noro Magazine,* as well as on the Craft Industry Alliance website and elsewhere. She lives outside Philadelphia and teaches at knitting events, knitting shops, and guilds. Her website is blackbunnyfibers.com.

Hokusai Cowl

MARI TOBITA

I designed this cowl, inspired by Hokusai's iconic *ukiyo-e*, based on the clouds seen through a paper *shoji* screen from inside a house. In addition to the *kumiko* (fine wooden lattice used in shoji screen) geometric pattern and the different shapes of the clouds, I added a technique that is part of Japanese culture: hiding vivid-color things on the inside or showing them only a little. I used traveling stitches to add texture to the paper screen and stranded colorwork for the clouds.



Courtesy of Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields

Fine Wind, Clear Morning (Gaifūkaisei) by Katsushika Hokusai (about 1800–1949). Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields (60.12).

Materials

- Blue Sky Fibers *Woolstok Light* (100% fine Highland wool), 218 yd (200 m)/50 g: 1 skein each of #2300 Cast Iron (C1), #2321 Loon Lake (C2), #2303 Highland Fleece (C3), and #2315 Red Rock (C4)
- Needles: size 2 (2.75 mm) and size 3 (3.25 mm) 24" (60 cm) circular (cir) or size needed to obtain gauge
- Stitch markers
- Locking stitch markers
- Cable needle
- Tapestry needle

Gauge:

31½ sts and 42½ rnds = 4" (10 cm) in pattern from Kumiko chart using larger needle, after blocking.

30½ sts and 40½ rnds = 4" (10 cm) in St st colorwork from Clouds chart using smaller needle, after blocking.

25½ sts and 49 rnds = 4" (10 cm) in seed stitch using larger needle, after blocking.

Finished Size: 26" (66 cm) circumference, 16½" (42 cm) total length, 12" (30.5 cm) wearing length with 4½" (11.5 cm) of seed-stitch lining folded to inside.

Visit pieceworkmagazine.com/abbreviations for terms you don't know.

Stitch Guide

K1tbl: Knit 1 stitch through the back loop.

1/1 LT: Sl 1 st to cn, hold in front, k1tbl, then k1tbl from cn.

1/1 RT: Sl 1 st to cn, hold in back, k1tbl, then k1tbl from cn.

1/1 LKT: Sl 1 st to cn, hold in front, k1, then k1tbl from cn.

1/1 RKT: Sl 1 st to cn, hold in back, k1tbl, then k1 from cn.



Project photos by Matt Graves

Mari artfully combined colorwork and traveling stitches to capture the essence of viewing clouds beyond a *shoji* screen.



Worked in twisted traveling stitches, the border evokes the delicate texture in the framing of paper screens.

1/1 LPT: Sl 1 st to cn, hold in front, p1, then k1tbl from cn.
1/1 RPT: Sl 1 st to cn, hold in back, k1tbl, then p1 from cn.

NOTES

When working the Kumiko chart, it will be necessary to move the marker at the start of some rounds to accommodate traveling stitches that would otherwise cross the end-of-round boundary. These rounds are indicated by arrows on the chart, and instructions for how to move the marker are provided in the directions.

When working the Clouds chart, loosely carry the color not in use across the WS of cowl to avoid puckering the fabric. Trap any floats longer than ¾" (2 cm) against the WS of the work, and do not catch the float on the same stitch in the following round.

COWL

Using C1 and larger cir needle, CO 204 sts. Place marker (pm) and join for working in the rnd, being careful not to twist sts.
Rnds 1 and 2: K1, p1, *k2, p1; rep from * to last st, k1.
Rnds 3–8: P2, *k2, p4; rep from * to last 4 sts, k2, p2—piece measures ¾" (2 cm).

Using C1, work Kumiko chart, moving the end-of-rnd marker before working the following rnds:
Rnds 7, 28, 29, 30, 37, 38, 39, and 40: Remove m, sl 1 st pwise, then place m on right-hand needle—marker has moved 1 st left.
Rnd 21: Remove m, undo last st of previous rnd and transfer it back to left-hand needle, then place m on right-hand needle—marker has moved 1 st right.

When Rnd 40 of chart has been completed, piece measures 4½" (11.5 cm) from CO.

Change to smaller circular needle.

Dec rnd: *K49, k2tog, pm; rep from * 3 more times, omitting last pm because end-of-rnd m is already in place—200 sts.
Purl 1 rnd, then break C1.

Join C4 and knit 1 rnd, purl 1 rnd. Do not break C4; carry it up the WS of the work until it is needed again.
Join C2, and knit 1 rnd.

Next rnd: K2 with C2, *k1 with C4, k4 with C2; rep from * to last 3 sts, k1 with C4, k2 with C2.

With C2, knit 1 rnd. Do not break C2.

With C4, knit 1 rnd, purl 1 rnd, then break C4—piece measures 5¼" (13.5 cm) from CO.

Join C3 and work Rnds 1–63 of Clouds chart, working the 50-st repeat 4 times for each rnd—piece measures 11½" (29 cm) from CO.
Break C2 and C3.

Change to larger circular needle.

Join C4 and continue with C4 to end.
Dec rnd: *K5, k2tog, [k4, k2tog] 15 times; rep from * 1 more time, k4, k2tog—167 sts.

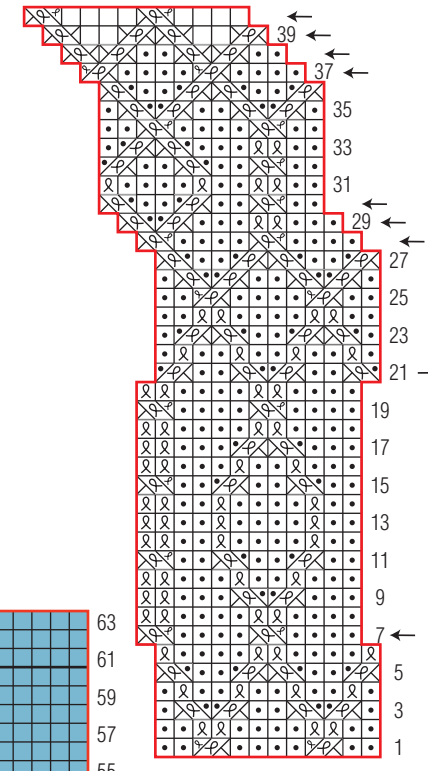
Work seed-stitch lining as follows:
Next rnd: *K1, p1; rep from * to last st, k1.
Next rnd: *P1, k1; rep from * to last st, p1.
Rep these 2 rnds until this seed-stitch section measures 5" (12.5 cm)—piece measures 16½" (42 cm) from CO.
BO all sts in pattern. ❖

FINISHING

Weave in ends. Block to measurements. To wear, fold seed-stitch lining to inside so about ½" (1.5 cm) shows at the top of the cowl.

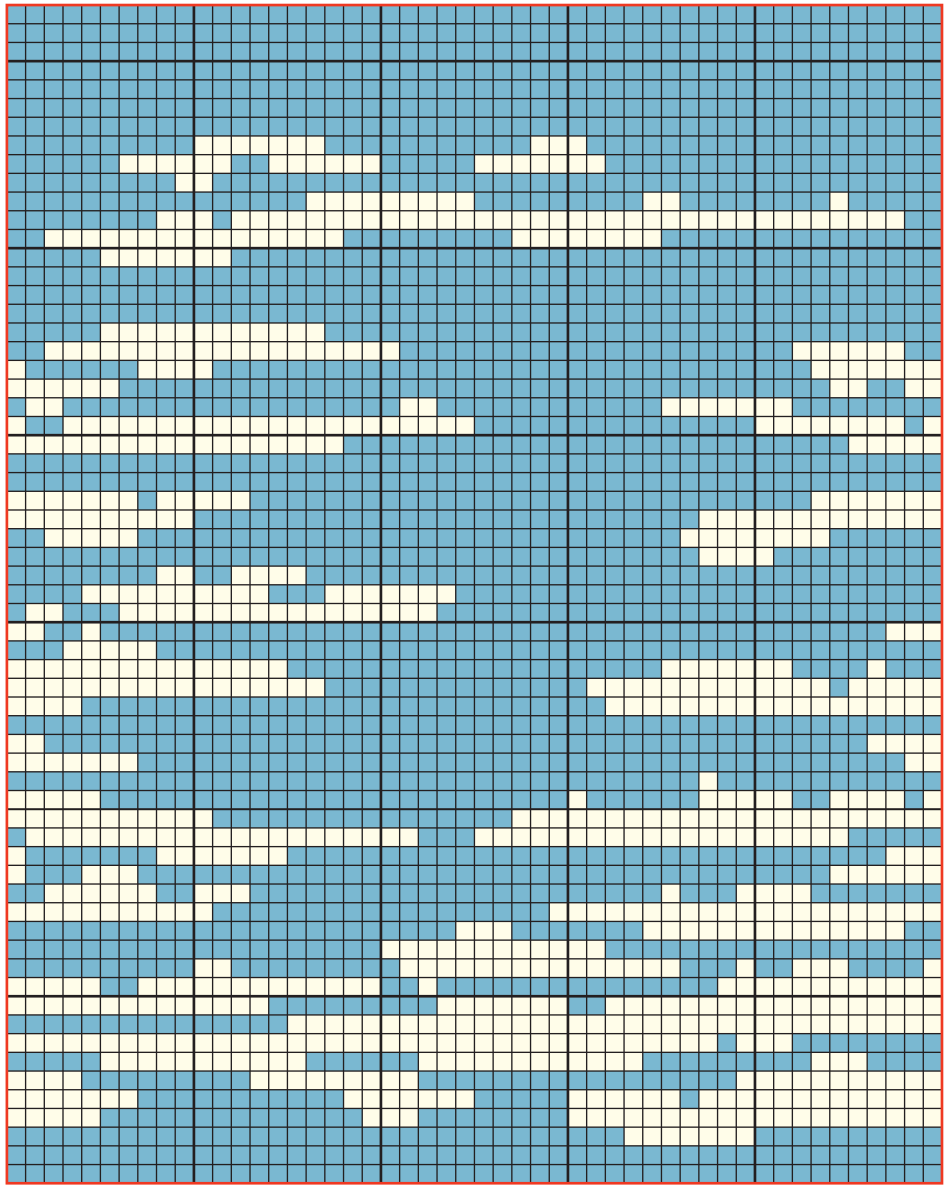
MARI TOBITA was born in Japan and lives in New York City in an apartment filled with books and boxes of yarn. Mari has spent many years studying knitting and designing knitwear.

Kumiko



12-st repeat

Clouds



50-st repeat

Key

- knit
- purl
- k1tbl
- C2
- C3
- repeat
- 1/1 LT
- 1/1 RT
- 1/1 LPT
- 1/1 RPT
- 1/1 LKT
- 1/1 RKT
- ← move marker 1 st left at start of rnd
- → move marker 1 st right at start of rnd

See Stitch Guide for cable definitions and Notes for marker movement.

Knotting

The Unnoticed Favorite in Royal Portraits

SUSAN HOLLOWAY SCOTT

An eighteenth-century woman's portrait was like a profile photo on social media today. The sitters chose every element of the portrait with care to show who they were—their social class and station, their marital status, their taste in clothing, and their favorite handwork, too. Marie Adélaïde de France (1732–1800) was a French princess, the fourth daughter of King Louis XV and Queen Marie Leszczyńska. She was 24 years old when she sat for this portrait by Jean-Marc Nattier; unmarried, she is dressed as a beautiful, eligible royal princess of the French court.

Stretched between Madame Adélaïde's hands is a length of cord. Over one wrist are looped the ribbons of her workbag, and in the other hand she holds a chased gold shuttle, or navette.

The princess is knotting, her favorite handicraft, but one that is now so forgotten that it's often misidentified in paintings as tatting or even crocheting.

The Craft of Knotting

As handwork, knotting is an uncomplicated skill, making a chain of overhand knots onto a cord or thread, usually silk, flax, or cotton. The thread is wrapped around the core of the shuttle: two flattened ovals centered by a spool for holding the wound working thread. Unlike later tatting shuttles, knotting shuttles were large, usually 4 to 5 inches long, and open at both ends.

Using the shuttle to control the thread, the knotter strives to make knots of exactly the same size, at the same intervals along the cord, to resemble a string of French knots. The knotting motion itself is simple and repetitive, and the only challenge to be mastered is uniformity. The knotted cord—also called a string—was rolled into a ball and placed in a workbag that hung from the wrist.

Once completed, the knotted cord could be used for creating decorative embroidery as one form of passementerie. The cord was couched onto fabric with small stitches between the knots to make elaborate designs. Most surviving examples are decorative, such as chair and bed coverings, pillowcases, or dress trimmings. Lengths of knotted cord were also looped to create fringe for borders.

Knotting seems to have been that rare craft in which the process was more important than the product. It was easily learned and didn't require concentration, bright lighting, or keen eyesight. It was the perfect pastime to practice during conversation, letter-readings, concerts, plays, long journeys by carriage, or tedious ceremonies at court. In her 1818 *Dictionary of Court Etiquette*, Stéphanie-Félicité, Comtesse de Genlis (1746–1830), wrote, "Knotting had no other purpose than to enable a woman to appear composed when in company." The repetitive creation of the knots could also be soothing and meditative, a way to calm restless thoughts and stave off boredom. Perhaps needless to say, knotting was a craft practiced only by elite women and girls with leisure time to fill.

Virtue and Luxury

Madame Adélaïde may have been an accomplished knotter, but there are more reasons for knotting to be included in her portrait. Knotting was a visually elegant craft, and the silk thread stretched between her hands and her flashing golden shuttle accentuated the grace of her hands—royal hands that never did anything more taxing than this.

Knotting also showed that Madame Adélaïde was patient and industrious and heeded the warning that "idle hands are the devil's workshop." There was even a suggestion of piety to knotting in Catholic countries, with the knots slipping through the fingers like rosary beads. Busy hands were virtuous hands, especially for a princess hoping to attract a royal husband. It's not surprising that an early (1762) portrait of future French queen Marie-Antoinette—drawn when she was still a seven-year-old archduchess—shows her knotting with an oversized shuttle in her small hand.

Virtue did not mean a lack of luxury, however. In aristocratic Paris, even the most everyday objects—snuffboxes, combs, cosmetic boxes, and mirrors—could be elevated through exquisite craftsmanship and costly materials into precious jewels. Like the shuttle the princess is shown using, the finest



Image courtesy of Alamy Stock Photo

Madame Adélaïde de France Tying Knots by Jean-Marc Nattier (1756). Palace of Versailles (MV 3801).

knotting shuttles were made of gold, silver, tortoiseshell, ivory, or rock crystal, embellished with enameling, chasing, inlaid gemstones or precious metals, or engraving, and were often stored in fitted, velvet-lined boxes like expensive necklaces.

Several surviving shuttles were made by Parisian master goldsmith Mathieu Coiny fils, who was born in 1723. One is fashioned from gold and platinum with elaborate enameling, including the message "a la plus belle" (to the most beautiful), reflecting the popularity of the shuttles as sentimental gifts.

British Royal Knotting

Knotting wasn't limited to the French court. It was equally popular in Great Britain, and some scholars suggest it may even have originated there as elite craft in the seventeenth century, evolving from

Knotting seems to have been that rare craft in which the process was more important than the product.

Tudor and Stuart raised-work embroidery (also known as stumpwork) that employed a variety of textures. In England, the cord was usually called a thread or string, with the craft itself sometimes called stringwork.

Queen Mary II (1662–1694) was an avid knotter, and it's believed she learned to knot early in her marriage to William III, when they lived in the Netherlands. According to Bishop Gilbert Burnet in *An Essay on the Memory of the Late Queen* (1695), the queen turned to "work"—knotting—to help preserve her eyesight.

> When her Eyes were endangered by Reading too much, She found the Amusement of Work: And in all those hours that were not given up to better Imployments, She wrought with her own Hands; and that sometimes with so constant a diligence, as if she had been to Earn her Bread by it. . . . Her Example soon Wrought on [and] the whole Town followed it: So that it was become as much the Fashion to Work, as it had formerly to be Idle.

In 1692, Sir Charles Sedley wrote the poem "The Royal Knotter" for Mary, equating her knotting to the triumph of Protestant England. Most courtiers would have been familiar enough with the craft that the symbolism would have been obvious:

> Bless'd we! Who from such Queens are freed,
> Who by vain Superstition led,
> Are always telling Beads;
> But here's a Queen now, thanks to God,
> When she rides in Coach abroad,
> Is always knotting Threads.

In 1694, Sedley wrote another, less political, poem called "The Knotting Song" (published in the *Gentleman's Journal*), which was soon set to music by Henry Purcell. Here, a young woman named Phillis ignores the "raging Love" of a suitor as she concentrates instead on her handwork: "Phillis, without Frown or Smile/Sat and knotted all the while." To be rejected in favor of knotted thread—oh, that poor "faithful Swain"!

Another English queen, Queen Charlotte (1744–1818), wife of George III, continued to make knotting a fashionable skill at court and taught it to her six daughters. A charming double portrait from 1776 of the queen with her daughter Charlotte, Princess Royal (1766–1828), shows Her Majesty with her



Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Left: Unlike a tatting shuttle, both ends of a knotting shuttle are open, as in this delicate gold and enamel shuttle made in Paris by Mathieu Coiny fils around 1764. Metropolitan Museum of Art (48.187.484). *Right:* Gold and enamel shuttles (navettes) by master goldsmith Mathieu Coiny fils, circa 1763–1764. Metropolitan Museum of Art (48.187.483 and 17.190.1028).



Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Queen Charlotte, Queen of Great Britain and the Princess Royal, by Benjamin West (1778). Royal Collection Trust (404573).

workbag in her lap and her shuttle in her hand, while her daughter displays cloth with an embroidered border, perhaps showing her own needlework to her mother. The Queen smiles with affection and approval and points with her shuttle to the bust of Minerva. Minerva was a Roman goddess with many attributes, including wisdom, learning, and household crafts, all tied together through knotting.

On a visit to the royal palace, famed artist, writer, and needleworker Mary Delany (1700–1788) wrote in a letter to Mrs. Frances Hamilton in October of 1783 that she was given a "frame for weaving fringe" by Queen Charlotte: "You will easily imagine the grateful feeling I had when the Queen present it to me, to make up some knotted fringe which she saw me about. The King . . . said he must contribute something to my work, and presented me with a gold knotting shuttle, of most exquisite workmanship and taste; and I am at this, while I am dictating this letter, knotting white silk, to fringe the bag which is to contain it." Royal approval and rewards for knotting excellence!

Knotting Declines

By the 1770s, knotting was no longer practiced by royalty alone. Women with the means, if not the aristocratic blood, were knotting as well. Knotting had become aspirational handwork, a status symbol that proved not only that middle-class women were industrious but also that they were now sufficiently genteel and prosperous enough to have leisure time. There are dozens of portraits from this era that show the wives and daughters of merchants, squires, and lawyers as well as dukes and earls, and all of them proudly have their knotting shuttles in hand.

Little is known about Bridget Forrester Foot (1718–1816) beyond that she was born in Dorset, England; married John Foot in 1736; and had at least three children—but Mr. Foot was also sufficiently successful for her to sit for her portrait in 1778. She chose to be painted with shuttle in hand and her workbag on her wrist, equal in her knotting skills to the Queen herself.

But the days for knotting were numbered. By 1800, it was becoming a handcraft practiced only by



Photo by Allen Phillips, courtesy of Wadsworth Atheneum

John Singleton Copley, American, 1738–1815. Portrait of Bridget Forrester Foot (1718–1816), c. 1778. Oil on canvas, 49½ x 39⅝ in. (125.8 x 100.7 cm). Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT. Gallery Fund, 1901.34

older ladies. The more ornamental loops and picots that could be created with a smaller tatting shuttle attracted younger, fashionable needleworkers, and the kinds of cords used for couching in embroidery and passementerie were being made with crochet. The social implications of knotting vanished as well. Queen Victoria preferred knitting, crocheting, and Berlin work, and she made those fashionable.

By 1859, *The Ladies' Hand Book of Fancy and Ornamental Work* by Florence Hartley barely mentions knotting. This comprehensive guide to every kind of handwork dismissed knotting with a single sentence: "This is so little used that a description seems almost unnecessary."

Knotting may have been little used, but it was not entirely forgotten. Two hundred years later, there are still craftspeople who specialize in historical handwork, keeping skills such as knotting alive. But the main way that knotting remains a presence today is in the portraits of women who proudly chose to be remembered with shuttles in hand and workbags on their laps. ❖

SUSAN HOLLOWAY SCOTT is the nationally best-selling author of 55 historical novels. She lives with her family and a mess of cats near Philadelphia. For more information about her books and the fascinating people, places, and things she discovers through her research, check out her website and blog, susanhollowayscott.com.

A Bookmark à la Matisse to Embroider

MARY POLITYKA BUSH

Colors sing and botanicals dance in *The Dessert: Harmony in Red (The Red Room)* painted in 1908–1909 by Henri Matisse (1869–1954). Perhaps the epitome of Fauvist art, Matisse's oil-on-canvas work is considered by some to be his masterpiece. It hangs today in The Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia, although a trip to the museum is not required to experience its visual power.

I designed this embroidered bookmark to echo the energy and electric effect of the bold palette and lively composition in Matisse's painting—and the genius of the artist. Simple stitches—stem, chain, and French knot—in crewel wool on linen make up the pas de deux of stylized leaves. If the Matisse-inspired palette of colors shown here seems a trifle tame, opt for raucous, free-wheeling brights—swimming-pool blue, salmon pink, lime, neon yellow—for a livelier effect. Anything goes.

Editor's note: Mary Polityka Bush initially created this design for the Winter 2018 issue of *PieceWork*. In honor of this issue's fine art theme, we are delighted to present it here.



Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

The Dessert: Harmony in Red (The Red Room) by Henri Matisse (1908–1909). Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

Materials

- Brown Sheep Company *Waverly Wool*, 100% wool yarn, 8 yard (7.3 m)/hank, 1 hank each of #1050 Black, #3004 Yellow, and #7052 Blue
- Zweigart *Belfast*, 100% linen fabric, 32-count, 1 piece 12 × 12 inches (30.5 × 30.5 cm) of #3609/902 Red. *Note:* This color has been discontinued. Substitute 4030 Terra Cotta or the color of your choice.
- John James Needles, size 22 chenille, size 22 tapestry, and size 10 sharps
- Sewing thread, Red
- Embroidery hoop, 8 inches (20.3 cm) in diameter or stretcher bars, 10 × 10 inches (25.4 × 25.4 cm)
- Marking pen, washout

Finished Size: Design, 2⅜ × 6⅝ inches (6.0 × 16.8 cm); bookmark, about 2½ × 7 inches (6 × 18 cm).



Project photos by George Boe unless otherwise noted

Mary Polityka Bush used *The Dessert: Harmony in Red (The Red Room)* by Henri Matisse as inspiration for her eye-catching bookmark.

Instructions

Bookmark

Hand-overcast or machine zigzag the edges of the linen to prevent raveling. Place the pattern on a light box or tape it to a sunny window; tape the linen over the pattern, centering the design and aligning it with the straight grain of the fabric. Trace the pattern onto the linen with the marking pen. Mount the linen in the hoop or on the stretcher bars.

Cut the yarn into 15-inch (38.1-cm) lengths; separate each length into its three component strands; embroider with one strand throughout. Use the tapestry needle for whipstitching the stem-stitch leaf veins; use the chenille needle for all other embroidery. Begin and end threads with three small running stitches placed in an area that will later be covered with embroidery or run the threaded needle through the backs of existing stitches. Do not use knots, to keep the wrong side of the embroidery as flat as possible; do not carry threads across unworked areas of the linen.

Embroider the leaves first, completing them one at a time. First, work the Black center vein and stem in whipped stem stitch; add two to three short straight stitches at the lower tip of the stem to form a small wedge, referring to the photograph for placement. Use Blue to outline the leaf with chain stitches. Fill the leaf with Blue French knots, spacing them close together but not crowding them. Use Black to work stem stitches closely around the outer edge of the leaf.

Embroider the chain-stitch spirals and circles with Yellow; for the small circles, make sure to loop the last link of the chain stitch around the base of the first one to make a continuous circle.

Finishing

Remove all traces of the washout marker by soaking the embroidery in three changes of cold water. Place the embroidery between thick terry towels to absorb excess moisture, stretching the embroidery gently by hand. Allow it to dry flat. Press around the motifs, if necessary.

Trim away excess fabric on all sides so the piece measures 7 inches (17.8 cm) wide x 8 inches (20.3 cm)

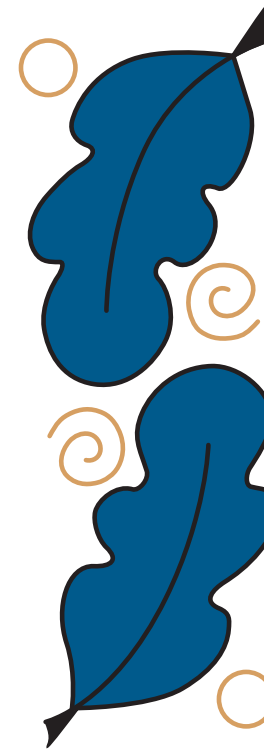
long with design centered. Fold ½-inch (1.3-cm) hems top and bottom toward the wrong side of the embroidery; finger press. On each side, fold and finger press 1¾ inches (4.4 cm) toward the wrong side once and then again, making sure the folded edges abut at the center back but do not overlap. Use the sharps needle and sewing thread to sew a ladder-stitch seam up the back and across the top and bottom.

To make the tassel, cut six 12-inch (30.5-cm) lengths of Yellow wool; separate one length into its three component strands and set aside. Fold the other five lengths in half and tie them tightly at the fold with one of the set-aside strands. Separate the strands that have been tied together into their individual component strands; fold and arrange them smoothly over the knot to hide it. Use one of the remaining set-aside strands to wrap the neck of the tassel, knot, and hide the ends of the wrapping strand by threading them into the tapestry needle one at a time and "sewing" through the neck of the tassel once or twice; trim ends. Trim the length of the tassel to 4½ inches (11.4 cm). Tack tassel to the center point at one end of the bookmark.

Steam the bookmark, gently pulling it into shape. Comb the strands of the tassels with your fingers; trim ends again if necessary.



A curved row of chain stitches in blue marks the border between the tidy black outline and the exuberant French knot interior of the leaves.



Pattern may be photocopied for personal use.
Enlarge pattern to 170 percent.

MARY POLITYKA BUSH considers herself fortunate to have written many articles and projects for *PieceWork* over the years. Each time she has written about a new-to-her embroidery technique, she has fallen in love with it.

The Empty Purse

Art, Needlework, and Early Women's "Craftivism"

KARIN J. BOHLEKE

British painter James Collinson (1825–1881) enjoyed a varied career that included a brief stint among the Pre-Raphaelites, followed by studies to become a Jesuit priest, which he subsequently abandoned. He returned to art in the late 1850s and focused on genre paintings—namely, ordinary scenes from daily life to which viewers could easily relate and that often contained a strong storytelling element. One painting, originally exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1857, exists in five versions held in different collections and is known under the names *For Sale*, *At the Bazaar*, and *The Empty Purse*.



Photo courtesy of author

Gentleman's Berlin work slipper. The roses were sewn in loops and then trimmed and brushed to create a three-dimensional effect. Collection of the Fashion Archives and Museum of Shippensburg University

The work depicts women's needlework contributions to a fundraiser to benefit St. Bride's Church. The flyer affixed to the tablecloth on the right side of the painting identifies the scene as the "Bazaar for the Sale of Beautiful and Fancy Articles" under the patronage of the "Honourable Lady Dorcas" and an associated committee. The various elements of the scene combine to depict women's involvement in charitable and public works through their needlework, as well as their socioeconomic situation, with a hint of the ambiguity that characterizes some of Collinson's works. Although Collinson depicted an Englishwoman, her American counterparts were equally engaged in similar craft endeavors for the same purposes.

"Lady Dorcas" anchors the connection between charitable works and needlework. This name recalls the biblical story of Dorcas, a follower of Jesus and his teachings, who makes clothes for widows and the poor (Acts 9:36–42). Although women's fancywork is a far cry from basic clothing, the fact that the sale of the objects benefits the church makes the time spent creating them, as well as the funds spent on their purchase, appropriate and moral. The name—St. Bride's Church—invites the question of the marital status of the fashionably dressed young woman in the center of the scene. If she is unmarried, perhaps she, too, is one of the suitable items a bachelor can find for himself in attending the bazaar, and one of the painting's titles, *For Sale*, underscores the financial negotiations and settlements that were integral to Victorian marriages in the middle and upper classes.

Home and Handwork

Women's fashion magazines and mid-nineteenth-century needlework books provided patterns and instructions for many of the objects in the painting. Starting from the upper left, the first item is a slipper, whose very large size suggests that it is for a gentleman. Designs for such slippers were not limited to Berlin work, as depicted in the painting, but also included appliqué, knitting, and embroidery. Women completed only the needlework upper; after that, "slippers [were] to be made up by a shoemaker."[1] Photos of men wearing slippers outside of staged stereoviews are rare, since the slippers were designated for indoor use in a private family setting. But one young gentleman received this



Photo courtesy of Bridgeman Images

One of the five instances of *The Empty Purse*, also known as *For Sale* and *At the Bazaar*, painted by James Collinson. Original copies of the painting are held in the collections of the Tate, National Gallery (London), Nottingham City Museums, and private collections.



Photo courtesy of author

A pair of petit point embroidered braces, mid-nineteenth century. Note that the needlework does not cover the entire ground fabric; this is not unusual. Collection of the Fashion Archives and Museum of Shippensburg University

gift of love and made a point of donning them for his studio portrait.

On the upper right of the painting, an incomplete view of a pair of men's suspenders, called braces in some areas, provides another example of women's "labor-of-love" needlework contributions to the masculine wardrobe. Mrs. Pullan, in her commentary on a pattern, suggested that "a pair of these braces would be a very pretty birth-day gift to a husband, brother, or other dear friend of the opposite sex. A more suitable gift, indeed, could not be found."[2] As they did with slippers, fashion magazines promoted the creation of braces using multiple techniques, including embroidery, knitting, and crochet. Again, once the needlework was completed, professional finishing ensured the best results: In a *Peterson's Magazine* article, Mlle. Defour cautions readers, "I prefer having braces made up at a good shop, as amateur workers can scarcely do them well enough."[3] Views of a nineteenth-century gentleman in his suspenders are rare, in this case due to their intimate nature, usually concealed under waistcoats and coats.

Embroidery and needlework projects for men centered around intimate apparel and emphasized private life in the home, and slippers and braces form only a part of the picture. These "undress" items, which also included the body linen that was the shirt, represented the domestic haven created by a loving wife; here a man could doff his suit—the outward symbol of industry and work—and relax. Other recommended projects included myriad smoking caps, tobacco bags, cigar cases, travel sewing kits called "housewives," shaving kits, and practical knitted winter and outdoor accessories, namely scarves, mittens, and hats. Even when a gentleman was out earning a living in the proverbial cold, hard world, he was still wrapped in the warmth that came from loving hands at home.

Additional needlework objects appear on the table on the lower right: a small drawstring bag and a child's ball. Small balls made of fabric remnants function as cheap toys for children and were sufficiently soft for childish hands to hold easily, with the additional bonus of being lightweight enough that the balls were unlikely to damage furniture or knock over and break things when thrown. These balls also appear regularly in the magazines. With the inclusion of the ball, the idealized Victorian life appears complete in the painting: a young woman, Bride's Church, sewing items for a man, ongoing needlework, and children.

Handmade Fashion

The doll immediately below the slipper wears a silk dress featuring a wide boat neckline—associated with evening and children's wear—in striped silk with contrasting puffed sleeves accessorized by a matching hat and overskirt that reveals a contrasting white underskirt. Dolls played a significant role in developing both sewing and maternal skills. In a series titled "How to Dress a Doll," *Godey's Lady's Book* explains that "to be able to make your own doll's clothes, you will acquire the knowledge of making your dresses when you are older. . . . Sewing is particularly a lady's accomplishment, and it cannot be too early practised or encouraged."[4] Adult women used dolls and their new wardrobes for fundraisers: for example, dolls and their highly fashionable garb were significant items at Sanitary Fairs during the Civil War, and some of them survive in collections.[5]

A jaunty hat trimmed with feathers and ribbons perches on a stand. Millinery was a profession dominated by women, and retrimming hats and bonnets to update their appearance was pursued at home as well. Adult women wore bonnets; activities in the countryside, in a garden, or on horseback formed a notable exception. But for girls and young women, hats were stylish additions to their wardrobe, and in this instance, the presence of the beribboned confection in the painting underscores the theme of fashion and youth introduced by the doll and by the woman at the center of the painting.

The Purse

The young woman at the center of the painting proffers an empty miser's purse for the viewer. For some reason, one of the two rings that fasten this purse is in her right hand. Miser's purses, long the primary method for carrying change, were knitted, netted, and crocheted and featured colorwork, beads, and tassels. One typical characteristic was the very different ends; without fishing through and hunting for change, the bearer knew by looking at a purse's ends which one contained copper and which contained silver coins (or gold, for the wealthier). By sliding the locking rings out of the way, women accessed the coins through a slit in the narrow center.[6] Yet the fashionably attired woman's purse is empty, and thus some of the ambiguity in Collinson's works appears. Has she spent everything already at the bazaar? Probably not, since she carries no purchases. Does she have no money because her stylish wardrobe consumes her income? Perhaps.

The specter of the fashion- and status-addicted woman who brings about her husband's financial ruin through her overspending haunts the literature of the time and serves as a moral warning in





Top: Carte de visite portrait of an unidentified young man modeling his embroidered slippers from the studio of J. L. Eck, Kutztown, PA, early 1860s. Collection of Drs. K. and B. Bohleke. *Bottom:* In this suggestive stereoview from the late 1850s, the partially dressed—and predatory—master of the house has yet to pull his braces up and over his shoulders. Or perhaps he is removing them. The maid provides the caption for the image: "Did you ring, Sir's?" Collection of Drs. K. and B. Bohleke.

Photos courtesy of the author



Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

A miser's purse, mid-nineteenth century. Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

countless stories. The fundamental question is where she would obtain any funds in the first place, and the answer is from the dominant male in her life, either a husband, father, or legal guardian. Women of her social class were "protected" by laws of coverture that left all financial control in the hands of men. Even if she contributed to the wares on display, the woman at the center of the needlework and the home it symbolizes had no independent financial means to contribute to the church fundraiser.

Yet women contributed the handmade items in the painting, spending their needlework time sewing, not for family and home but for charitable purposes, transforming an intimate gift into a market commodity. For many, the path of sewing for charity opened the door to larger social and political activism while still underscoring their femininity. The establishment of sewing circles simultaneously founded women's groups capable of organizing large projects, as noted by the committee that aided Lady Dorcas. Needlework, namely women's "work," formed a key component in their crusades for abolition, temperance, economic rights, and suffrage.[7] The previously mentioned Sanitary Fairs raised millions of dollars during the Civil War, and the innumerable socks and mittens knitted for Federal and Confederate troops pale in comparison to quantities produced for the war effort during World War I.[8] These women were passionate about their causes, even if the sewing itself held little appeal. One example is abolitionist Charlotte Forten, a young African-American woman training to be a teacher in Boston in the 1850s, who joined an antislavery sewing society in 1854. She described one afternoon when she "went to a sewing party, or 'bee' as the New Englanders call it—Such parties possess not the slightest attraction for me, unless they are for the anti-slavery fair. Then I always feel it both a duty and a pleasure to go."[9]

Collinson depicted these themes in a painting that encompasses far more than women's fashions and crafts to acknowledge the financial situation of women and their active and expanding role in transforming society. Sometimes a piece of embroidery is not just a piece of embroidery. ❖

Notes

1. *Godey's Lady's Book* 36, no. 2 (February 1848): 125.
2. Mrs. Pullan, "Embroidered Braces," *Peterson's Magazine* 31, no. 5 (May 1857): 391–92.
3. Mlle. Defour, "Embroidered Braces," *Peterson's Magazine* 27, no. 1 (Jan. 1855): 93.
4. "How to Dress a Doll," *Godey's Lady's Book* 60, no. 4 (April 1860): 378.
5. One 12-inch doll with her wardrobe and trunk from the 1864 Brooklyn Sanitary Fair is housed at the Brooklyn Museum.
6. See Gwen Blakley Kinsler, "The Ingenious Miser's Purse," *PieceWork*, March/April 2017, 50–52.
7. Katherine Durack, "Let Us Keep Knitting and Crocheting for the Bazar, Sisters! Notes on the December 1900 National Suffrage Fair," *PieceWork*, November/December 2015, 12–17.
8. Susan Strawn, "Another Noble Cause: Suffragist Knitters of World War I," *PieceWork*, Summer 2023, 45–49.
9. Charlotte Forten Grimké, *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*, ed. Brenda Stevenson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 114–15, entry dated December 6, 1854.

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Water Lilies Tote

SARAH KELLY

"When you go out to paint, try to forget what objects you have before you, a tree, a house, a field, or whatever it is. Think only this: here is a little square of blue, of pink, a green oval, a yellow streak, and paint exactly how it looks to you, the exact colors and shapes, until it gives your own naïve impression of the scene before you." —Claude Monet



Photo courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago

Water Lilies by Claude Monet (1933). The Art Institute of Chicago (1933.1157).

Impressionism is about emotions and sensations, capturing the changing light from the passage of time or a cloud casting shadows, the natural movement of the body and nature. An Impressionist painting pulls at our hearts rather than our heads.

Monet created about 250 paintings of his garden. We can guess what time of day he's painting, what the weather must have been like, what his mood must have been as he brushed the paint on the canvas. One painting is grays and light pinks, another focuses on the greens and blues, and yet another on unexpected yellows and oranges. Each time you think you've seen every color in a piece, he surprises you with a stroke of another.

Create your own masterpiece tote bag inspired by Monet's *Water Lilies* series. The flecked color and faint halo of Felted Tweed yarn give the piece the soft, feathery look of Impressionist paintings.

Emulate Monet's masterpieces by choosing your favorites of his collection and using colors from them: light gray background with soft greens and pinks for 1903 and 1907 works; bold green background with lighter green leaves and reeds and light pink lilies for his 1904 works; or lightly variegated background for a dawn or dusk impression.

MATERIALS

- Rowan *Felted Tweed* (50% merino wool, 25% alpaca, 25% viscose), DK weight, 191 yd (175 m)/ 50 g: 2 balls of #178 Seasalter (dark blue, MC); 1 ball each of #213 Lime (CC1), #199 Pink Bliss (CC2), and #181 Mineral (mustard, CC3). *Note:* The sample project uses 2 full balls of MC. To have enough for swatching, differences in gauge, or pattern adjustments, purchase a third ball.



Project photos by Matt Graves

- Needles: size 5 (3.75 mm) 8" (20 cm) set of double-pointed (dpns), three 24" (60 cm) circular (cir) needles, optional, or size needed to obtain gauge
- Markers, including 1 in contrasting color for beginning of round
- Waste yarn or stitch holder
- Hand towels or facecloths for blocking
- Tapestry needle

Gauge: 24 sts and 28 rnds = 4" (10 cm) before felting; 30 sts and 34 rnds = 4" (10 cm) after felting.
Finished Size: 14" (35.5 cm) wide and 14" (35.5 cm) tall (measured from the slipped sts edge of the bottom of the bag) before felting; 11¾" (30 cm) wide and 12½" (31.8 cm) tall after felting.

Visit pieceworkmagazine.com/abbreviations for terms you don't know.

Notes

When working with more than one color, the way you hold the strands can influence which yarn is featured more prominently or which is dominant. I usually carry the contrast yarn(s) behind/underneath the main color to make the motif stand out (dominant).

When working with three colors, determine which color you want to be dominant, and hold this strand behind the other two colors.

The charts are read from right to left, and from bottom to top. The 87-stitch repeat is worked twice each round, once for each side of the bag.

To avoid overly long floats on the inside of the bag, trap the nonworking strand(s) whenever the float will be more than 5 stitches long. Do not catch the float on the same stitch the following round. Keep the floats loose to avoid puckering.

Instructions

Bottom of bag is worked back and forth on two dpns in double-knitting technique.

Using MC, CO 16 sts.

Row 1 (RS): *K1, sl 1 wyf; rep from * to end.
Row 2 (WS): *K1, sl 1 wyf; rep from * to end.

Work Rows 1 and 2 a total of 72 times—144 rows, 72 rows visible on each side.

Body

First Side: K8 to end in the center of sts on needle.

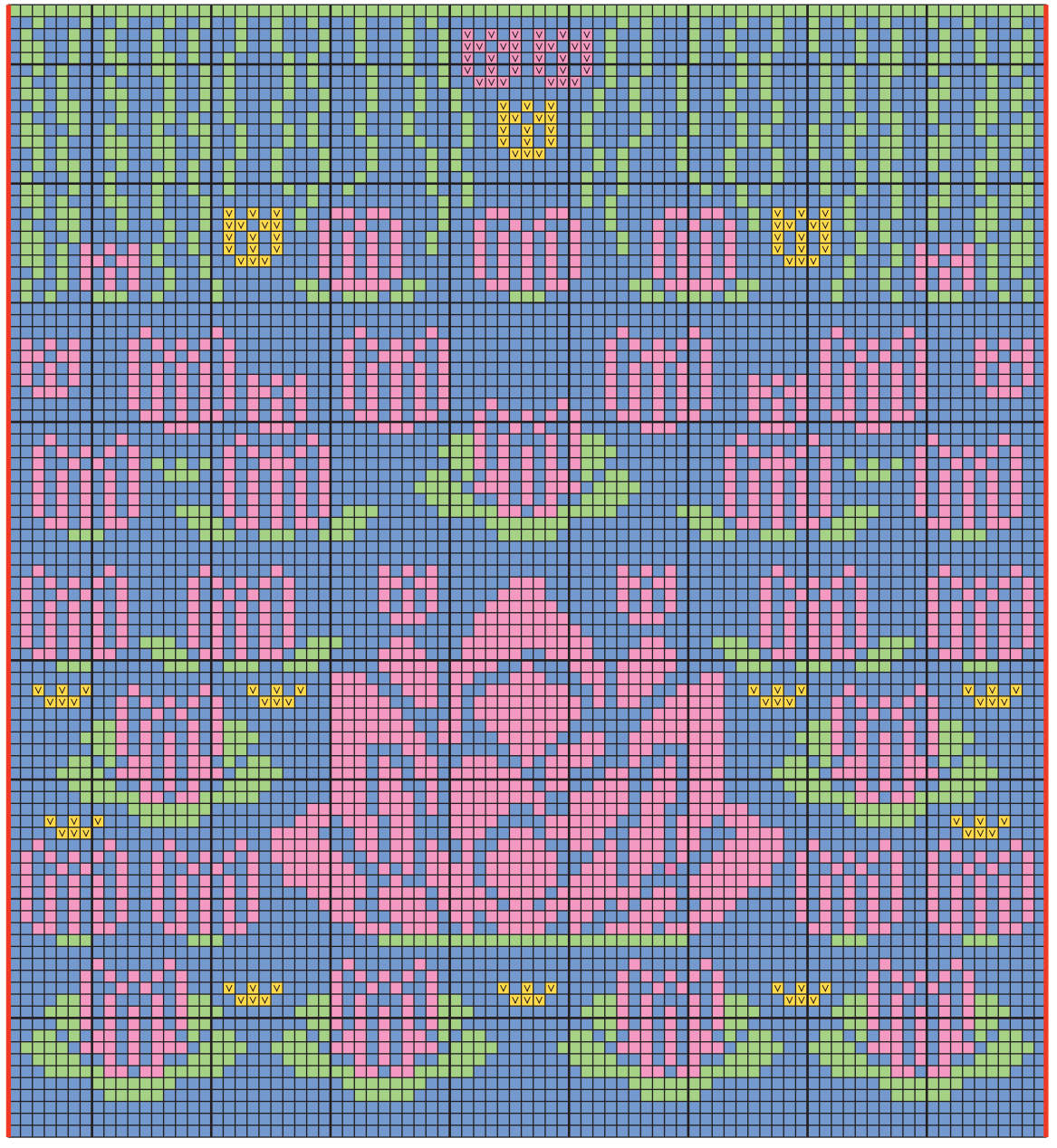
Using a new needle (if using dpns this will be Needle 1), k6, k2tog—7 sts on Needle 1. Do not turn.





Left: Pick up stitches along the edges of the double-knitted base to form a sturdy, tidy bottom. *Right:* Work some of the flowers in duplicate stitch as indicated on the chart, adding texture to the flowers and reducing the number of yarns to use in a single round.

Water Lilies Chart



87-st repeat

Key

- MC
- CC1
- CC2
- CC3
- repeat

An Impressionist painting pulls at our hearts rather than our heads.

With same side of work facing, pick up and knit 72 sts (1 st for each slipped edge st) along the selvedge. If using dpns, use Needle 1 to pick up the first 36 of these sts, then add Needle 2 to pick up the second 36 sts.

With the same needle and same side facing, pick up and knit 8 sts across first half of cast-on edge—87 sts for first side of bag.

Second Side: Using a new needle (if using dpns this will be Needle 3), pick up and knit 7 sts across the remaining cast-on sts.

With same side facing, pick up and knit 72 sts (1 st for each slipped edge st) along the other selvedge. If using dpns, use Needle 3 to pick up the first 36 of these sts, then add Needle 4 to pick up the second 36 sts.

With the same needle and same side facing, knit across the first 8 sts of the bottom again to end in the center of the bottom sts, and pm in color for beg of rnd—87 sts for second side of bag; 174 sts total.

Begin Using Charts

You may find it helpful to place markers every 10 stitches to correspond to the heavy lines of the charts; there will be 7 stitches in the last group at the end of each side.

Work Rnds 1–95 of the Water Lilies chart in stockinette stranded colorwork, working the 87-st repeat twice for each rnd. The mustard CC3 sts with the duplicate stitch V symbols can be knit using a separate short length of yarn for each motif, or knit these stitches in one of the other contrast colors and duplicate stitch them with CC3 later, before felting. Similarly, the pink CC2 sts in Rnds 89–93 can be knit in the color shown, or knit using CC1 and then duplicate stitched with CC2 later.

After completing Rnd 95, cut CC1 leaving a 4" (10 cm) tail to weave in later.

Using MC, [knit 1 rnd, purl 1 rnd] 2 times, then knit 1 more rnd—5 garter rnds completed.

Bag Straps

Straps are worked back and forth on two dpns in double knitting as for the bottom of the bag.

First strap: Using MC, BO 10 sts, knit until there are 16 sts on right needle after last BO, then place the 16 sts just worked onto holder or waste yarn. BO next 35 sts, then knit until there are 16 sts on right needle again. Turn work.

Row 1 (WS): *K1, sl 1 wyf; rep from * to end.
Row 2 (RS): *K1, sl 1 wyf; rep from * to end.

Rep Rows 1 and 2 until strap measures 16" (40.5 cm), or desired length, ending with a WS row. Keep in mind that felting may shorten the length by about 10%, or 1½" (4 cm).

Place 16 held sts on a separate dpn.

Being careful not to twist the strap, bring the needles holding the live sts together and parallel, with the wrong sides touching and right sides facing out, then graft end of strap to top of bag. Cut yarn, leaving a 4" (10 cm) tail.

Second strap: With RS facing, rejoin MC to sts on needle just after the completed strap. BO 20 sts, knit until there are 16 sts on right needle after last BO, then place the 16 sts just worked onto holder or waste yarn. BO next 35 sts, knit until there are 16 sts on right needle again and place these sts on a separate holder, then BO remaining 10 sts.

Return one group of 16 sts to dpn, and rejoin MC with WS facing.

Work Rows 1 and 2 as for first strap until second strap is the same length as the first, ending with a WS row.

Join strap sts to held sts by grafting as for first strap. Cut yarn, leaving a 4" (10 cm) tail.

Finishing

If you worked any CC2 or CC3 sts using one of the other colors, add them using duplicate stitch now. Weave in ends.

To felt bag, place in a pillowcase or delicates bag and wash on warm with a cold rinse.

Immediately remove from washing machine. Roll up towels and place inside bag, pin to shape, and allow to dry completely before removing pins. ❖

SARAH KELLY is a lifelong knitter based in Alberta, Canada, who creates whimsical and joyful stranded colorwork designs. Finding inspiration from childhood memories, her love of camping and the outdoors, and scenes that capture her imagination, she creates designs for mittens, socks, cowls, hats, and sweaters that are truly unique and engaging. Find her on Instagram as @Grey_Owl_Knits.

A Bayeux-Style Tapestry Unfolds in Iceland

Many Hands Stitch a Saga in a Small Village

CLAUDIA PÉTURSSON



Photo courtesy of the author

Visiting the Hvolsvöllur Saga Center led to a crafter's dream: the opportunity to participate in creating an ambitious work of art. Here, I am sitting at the tapestry (in the foreground in blue) on that amazing first day of stitching.

The Bayeux Tapestry is an important part of my family's story, woven into our daily life. My father, a military historian, would talk about the events that were told in the tapestry and the 10,000 French- and Latin-derived words that arrived in the English language with the Norman invasion of 1066 CE. My father referred to the tapestry, with its bright colors and energetic images, as "the world's first comic strip."



This image shows the tapestry in process. The tapestry is structured with a top and bottom border surrounding a center band. My first completed border is in the bottom band. You can see other areas of work in various stages of completion.

As fate would have it, I married a "Norman," a man from the north, specifically Iceland. In marrying me, my husband married someone who works with her hands, as my mother did before me. This quality fit right into my husband's culture. Iceland was the poorest country in western Europe at the turn of the twentieth century, and Icelanders had limited mechanized resources. During cold winter evenings, a tradition of women's handwork emerged that is expert in its execution and astonishing in its beauty.

My husband and I started to spend a lot of time in Iceland, starting in 2018. We had a steady stream of visitors, including a dear friend and her son. Icelanders are known for their gatherings of endless coffee, cake, and conversation. On one occasion, I noticed that my friend's son looked subdued. I leaned over to him and asked what he would like to do. His answer reorganized my life. "I am on the hunt for Vikings," he answered. "Then I know just what we will do," I responded.

A Saga Unfolds

The next day, we headed to Hvolsvöllur, a small town of 1,000 inhabitants, an hour and a half east of the capital city, Reykjavík. Some of Iceland's most iconic history took place in this area and is recounted in Iceland's mightiest saga, *The Saga of the Burning of Njál* (known in English as Njál's saga). My guest would learn the Viking history he sought in Hvolsvöllur.

And what is a saga? A sweeping tale of derring-do, of maidens offered in marriage to questionable suitors, of battles and heartbreak, of betrayal and loyalty, and, in the case of Iceland, a story integral to the soul of the nation. This saga chronicles a 50-year blood feud and the friendship between a wise legal counselor, Njál Thórgeirsson, and his impetuous friend Gunnar Hámundarson. It includes long treatises on Viking-era law, the conversion of Iceland to Christianity, and one of the most complicated female characters in literature, the beautiful Hallgerðr Höskuldsdóttir (Hallgerthur Long-Legs).

Before heading out, I searched the website of the Hvolsvöllur Saga Center. During my search, I discovered something remarkable. The community was sewing a 90-meter-long tapestry—in the Bayeux style! On certain days, visitors were invited to come and see the project.

As luck would have it, the sewing room was open during our visit. And there it was—about 10 meters of the not-yet-stitched project stretched out on a

sturdy wooden frame, with the completed part rolled up on a big spool. People were leaning over the work, a linen field printed with images and text. We oohed and aahed at the astonishing length of the fabric, the style, the colors, and the pure Icelandic and native-plant-dyed wool used to sew the tapestry.

Then one of the staff members invited us to join in! "What do you mean? We can sew?" I asked Sigga Fritha, the smiling staff member. "Yes, everybody sews. That's what we are doing," she answered. When the project was conceived, its founders decided that the world would be invited to sew. This would not be a project of experts, but a homegrown project that showed the mark of many hands.

The tapestry is constructed in the same format as the Bayeux, from which it took its inspiration. (The Bayeux Tapestry and the Njál's Saga Tapestry are embroideries that are commonly called tapestries. Typically, tapestries are woven on looms, not embroidered.) It is 91.5 meters long and 50 centimeters wide (300.2 feet long and 1.7 feet wide). Along the top and bottom of the linen field are two borders, just like on the Bayeux, in which images, clues, and text are recorded. Framing each border strip are four lines, where newcomers start practicing the "outline stitch," a classic running contour stitch.

These four border lines illustrate the intent of the founders. From the perfect stitches of the long-practiced expert to the disjointed, choppy stitches of the total beginner, these lines tell the story of every person who sewed on the tapestry.



Photo by the author



Photo at right and opposite courtesy of Njálurefill SES

Above: The notes pinned to the tapestry indicate areas that embroiderers have claimed. Their names and the dates they began the image were written on the notes and then pinned to the tapestry. *Top:* A turtledove clue: this motif in one of the tapestry's borders indicates that characters are falling in love in the main panel.

Embarking on a Stitching Journey

Hvolsvöllur sits on the south coast of Iceland in the heart of saga country, its geography filled with places where pivotal historical events took place. The town mainly services the agricultural area and is a hub for tourism in some of the most beautiful natural parts of the country, Landmannalaugar and Thórsmörk.

The founders of the Njál's Saga Tapestry Project—Christina M. Bengtsson, a secondary school history instructor, and Gunnhildur Edda Kristjánsdóttir, a regional librarian—conceived of the idea to retell the story of their most famous saga, The Saga of the Burning of Njál, in the form of a tapestry. Icelanders are rooted in tradition and history, but they also have an openness to innovation and modern methods. Thus, the tapestry is a marriage of their handwork and literary traditions coupled with a modern artistic interpretation. The decision to invite the world to sew was modern, since typically projects such as these have involved experts and those with long practice creating works of art.

Award-winning artist Kristín Ragna Gunnarsdóttir drew the images on the template in a style that echoes the Bayeux tapestry. It retains the upper and lower borders, with the main action taking place between these two areas, and uses a code style in the borders similar to that on the Bayeux. For example, turtledove motifs suggest that characters are falling in love, and an intertwined tree describes the fates of families being woven together.

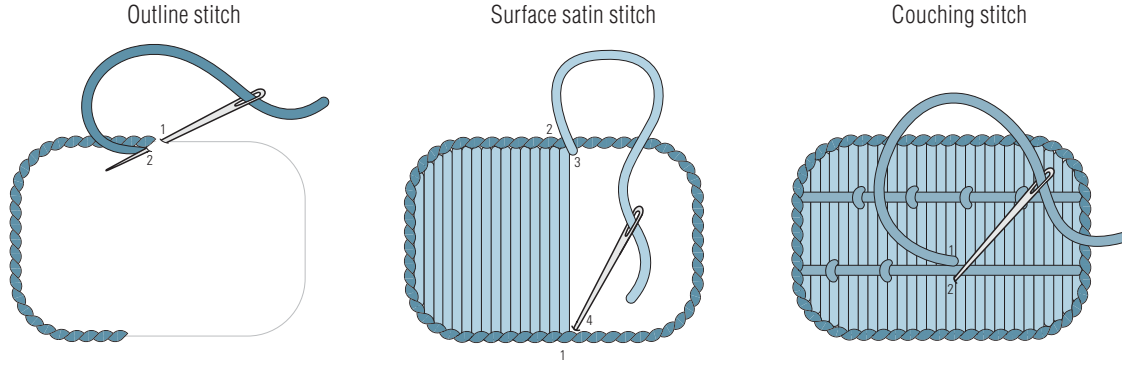
Although the inspiration for the tapestry comes from the Icelandic literary masterpiece, the founders decided to use text sparingly. Text is sprinkled throughout the tapestry, giving the viewer clues to the action but allowing the images to draw one's attention along and into this monumental tale.

Christina, Gunnhildur, and Kristín Ragna decided to sew the tapestry in the Bayeux stitch called laidwork, or couching stitch. It was a brilliant choice because it enables the accuracy necessary for depicting images with clean borders and for delineating action. We are not looking at an impression of the story over 90 meters, but a chapter-by-chapter (159 to be exact) retelling of a saga.

The Bayeux stitch, captured within the borders of the outline stitch, offers the viewer a sense of motion and majesty. Clothing flows in the wind, voices rise to the sky, fog swirls through the trees. And for a story of such sweeping import, these stitches offer

Bayeux Stitch

The Bayeux stitch is a laidwork stitch in which wool is laid across the fabric field and secured with a surface satin stitch. This makes it very economical to cover large areas, as it does not waste wool on the wrong side. Then, the main laid body of stitches are secured with single laid lines. Finally, the single laid lines are tacked down with single small couching stitches, typically secured in a brickwork pattern to create depth and interest. "There is evidence that this stitch, while not invented in Iceland, was preserved for many more centuries in Iceland after it had fallen out of fashion on the European Continent," says Kristín Ragna Gunnarsdóttir, one of the tapestry project's founders.







Photos pages 39 and 40 by the author

Above: Once a stitcher demonstrated skill at the outlining stitch, the next step was to learn the Bayeux couching stitch on one of the motif borders.
Top: This section shows the main character that I was invited to embroider: Gissur the White, the character in green, a chieftain from Mosfellsbaer.

accurate expression and emotion. We observe hope, flirtation, disappointment, anger, and calculation on the faces of these passionate characters.

After proving mastery of the outline stitch, visitors were invited to sew something straightforward, such as a motif border. In these borders, many of which signaled a change in action, the Bayeux stitch was introduced. Because one of the stitch's attributes is precision, it demands that the embroiderer is thoughtful and strategic about how to fill in the spaces.

During the hours that I stitched, I thought about the courage it took to bring this idea of a tapestry to fruition and completion. How many small towns decide to tell their local history in a "crowd-sewn," hand-embroidered tapestry in a medieval style in an age when computers can generate "art" in seconds? How many communities dare to gather the few who believe, and hope that they can convince others to sew, to donate workspace, to invite government officials to support the project? How many groups invite the world to sew, give themselves 10 years to complete the project, and finish it in less than 8, even with a global pandemic? This project is a testament to the nature of Icelanders, their tenacity, their ability to dream big in a country with limited resources, limited opportunities, and even limited sunlight.

Iceland's Bounty

One resource that is not scarce in Iceland is wool. There are just under 400,000 Icelanders, but more than 400,000 sheep, peaking at 800,000 during the summertime. Icelandic sheep came from Norway with the first settlers in 874 CE and have remained isolated since then. They have a distinctive combination of outer fibers that are long, glossy, tough, and water-resistant, and inner fibers that are fine, soft, and insulating, providing breathability and resistance to cold.

Icelandic wool's natural colors are black, gray, brown, and white. For the Njál's Saga Tapestry,



The completed 5-meter-long "Traveling Tapestry" when it was on display at Hótel Rangá, Hvolsvöllur, Iceland. The "Traveling Tapestry" is on a North American tour in 2025.

some of the wool was dyed using plants found in the Icelandic landscape. The wool was spun in a two-ply, embroidery-wool weight. Gunnhildur and Christina spent hours testing plants and creating dyes until they finally landed on the color palette for the tapestry using birch, rowan, lupine, and poplar leaves as dyes.

The Quest, Completed

In April 2019, a year before the tapestry was completed, a delegation of Hvolsvöllur embroiderers traveled to Bayeux and met with head curator Antoine Verney. He was so impressed that this tiny community in this tiny town in this tiny country would embark on such a monumental endeavor and accomplish the task! The delegation presented him with a sample from the Njál's Saga Tapestry that is now displayed in the museum with other gifts from around the world that celebrate embroidery inspired by the Bayeux Tapestry.

On September 15, 2020, the tapestry was completed. It took 12,518 individual contributions of sewing by the local community, other Icelanders, and visitors from 150 countries to complete. Along with founders Christina, Gunnhildur, and Kristín Ragna, a core group of embroiderers gathered to take the last stitches, with dignitaries from the local government on hand for the celebration. The former prime minister of Iceland, Katrín Jakobsdóttir, presented the project with a grant of $175,000 USD from the Icelandic government.

However, it was a bittersweet day. So many local friends who had sewn together for years were now pondering their next steps. Due to COVID-19, the plans for constructing a building for the tapestry were put on hold. The tapestry lay rolled up in storage, with no one enjoying its wonders.

I had an idea. What if the community sewed a smaller version of the tapestry that could be taken to events to help spread the word and raise funds for a museum worthy of this work of art? The Hvolsvöllur community loved the idea and began designing and sewing the new "Traveling Tapestry." This 5-meter-long tapestry, an excerpt from chapters 31 to 45 of the saga, was completed in May 2024 and is now on tour in the United States and Canada for the spring, summer, and fall of 2025. We hope that this historic partnership of Icelanders and North Americans will bear much fruit as we seek to build a home for this world-class testament to the work of a small community that knows the value and beauty of working with our hands. ❖

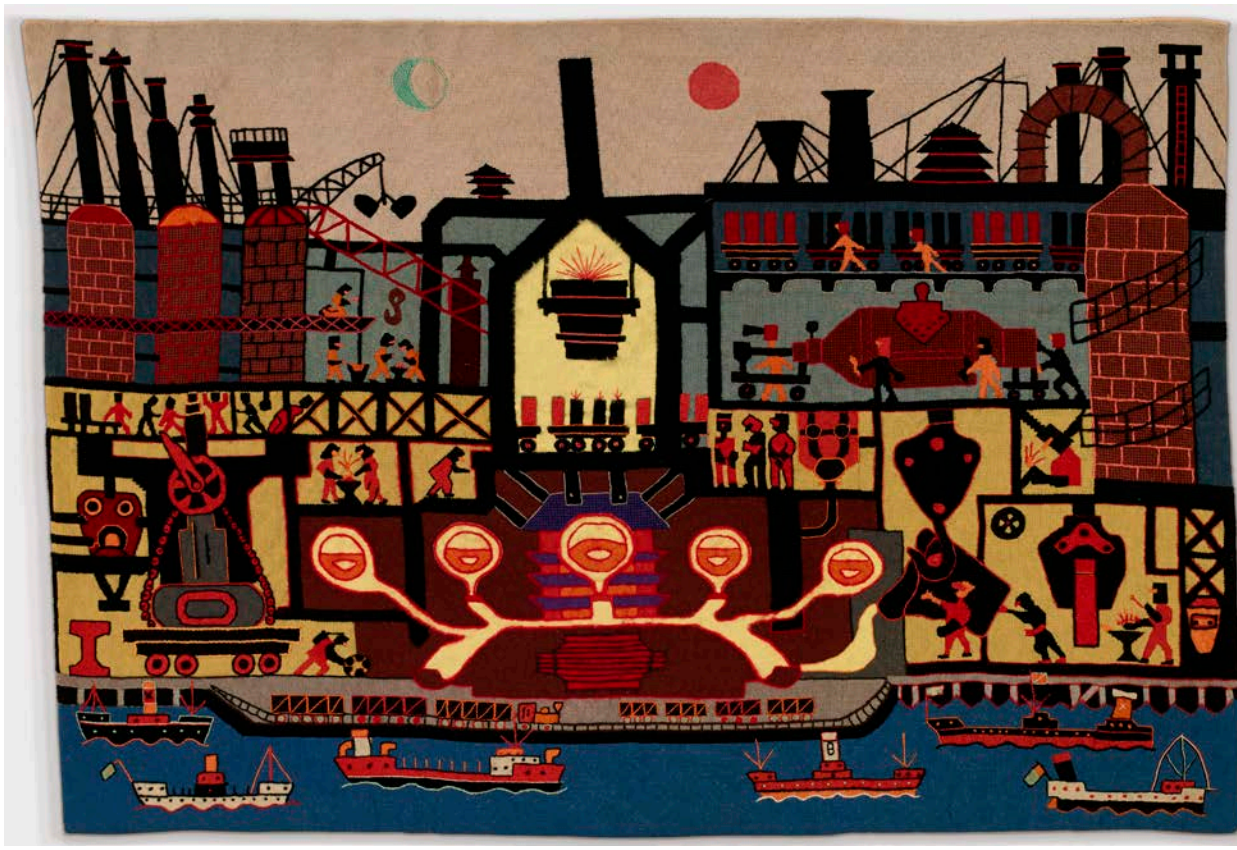
To learn more about the North American tour of the Traveling Tapestry, visit icelandicroots.com/post/the-saga-of-claudia.

CLAUDIA PÉTURSSON knits, embroiders, gardens, uses skill saws, and has even been known to build brick walls. She serves as the North American representative for the Njál's Saga Tapestry Project of Iceland and hopes to build many bridges through the tapestry between North Americans and Icelanders. Claudia lives in Iceland with her husband.

Celebration and Resistance

The Innovative Needlepoint Art of Mildred T. Johnstone

CAROL SHINER WILSON, PhD



Photos courtesy of Allentown Art Museum unless otherwise noted

Industrial Doll House (1977.019.005), one of Mildred T. Johnstone's embroidered works based on the steelmaking industry, includes angora yarn to add texture to the bright yellow furnace as just one of the artistic choices that makes the immense factory intriguing rather than terrifying.

Mildred "Milly" Thomas Johnstone (1900–1988) was an original. Independent and bohemian, she openly resisted the elite business culture of Bethlehem Steel into which she married.

In the late 1940s, she anticipated the fiber art movement, using feminine-signifying needlepoint to portray the masculine world of steelmaking. While predominantly Modernist in aesthetic and temperament, Johnstone drew upon eclectic sources, including the Bayeux Tapestry, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, and South American Indigenous motifs.

Milly Thomas was born in Philadelphia, studied at a Quaker school in New Jersey, then attended a finishing school in New York. A spiritual seeker after a traumatic event in 1927, she incorporated Quakerism, Zen Buddhism, the Japanese tea ceremony, and traditional Judeo-Christianity into her life and needlepoints. Her life was transformed when her little boy Tommy, aged 2½, was mauled to death by a wolf that had escaped from her first husband's private zoo.

In 1935, Milly married rising Bethlehem Steel star William H. Johnstone. Aware of her privileged life at The Steel, as the company and culture were known, she was alienated by the arrogance, provincialism, and rationality of the privileged executives, who disapproved of her volunteer work at Planned Parenthood and her habit of swimming in the nude. She saw in her husband Bill a creative, visionary outsider.[1] Detesting cocktail parties and the "expensive



Photo courtesy of Margaret Buchholz and Lo and Thomas Holton, provided by Martin Richter

Milly Johnstone stitching, with tapestry *Little Man, What Now?* above the mantel. The photograph was taken by George Holton, Milly's son, who gave her the parrot, Lola.

stuffiness" and "sea of black" dresses, she wore her favorite flowing "chartreuse dress with a vibrant blue Siamese scarf."[2] Many outside Steel officialdom were mesmerized by her quiet grace, youthful joy, and capacity for deep friendships.

Needlepoint Meets Steelworks

Johnstone's love of color and freedom extended to her innovative needlework, sparked by her transformative 1948 tour of steelmaking. She was captivated by its energy and magic.

> Drawn into the percussive beat of [its] tensions and power . . . dust catchers, skip cars, sawtooth roofs or a blast furnace against a red sky . . . the excitement of turning hot metal into cold steel [suggested] infinite possibilities for working in thread—fluorescent red for the burning crackle of scrap iron or yellow angora for poured steel . . . men in masks pushing levers, switches and buttons . . . colors and composition [of the needlepoints] dictated by the industry, its dissonance, texture, and drama.[3]

Johnstone immediately set to work researching, designing, and stitching a series of more than 20 steelmaking-themed needlepoints from 1949 through the early 1960s. Her privileged status enabled her to travel with her husband to steelmaking sites in Michigan, to iron ore ranges in Chile, and to blast furnaces in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and Sparrows Point, Maryland. Her respectful demeanor and interest in learning from the workers allowed her to develop an understanding that became a springboard for her imaginative canvases. A retired steelworker said of Johnstone's work, "It is gratifying to see that an artist has 'poetically' and *reverently* portrayed the machinery and 'men of steel' in such a unique and beautiful way."[4] She drew on her visits, photos, and a variety of materials from the Steel library, including a Heat Colors guide to which she tied brightly colored yarns to prepare collages for collaboratively designed cartoons for her canvases. She worked initially with painter Pablo Burchard and then, for more than 30 years, she collaborated with friends and fellow artists Joe and Margaret Cantieni. Her lap was her studio, and she stitched constantly and everywhere—a cabin retreat, public gardens in Paris, a camel market in Marrakesh—frequently ripping out work to modify the design and color to capture just the right mood.

The Tapestry of Fiber Art

While embracing the traditions of needlepoint, Johnstone encouraged women to stitch as an adventure in art and to find fresh subjects in their everyday lives to stitch in their own imaginative ways. In 1955, she stitched a sampler-style needlepoint, *Neere and Far*, after she discovered the philosophy of stitching the nearby in the poem "The Prayse of the Needle" (1640) by John Taylor. Instead of flowers typical of an English sampler, she stitched steel stacks. Steelmaking was her most prominent nearby source of inspiration, but she also lovingly worked *Horse Show* (1950), a needlepoint based on a drawing by her eight-year-old goddaughter Mira Nakashima. She was never to relinquish the habit of stitching personalized designs as gifts.

Until Johnstone, iron casting and steelmaking had been portrayed through painting and photography, including the awe-inspiring, blazing power of the





Alice in a Wonderland of Steel (1977.019.002) depicts a white-clad girl exploring a friendly industrial landscape.

fiery industrial furnace in John Ferguson Weir's Civil War painting *The Gun Foundry* (1866) and in photographs such as Margaret Bourke-White's late-1920s shots of Cleveland steelmaking. Strong, muscular steelmakers' bodies were also prominent in painting, as in Thomas Hart Benton's monumental mural *America Today* (1931). Unlike the representational work of her predecessors, Johnstone's needlepoints, even two early sampler-style pieces, were Modernist nonrepresentational experiments with geometric shapes and juxtaposition of shapes and colors. She often used vibrant colors—purple, red, orange—to convey feeling. Her color soulmates included O'Keeffe, Matisse, and Klee.

Milly Johnstone inadvertently became a pioneer in what was to be called the fiber arts movement, which gained prominence in the 1960s and 1970s. From the late Renaissance through the eighteenth century, art (primarily painting and sculpture by men) was deemed superior to craft (beautiful but utilitarian work including weaving and needlework, particularly done by women in the domestic sphere). Art is now more broadly defined, and weavings, needlepoints, quilts, and more are on view side by side with paintings and sculptures. Two successors are *The Dinner Party* (1974–1979) by Judy Chicago and African American story quilts by Faith Ringgold beginning in the 1980s.

Johnstone was part of a world that had worried since the 1830s about the dehumanizing effects of industrialization and the accelerating pace of life. Moreover, she was sobered by World War II (her son George was in combat), technological "advances" such as the atomic bomb, and the Cold War in its aftermath. When she read Hungarian painter Gyorgy Kepes's *The New Landscape in Art and Science* (1956), Johnstone found what she had already sought to do. Instead of fearing and avoiding the world of technology, the artist should seek to understand it organically and reshape it into a site hospitable for humankind.

Steelworks, Stitch by Stitch

Johnstone always worked on two or three needlepoints simultaneously. Two from 1949 reimagine industry, celebrate the imagination, and subtly subvert the rationality of the Steel elite: *Alice in a Wonderland of Steel* (26" × 55½" [66 × 141 cm]) and



Bride in a Blast Furnace (2021.004.000) shows the range of roles available to women working at the Steel.

Industrial Doll House (36¼" × 52½" [92.1 × 133.4 cm]). *Alice* won first prize in the miscellaneous category awarded by the American Craftsmen's Educational Council and toured museums in major cities, including Brooklyn, Chicago, and San Francisco, in 1953.

Our eye is immediately drawn to the diminutive yet energetic little girl in white, her flying pigtail tied with a pink ribbon. She is setting off on an adventure of exploration and discovery that will take her—and us—up the spiral staircase to the moon of creativity. The railing of that staircase is an eye-catching red yarn, stem-stitched at the center of thinner rows of orange and purple. Alice, the Milly surrogate, recalls the mischievous little girl in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871). Once our eye is on the moon against a bright red sky, we start to notice all sorts of fascinating details: wisps of smoke echoing the spirals of the staircase and geometric figures that suggest the masks of friendly workers atop accordion lifts that appear to be jack-in-the-boxes. Johnstone juxtaposes nonrepresentational colors, including purple waterways with waves side by side with orange and red stitches.

While *Industrial Doll House* presents more identifiable steelmaking functions than *Alice*, abstraction and the miniature prevail. The sky above has both the sun and the moon, since steelmaking was a 24/7 operation. The heavy black outline of the blast furnace accentuates brilliant yellow angora, which sets the scene for molten steel to be poured into molds for red-hot ingots. Beneath that scene are five furnaces in yellow angora, with contrasting bright orange stitching suggesting smiles. Other objects include the brown torpedo car ready to transport liquid iron to another site, the iconic I-beam (left bottom corner), and little ships. Like Alice, workers are diminutive and energetic, dressed in protective masks and gear. The title juxtaposes male-signifying *industrial* with the little-girl-signifying *doll house*.

Bride in a Blast Furnace (22" × 36" [55.9 × 91.4 cm], 1950) focuses on women. The bride draws our eye to the center. To the left, an animated female figure atop an airplane suggests Rosie the Riveter and wartime production. The 2,200 Bethlehem-based Rosies were welders but also security guards with firearms, "Pistol Packin' Mamas." At the end of the war, Rosie

Milly Johnstone inadvertently became a pioneer in what was to be called the fiber arts movement.

was sent home as servicemen reclaimed their jobs in the robust postwar production of steel for consumer goods. To the right, the switchboard operator embodies the typically single women in traditional roles who stayed on to work. Miss Helen Holly, for example, was the remarkable executive secretary for Bill Johnstone for almost three decades. Blue or white collar, women were proud to be part of the Steel family.

The bride is another Milly surrogate, an exquisite geometric figure in ivory satin stitch, framed by heavy black yarn containing her in the blast furnace, where three tent-stitched colors—red, a deeper red, and orange—reflect the intensity of the heat, up to 2,100 degrees Fahrenheit, that she endures. The bride comprises two isosceles triangles, with a circle on top to represent her head, outlined in black. Her bouquet is made from red French knots, a stitch Johnstone favored for a clustered effect. Her shoulders are broad, and her face is exquisitely calm. At once a personal and universal symbol, the bride suggests how to cope with life's trials. From her Buddhist practice, Johnstone believed that suffering and impermanence were fundamental to human experience. In *Bride* and related needlepoints—*Pink Nude in a Black Ingot* and *Mrs. Ingot*—she suggests that accepting the mysteries of the universe, enduring, forgiving, and learning how to live are key.

Beyond the Steel

In the 1960s, Johnstone migrated from steelmaking as subject matter to brightly colored, symmetrical mandalas, abstract representations of the universe, and black-and-white calligraphy inspired by Buddhist philosophy and practice of the Japanese tea ceremony. Through stitching and meditation, she at last made peace with the wolf that killed her son and the wolfishness of Big Business.

Johnstone's work was not widely known in her time, in part because she did not cultivate a career. Her circle of friends included weaver Lenore Tawney, ceramicist/weaver Toshiko Takaezu, Santa Fe fiber artist Alice Kagawa Parrott, woodworker George Nakashima, and writer Anaïs Nin, who described Johnstone in her diaries. In addition to the Craftsmen's show, Johnstone exhibited in small galleries and museums in France, Chile, and Canada, and in the United States at Tulane, Rice, and the University of Pittsburgh. The Allentown Art Museum mounted exhibitions in 1978 and 2003 and displays her needlepoints on regular rotation. The museum holds 12 Johnstone needlepoints and related artifacts.

Innovative in her life and art, Milly Johnstone stitched together timeless lessons to embrace us all. ❖

Warmest thanks to Johnstone family members Margaret Thomas, Mira Nakashima, and Lo Holton; Allentown Art Museum Associate Curator Claire McRee; retired steelworker Greg Buragino; the Cantieni family; and others for their generosity in this endeavor. My gratitude to photographer Joseph Elliott for taking me to a blast furnace the night before its last cast in November 1995.

Notes

1. John Strohmeyer, *Crisis in Bethlehem: Big Steel's Struggle to Survive* (Bethesda, MD: Adler & Adler, 1986).
2. Mildred Johnstone to Robert Barbee, March 16, 1961.
3. Mildred Johnstone, foreword, *Fact and Fantasy in a Steel Plant* (Allentown, PA: Bethlehem Woman's Club, 1956) and other exhibition catalogs.
4. Greg Buragino, email to author, March 24, 2024.

Resources

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CAROL SHINER WILSON, PhD, is dean emerita of the College for Academic Life, Muhlenberg College, where she taught English and women's studies. She is writing a book on Milly Johnstone's life and art. Her presentations and research, including publications with the University of Pennsylvania Press and Oxford University Press, closely examine women's needlework in literature within historical and cultural contexts from 1650 through the twentieth century.

Behind the Scenes at The Met

How America's Largest Museum Conserves Its Textile Treasures

ANTONIA L. CAPASSO

Tucked away on the ground floor of the largest museum in the United States sits the laboratory of the Department of Textile Conservation, where 13 conservators care for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's extensive collection of more than 36,000 textiles. It is a team composed of all women, many hailing from countries around the globe, with extensive skills and expertise in this specialized field. Despite the department's existence for more than 50 years, few members of the public are aware of the work that goes on behind the scenes just below Fifth Avenue.

The department was established in 1973 to address the growing needs of The Met's large collection of textiles. It is responsible for the care and preservation of tapestries, carpets, quilts, embroideries, three-dimensional accessories, fiber sculpture, and global dress from all over the world. The collection ranges from archaeological pieces to modern and contemporary objects, covering more than 6,000 years of history. The department works independently from the Costume Institute, which focuses on "fashionable dress and accessories." In 1995, thanks to funding provided by the Antonio Ratti Foundation, the department moved into its current custom-designed state-of-the-art facility and opened the Ratti Textile Study and Storage Center. In this facility, the public and staff can view the museum's textile collection by appointment.

The Skill and Science of Conservation

The creation of the department coincided with the professionalization of the field of textile conservation. Prior to this time, individuals in this role were given the title of "restorer" within museum settings. The distinguished university programs that exist today were not yet developed. As current Conservator in Charge Dr. Janina Poskrobko explained during the 2023 colloquium *Continuous Threads: Celebrating 50 Years of The Met's Department of Textile Conservation*, "The status of such positions echoed the common belief that every woman with a basic knowledge of sewing, embroidery, and knitting could repair textiles, so professional training was not needed."

One of the earliest examples of this type of non-professional work at The Met took place during the late 1940s, when skilled "needlewomen" were employed for "cutting apart, reassembling, piercing, and relining" 94 fragments of the Heroes Tapestries from The Cloisters collection. Today you will find a very different world behind the doors of the Department of Textile Conservation, where conservators have created a scientific approach to textile works of art.

In addition to the research done by the curatorial team after acquiring a work of art, the conservator's careful study can reveal an object's history, including the time and place of its creation. The conservators meticulously handle each object and work to understand the physical composition and construction of the piece, which can lead to new information about its history. Importantly, the conservators are charged with deciding how best to maintain the integrity of the artwork.

The conservators are temporary custodians for each textile they work with. They begin with a full analysis, documenting the condition and determining how best to maintain its lifespan. The department works with this object-based approach developed under the leadership of the first head of the department, Nobuko Kajitani. Research done in this manner is extraordinarily important to conservation work, providing important primary-source information that is critical to the correct placement of a textile in its historical context and its long-term care.

Conservators are all highly skilled in stitching treatments, but they use a variety of other conservation techniques to preserve textiles. When a textile is acquired, the condition must be reviewed and documented. At this time, the conservators, in consultation with their curatorial colleagues, discover information about the object and how best to address its needs. Integral to the department's practice is

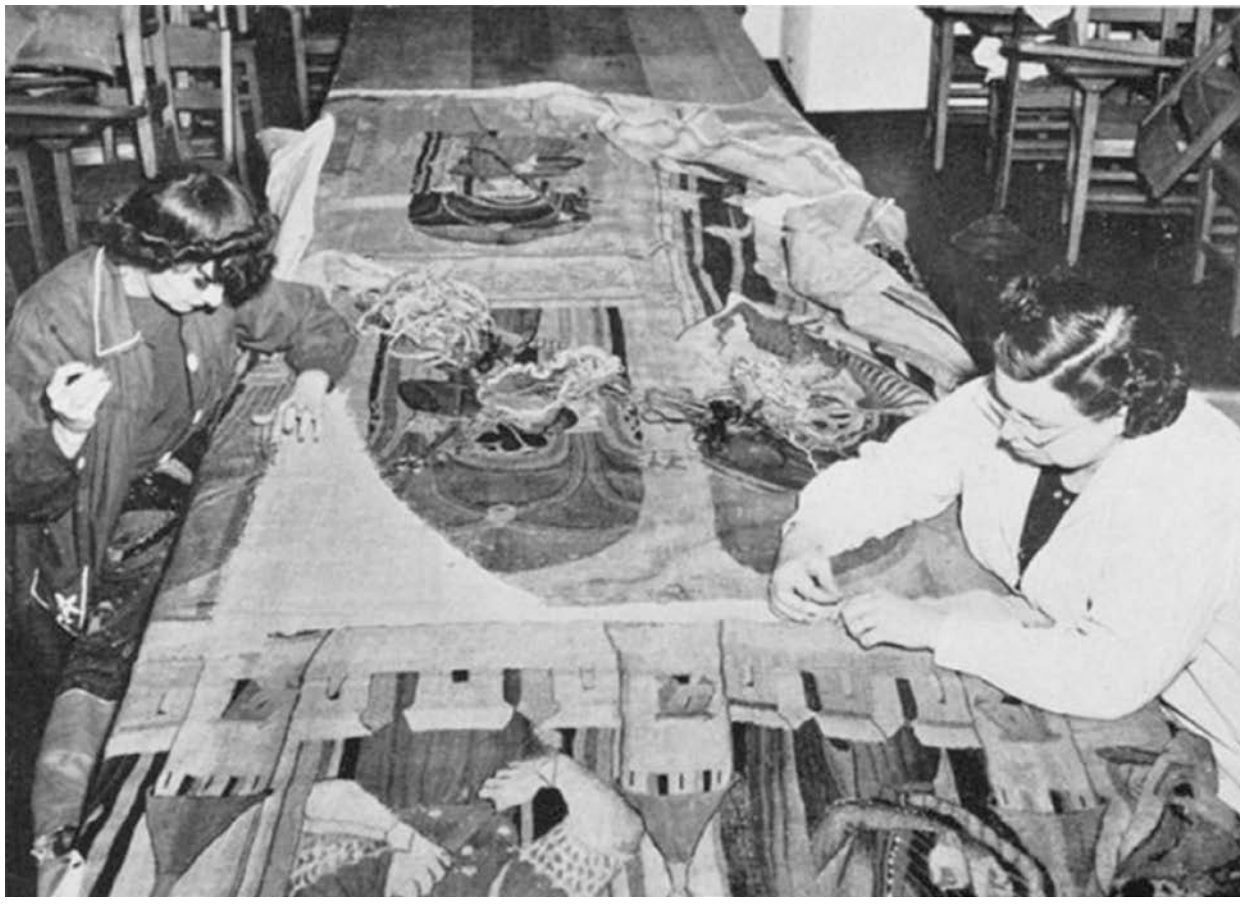


Image from the summer 1949 issue of The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin

Two restorers working in the 1940s on the Joshua tapestry, one of the fragments of the Heroes Tapestries from the collection of The Cloisters.

the systematic study, documentation, and scientific investigation of textiles. Conservators also play a key role in museum pest management, as textiles are some of the most susceptible materials.

The study of textiles benefits tremendously from technology. Through purchases made possible by the generous support of its donors, the department invests in state-of-the-art equipment to ensure that conservators can continue to develop innovative methods and set guidelines for preserving, storing, and exhibiting textiles. Microscopes are used in imaging for technical analysis. Spectrophotometers allow measurements to be taken to see the effects of light on an object, helping conservators detect how levels of light will impact a textile's color over time when it is on view in the galleries. An MFT (microfading tester) also determines an object's light sensitivity, justifying the conservators' suggestions on the proper light levels in galleries and the appropriate length of time the object will be on display. The portable XRF (X-ray fluorescence) tracer allows for spot sampling on textiles with either woven or embroidered metal threads. This can provide historical context, in some cases narrowing down where and when the metal thread was made.

The Anna Williams Sampler: One Textile's Conservation

Associate Conservator Alexandra Barlow, the liaison textile conservator for the American Wing, is currently working on a framed needlework picture from 1802 by Anna Williams of Gloucester, Massachusetts (2020.68). It was created with silk and metallic thread embroidered on silk satin with a linen support fabric. Its central image depicts a large bouquet including



The conserved, remounted, and framed needlework picture from 1802 by Anna Williams, 2020.68, ready for display in The Met's collection.

Photo by Alexandra Barlow

carnations, roses, morning glories, sweet peas, and a single tulip, primarily stitched in stem and couching stitches. Metal thread can be found in the outlines of Anna Williams's name. The original frame reads, "Wrought at Mrs. Saunder's Academy."

This sampler was donated by a descendant of Anna Williams. The American Wing curatorial team who works on needlework, Amelia Peck and Cynthia Schaffner, ascertained that the sampler was made while Anna was a pupil at a ladies' academy run by Mrs. Judith Saunders. Their research revealed that this academy was open only a couple of years before Mrs. Saunders partnered with Clementina Beach and established the Mrs. Saunders and Miss Beach's Academy. This elite school for well-to-do young women, located in Dorchester, Massachusetts, was open for more than 40 years, closing in 1846.

Academies such as these became popular during the early nineteenth century, as there was a shift in the perspective on education, particularly the education of young women. Although some of these new educational havens focused on humanities classes, others taught "finishing" skills such as sewing, music, painting, and French. The Saunders and Beach Academy taught more rigorous academic classes along with needlework skills. A beautifully finished needlework such as Anna Williams's piece allowed the maker to not only practice her skills but also display the versatility of the discipline. It indicated that her family had spent money to educate her and that she was now ready to make a suitable marriage to a refined gentleman.

As Isabella Rosner and Theresa Kutasz Christensen described in their article "Tapestry, Woven Fabrics, and Embroidery" in *Making Her Mark: A History of Women Artists in Europe, 1400–1800*, "At the centre of a girl's education was a sampler, a piece of embroidery created to practise or demonstrate stitching knowledge. Samplers range from the solely practical to the highly decorative;

Academies such as these became popular during the early nineteenth century, as there was a shift in the perspective on education, particularly the education of young women.



Photo by the author



Photo by Alexandra Barlow



Photo by Alexandra Barlow



Photo by Alexandra Barlow

Top Left: Conservator Alexandra Barlow removes the sampler from the stretcher. *Top right:* Overall view of the 1802 sampler by Anna Williams (2020.68) before removal from the stretcher. *Above left:* A close-up image shows the frayed edges of the sampler. *Above right:* Photomicrograph of the Anna Williams sampler taken by Alexandra Barlow with a microscope at 50x magnification, showing metal thread.

they are both educational exercises and biographical documents, providing unique glimpses into the lives of the girls who stitched them, with their inclusion of names, dates, and ages." Embroidered samplers are no longer viewed as just examples of needlework, but they are displayed and studied as pieces of art. Samplers may be all that is left to represent the wonderfully large number of women artists who were the makers of extraordinary textiles.

As conservator Alexandra Barlow works with this textile, it is her responsibility, with guidance from Janina Poskrobko, to ensure that Anna Williams's work is treated and prepared for display, preserving the integrity of the art so that it can continue to be part of the collection for generations. The textile came to the museum in fair condition. The colored silks showed fading typical of a piece of its age but also signs of past water damage. The linen and silk satin ground has dark stains, and the wooden stretcher that it was tacked to was warped. Splits to the silk satin were visible under magnification. It was determined, in consultation with the American Wing textile curator Amelia Peck, that the needlework would be remounted. Sometimes in a case such as this, where the textile is especially brittle, stitching it to a new mount is not possible. Any insertion of a needle can cause a larger split to the fabric. In this situation, textile conservators can use a pressure mount to safely display the textile vertically without stitching. Using a method developed in the department, the appropriate pressure for the textile is determined and a custom mount is created for its particular needs.

Embroidered samplers are no longer viewed as just examples of needlework, but they are displayed and studied as pieces of art.

Working with a colleague in Objects Conservation, Marijn Manuels, Alexandra carefully detached the sampler from the warped wooden stretcher by removing each nail. A new conservation pressure mount will be created, and it will be set into the original frame. Work such as this takes incredible patience and attention to detail. This needlework sampler will be on view in the American Wing's Needlework Gallery beginning in June 2025.

At The Met, the American Wing's Needlework Gallery (Gallery 727) features samplers and needlework pictures, allowing for the display of works of art by female artists. Many of these artists' histories are now known because each sampler proudly bears a name, age, and the sampler's date of completion. Even if today's viewer doesn't know the maker's name, each sampler tells a story of the life lived by a young woman long ago. A needlework sampler serves as a piece of material culture from which we can learn, a gateway to another place and time.

The Department of Textile Conservation has always been dedicated to contributing to the education of conservators and the continued burgeoning of the field. Textile conservators benefit from a strong collegiality that has lifted the profession. As textiles such as Anna Williams's sampler have become accepted as important works of art, so has the profession of textile conservation received the recognition it has always deserved. ❖

RESOURCES

Rosner, Isabella, and Theresa Kutasz Christensen. "Tapestry, Woven Fabrics, and Embroidery." In *Making Her Mark: A History of Women Artists in Europe, 1400–1800.* Art Gallery of Ontario; Baltimore Museum of Art; Goose Lane Editions, 2023.

ANTONIA L. CAPASSO joined The Met in October 2021. Her responsibilities involve the financial and administrative aspects of the Department of Textile Conservation, assisting in the management of operations, and coordinating all departmental events. Before coming to The Met, she spent eight years working in apparel production, fabric sourcing, and textile manufacturing. Antonia studied fashion merchandising management and international trade and marketing at the Fashion Institute of Technology, earning her BS in 2012. She received an MA in Italian literature from Hunter College in 2022.

The Art of Georgian Embroidery Design

JENNIE BATCHELOR



Photos courtesy of the author unless otherwise noted

This Tulip and Anemone pattern from *The Florist: or, an Extensive and Curious Collection of Flowers for the Imitation of Young Ladies, Either in Drawing, or in Needle-Work* (1759) offers a rare example of a design for both fine art and needle art.

Readers of *PieceWork* may have heard of Mary Linwood (1755–1845), one of the most skilled needlewomen of her age. Famous for her stitched replicas of paintings by the likes of Thomas Gainsborough, Joshua Reynolds, and George Stubbs, she is widely considered one of the first embroidery artists. She opened a gallery in London to show her work, and by attracting a large audience, she persuaded at least some of her viewers that needlework was art.

But Linwood was an exception. In the hands of her contemporaries, needlework—including embroidery—was understood as craft, not art. And if this was true of the work of the professional embroiderers who decorated the gowns and waistcoats worn at court and in elite society, it was even more true of domestic embroiderers who, in addition to plain work (the making of skirts and household linens), spent hours each week embellishing household furniture, pictures, garments, and accessories in the home. Yet there was artistry in the designs that Georgian women used as the basis for their needlework, and still more in the making of them.

Throughout the eighteenth century, designs were available to domestic embroiderers in various formats. Among the most stunning examples are those found in the professional pattern books that had been circulating throughout Europe for the previous two centuries. Some of these, such as Augustin Heckel's *The Florist, or, An Extensive and Curious*



Top: A New Fancy Pattern, *Lady's Magazine* 13 (August 1782). Private Collection. *Middle:* A New Elegant Pattern for a Sleeve as Seen in the Dress Plate, *Lady's Magazine* (March 1808). Private Collection. *Above:* Two Elegant New Patterns for Lady's Tuckers, *Lady's Magazine* 3 (October 1772). Private Collection.

Collection of Flowers for the Imitation of Young Ladies, Either in Drawing, or in Needle-Work (1759), were crossover titles that offered instruction in both drawing and needle painting. They stressed the desirability that women cultivate botanical knowledge so they could wield their pencils and needles with precision. This knowledge was especially useful to the many women who stitched wall hangings, workbags, muffs, or fire screens in the "fancy pattern" style that was fashionable from the mid-century onward.

Pattern books were expensive, though, and their print runs were limited. Individual pattern sheets, designed by commercial pattern drawers and purchased from haberdashers, were less expensive. From the 1770s, commercial designs became still cheaper and more accessible via the first women's magazines. The lead innovator was the monthly *Lady's Magazine* (1770–1832), which announced in its first issue that it would capitalize on the "progressive improvement made in the art of *pattern drawing*" to provide readers with "elegant patterns for the Tambour, Embroidery, or every kind of Needlework." True to its word, in every issue for 50 years, the *Lady's Magazine* produced a pullout folded pattern sheet for embroidering gown lengths and borders, waistcoat fronts and cravats, veils, shoe uppers, pincushions, fire screens, and workbags. At sixpence an issue for the first 30 years of its run, the magazine was cheap. It was also hugely popular and sold around 15,000 copies at its height. The periodical's copperplate patterns were a draw for subscribers, and the women's magazines that sprang up in its wake, including the *New Lady's Magazine*, *La Belle Assemblée*, and the *Fashionable Magazine*, all produced patterns of their own.

We know little about the designers of magazine needlework patterns, since most were not signed. Those few that are, however, offer tantalizing clues to the credentials of those behind them. The *Fashionable Magazine*, for instance, proudly advertised that its patterns were designed by celebrated Parisian-born needlework and filigree pattern drawer Charles Styart. In the early decades of the *Lady's Magazine*'s run, its patterns are unsigned. But we do know that, at this very time, the periodical was employing some of the leading artists of the day, including Royal Academicians Thomas Stothard and James Heath, to produce engraved portraits,

landscapes, illustrations, and fashion plates. While we have no concrete evidence that these high-profile artists were involved in the periodical's needlework designs, Henry Mutlow, who was behind its hand-colored engravings of Parisian fashions in the 1800s, is named on some of the embroidery patterns issued during that decade. The magazine also contains examples of needlework patterns explicitly linked to garments in the accompanying fashion plate, further suggesting close collaborations between the magazine's artists and pattern designers and perhaps that they were often the very same person.

Look at the thousands of designs circulated by early women's magazines, and two things jump out immediately. The first is that their quality doesn't always meet the professional standards of other illustrations. Sometimes, the scalloped edges on a shawl, veil, or cravat pattern are wonky and require correction during transfer. Very occasionally, a pattern sheet looks unfinished, a slip likely occasioned by the tight production deadlines of these publications. In general, though, the patterns are intricate and precise and attest to the cultivated skill sets expected of leisure embroiderers at the time.

The second thing that strikes anyone who studies these designs en masse is how designers relied on a finite repertoire of established motifs that they endlessly reworked to produce diverse effects. Over the five decades in which the *Lady's Magazine* printed embroidery patterns, it published around 650 pattern sheets containing over 1,000 designs. And while each is unique, the patterns are largely variations on a handful of themes. Topical trends emerge for short periods. The early 1800s, for instance, saw a run of so-called "Etruscan" designs featuring geometric swirls and palmettes inspired by classical vases recovered through archaeological digs. A little later in the Regency period, patriotic emblems of feathers, acorns, and oak leaves (all visual shorthand for Englishness) were predictably popular. But for most of the period, these relatively short-lived fashions in embroidery designs are overwhelmed by fields of botanically precise or stylized flowers, sprigs, or bouquets framed by scrolling stems, scalloping, or other decorative edges. Ribbons, baskets, and urns (usually ties and props for flowers) are common accompaniments for such designs and are sometimes set into relief by birds, butterflies, or animals such as squirrels.



Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library

London Fashionable Full Dress, *Lady's Magazine* 39 (March 1808).

The endurance of such motifs across so many different patterns is testament to their visual appeal. Their repetition attests also to their seductive versatility and suitability for multiple applications. This versatility was explicitly advertised in the titles printed on the pattern sheets, which indicated that a design was suitable for a "gown or apron," a "fire screen or muff." It was common for pattern titles to end with one or more "et ceteras" to signal that makers could adapt a design wholesale or in part for whatever purpose they saw fit.

In other words, the designs allowed considerable freedom, a freedom underlined by the feature that makes them most challenging for modern makers: they were unaccompanied by the detailed instruction that became standard in Victorian women's magazines and now in modern-day kits and YouTube tutorials. Trusted to make their own decisions about color palette, technique, and scale, eighteenth-century embroiderers were at liberty to make the designs their own.

As a keen embroiderer, and someone who has spent the past 20 years working on eighteenth-century fashion and early women's magazines, I have long been



fascinated by these designs and their makers. From 2015, when I started collecting these patterns, which for so long lay scattered in dusty volumes in research libraries and people's attics and basements, I became determined to put as many of them back into mass circulation as I could by using the technologies of our own age: social media and the internet. The response has been simply incredible and has taught me much about the enduring power of good design.

Here is just one example. This 1775 pattern sheet for two shoe vamps (or uppers) is typical of its kind (top). Both designs share various elements—the flowers and leaves in each pattern are similar, both have bellflowers, and in both designs, the sprays are fixed (by a swirling frame in the left-hand design and by a ribbon in the one on the right). When I first circulated this pattern sheet for a Stitch Off I ran in the mid-2010s, it was the most popular with makers and resulted in dozens of reworkings. Undoubtedly, part of the appeal was the prettiness of the images. These are also small projects in the most literal sense of the term. Each motif is under 2½ inches in height, and neither necessarily requires elaborate techniques or a large number of stitch types to execute it effectively.

Shoemaker, tailor, and historian Nicole Rudolph, for example, worked the right-hand design in a simple yet highly effective combination of satin and stem stitch before crafting the uppers into a magnificent and historically authentic pair of low-heeled shoes with wooden soles.

Embroidery expert Alison Larkin took a similar approach for our 2020 book *Jane Austen Embroidery*, adapting the left-hand design in two configurations for a sewing kit. To make the project accessible for makers at different levels, Alison, like Nicole, used a limited range of stitches (stem, satin, and slanted satin).



Photo by Mary Martin

Above: Goldwork shoe motif by Mary Martin. *Top:* Two New Patterns for Shoes, *Lady's Magazine* 6 (April 1775). Private Collection.

Each motif is under 2½ inches in height, and neither necessarily requires elaborate techniques or a large number of stitch types to execute it effectively.

To reduce the volume of stitching required, she outlined the framing leaves in chain stitch but left them unfilled and used waves of sequins to replicate the harder-to-work-with metal spangles likely used by many of the pattern's first makers.

Hand embroiderer Mary Martin created a still more technically difficult version of the same design by using a breathtaking combination of silk shading and goldwork (bricked couching, outlining, and chipping). In total, Mary reported that her interpretation of the design took about 75 hours to complete before it was mounted on an illustration board for framing.

Freelance embroiderer and Royal School of Needlework graduate Charlotte Bailey opted to work the same design for a framed display but in a very different style than Mary's. Choosing to work white on white, Charlotte paired stem stitch, padded satin stitch, and French knots with cutwork and eyelets to create a delicacy and permeability totally unsuited to the design's original application as a shoe upper but entirely appropriate for this large whitework sampler.

This handful of reworkings of designs from a single pattern sheet tells us many things. It tells us, most obviously, about the versatility of eighteenth-century commercial embroidery designs. Most stitches and techniques used by these Stitch Off participants would have been known to eighteenth-century makers. More importantly, their reimaginings underline the creative license historic patterns gave to makers. The kinds of decisions made by these twenty-first-century embroiderers—whether to work white on white or use colored thread, to fill shapes or outline them, to use metal threads as well as silks, to work entirely in surface stitching or use pull or cutwork—are those that our ancestors would have had to make, too.

The inescapable conclusion is that while there is considerable artistry in the commercial embroidery patterns that circulated in the eighteenth century, the girls and women who made them should be recognized as artists in their own right. ❖

JENNIE BATCHELOR is a writer, speaker, and academic at the University of York, where she is head and professor of English. She is the author of nine books, including *Jane Austen Embroidery* (Dover, 2020) which she coauthored with Alison Larkin. Her website, Patterns of Perfection (ladysmagazine.omeka.net), offers a searchable digital catalog of magazine needlework patterns from 1770 to 1819.



Photo by Nicole Rudolph



Photo by Charlotte Bailey



Photo by Alison Larkin

Top: A replica of the 1775 shoe pattern design by Nicole Rudolph. *Middle:* Whitework motif by Charlotte Bailey. *Above:* Sewing set by Alison Larkin.

Saint-Rémy Irises

Punch Needle Pillow

SIMONE VOJVODIN



Photograph courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum via Wikimedia Commons

Irises by Vincent van Gogh (1889). J. Paul Getty Museum (90.PA.20)

This pillow draws inspiration from Vincent van Gogh's painting *Irises*, capturing the vibrancy of the flowers in loops of tactile wool yarns. Beautiful blues that lean toward violet, accented with golden yellows, set against rusty oranges and a riot of glorious greens reflect Van Gogh's palette.

Van Gogh painted this masterpiece in 1889 in the iris-filled spring garden of an asylum in Saint-Rémy, France, where he was institutionalized. I decided to include one white iris in the pattern as in the original. As I punched it, I wondered whether this had a deeper meaning for Van Gogh. Was he portraying feelings of otherness, did it symbolize healing and renewal, or was there simply a white iris among the blue in the gardens that surrounded him?

I love the versatility of punch needle embroidery; it allows us to paint with yarns, and the finished artworks are easily incorporated into functional items. Making the little punched rug into a pillow invites viewers to experience the irises in a tactile way. I chose to frame the design with wide wool fabric strips that I added before I even began to punch, which made finishing the pillow quick and straightforward.

MATERIALS

- The Oxford Company *Violet Jane Fine Yarn* (100% wool), 131 yd/4 oz (120 m/113 g): 1 skein each of:
  - Variegated greens: Evergreen Dark, Evergreen Medium, Evergreen Light, and Evergreen Extra Light
  - Solid greens: Lime Sorbet, Peas in a Pod, Limelight
  - Variegated blues: Blackbird, So Blue, Blue My Mind, Lobelia, Atlantic Coast
  - Variegated yellows and oranges: Deep Ochre, Golden Ticket, Embers, Sweet Potato
  - Solid orange: Autumn Spice
  - White: Bleached White



Project photos by Matt Graves unless otherwise noted



- The Oxford Company *Monk's Cloth*, 13-ct (100% cotton): 1 piece precut 24" × 24" (61 × 61 cm)
- Wool flannel–weight fabric for pillow edges and back, dull orange to complement the background yarns: 1 piece about 16" × 16" (40.6 × 40.6 cm), and four strips 3" × 16" (7.6 × 40.6 cm) each
- Pillow insert: 15" × 15" (38.1 × 38.1 cm)
- Punch needles: The Oxford Company #14 fine and #13 fine Oxford Punch Needles
- Frame: The Oxford Company Gripper Frame, 18" × 18" (45.7 × 45.7 cm)
- Black marker (such as a Sharpie)
- Pattern printed on paper, enlarged to about 11" × 11" (27.9 × 27.9 cm)

Design Size: 11" × 11" (27.9 × 27.9 cm).
Finished Size: 15" × 15" (38.1 × 38.1 cm).

Special Stitches and Notes

Oxford Monk's Cloth is an evenweave cloth with rows of holes clearly visible. These rows of holes form a "ditch" in the cloth that can be followed to keep the square outline of the design straight. Having the pattern straight and aligned with the weave of the fabric makes the punching easier and will give a better result.

This project uses fine Oxford Punch Needles and two different stitch spacings. The #13 fine needle makes slightly taller loops than the #14, creating extra dimension and focus within the pattern. In the irises, 7 to 8 stitches per inch are punched with rows gently touching one another with occasional spaces between them. Other areas, such as the background, are punched in nearly every hole, and the rows have spaces between them the width of an empty row of holes in the monk's cloth.

To form filling stitches, hold the punch needle with the slot in the handle facing the direction of punching. Lines of stitching follow the contours of the design.

Stem stitch forms the golden yellow circle around the irises and the outermost border line. To create the stem stitch, turn the punch needle so the slot in the handle is facing perpendicular to the line to punch along. Keep it this way as you make your stitches. This aligns the wool to form a tunnel of loops, giving the appearance of a solid stem.

Instructions

Preparation

Print the paper pattern about 11" (27.9 cm) square. Tape the pattern to a light table or bright window, then tape the precut, serged monk's cloth backing on top with the pattern showing through. Center the pattern on the fabric and align the outer square with the rows and columns of holes in the cloth. Carefully trace the pattern onto your monk's cloth with a black marker.

Remove the paper pattern from the light table or window. Turn the monk's cloth over and carefully trace the outer square border line drawn around the pattern onto this blank side of the backing. Draw a second, larger square border about two empty monk's cloth holes out from the previous line. You should now have the full design drawn on one side of the monk's cloth (side A), and two square outlines, one inside the other, on the opposite side (side B).

Next, create the frame of fabric around the punching. With side B (squares) facing up, place the first strip of wool fabric right side down over the inside of the square, lining up the edge of the fabric with the outer drawn line. The fabric should extend beyond the drawn lines at each end. Repeat on all sides, allowing fabric to overlap at the corners. Pin in place along the drawn line, and sew with a small seam allowance. The stitch line sits just to the outside of



Shown at 50% size

Pattern may be copied for personal use.

Figure 1

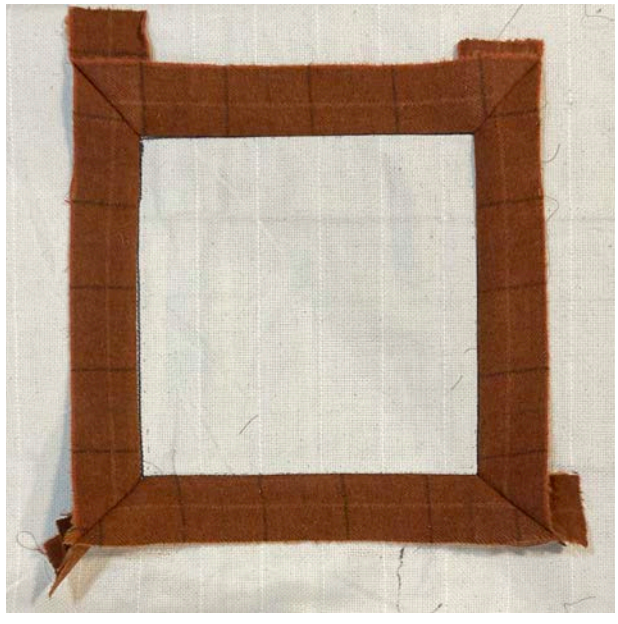


Figure 2



Photos by author

the inner drawn square. Do not sew the wool where it extends beyond the line and overlaps; start and stop at the drawn line. Press the wool strips outward to make an empty square of monk's cloth on side B with a frame of wool surrounding it. Fold the wool fabric in the corners at a 45-degree angle. Where two strips meet, form the miter with the raw edges underneath. Sew the mitered wool corners together along these lines. Trim the excess (Figure 1).

Punching

The side facing you (side A), with the pattern, is the side you will punch on and will be the back of the piece once it is finished. The opposite side (side B) is where the loops will form as you punch, and it will be the finished side of the project. The finished design will be a mirror image of the drawn pattern.

Carefully stretch the monk's cloth with the design (side A) facing up onto the gripper frame so that it is *extremely* taut. Avoid catching the wool strips (on side B) against the grippers or distorting the design and the straight border lines as you pull the backing tight.

See Figure 2 for color placement. Using the #13 fine Oxford Punch Needle, which makes a 3/16" (5 mm) loop, and Blackbird, punch the outlines of the irises and leaves with stem stitch (Figure 3). Ensure your stitches are close together to form a solid outline of loops on the opposite side. Punch the yellow centers, using Golden Ticket and Deep Ochre.

Push the yarn tails down to the loopy side every time you stop and start punching.

Fill in the two blue/violet-colored irises using the five blue yarns in value from dark to light: Blackbird, So Blue, Blue My Mind, Lobelia, and Atlantic Coast. Work with the lightest and darkest values first, then add middle values, to make a smooth transition. Use the photo of the finished piece as a guide.

Punch the remaining iris using Bleached White as the main color and Evergreen Extra Light and Lime Sorbet to shade petals and give them shape.

Fill in the iris leaves using vertical rows of Evergreen Dark, Evergreen Medium, and Evergreen Light.

Trim yarn tails each time a section of a design is completed. Turn to the loopy side (side B) and gently but firmly pull up on the tails, snipping them off level with the loops. In Figure 4 you can see one trimmed iris with the other two still in need of trimming.

Switch to the #14 fine Oxford Punch Needle, which makes a 1/8" (3 mm) loop height. Using Blackbird yarn and stem stitch, punch the outer circle around the irises, stopping and cutting each time an iris petal intersects the line.

With the #13 fine Oxford Punch Needle and stem stitch, punch another circle on the inside of the Blackbird, using Deep Ochre yarn (Figure 5).

Figure 3



Figure 4



Photos by author



Photos by author

Figure 5



Figure 6

Return to the #14 fine Oxford Punch Needle and make one more circle with Blackbird, this time in normal filling stitches.

Continue to punch the remaining outlines with Blackbird, including the small flowers in the border and the square border line.

To create interest around the irises, fill the background inside the circle with alternating rows using Embers, Sweet Potato, and Autumn Spice.

Punch the little border flowers with Deep Ochre and Golden Ticket. Fill in the stem area with Evergreen Dark. Punch the corner areas with Peas in a Pod and the remaining area in Limelight.

Switch back to the #13 fine Oxford Punch Needle and, using the color that most closely matches your wool fabric, punch another row around the outside of the design in stem stitch. This row of loops will fill in the space between the main punching and the stitching line where the border fabric was sewn.

FINISHING

Remove the project from the stretcher frame. Trim tails level with loops. Adjust loops into place so that the lines of loops are neat and everything looks orderly. Using a damp cloth and hot iron, carefully steam-press the loopy side.

Trim the excess monk's cloth so it is slightly shorter than the wool fabric border. Press the remaining monk's cloth edges inward over the punching back (Figure 6). Place the project on your work surface with the loopy side (side B) facing up. Position the fabric for the back of the pillow right side down, over the punching, and pin the edges together. Sew around the perimeter, leaving a 4"–6" (10–15 cm) opening along one side. Trim the excess wool fabric at the corners. Turn pillow cover right side out.

Stuff with a pillow insert. Handstitch the opening closed. ❖

SIMONE VOJVODIN is an advanced Oxford instructor and dean of the Oxford Rug Hooking School, overseeing the Oxford Instructor Certification Program. She enthusiastically shares her love of punch needle rug hooking, teaching classes from beginner to advanced. Her award-winning rugs have been featured in exhibitions throughout Canada and the United States, and she is the author of *Mastering the Art of Punch Needle Rug Hooking*.

Lagarteran Kerchief

Stitches of Spain

SARAH PEDLOW



Photo courtesy of Museo Sorolla via Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Typical Lagarterans or Lagarteran Bride (Tipos de Lagartera o Novia lagarterana) by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida (1912). Museo Sorolla, Madrid, Spain

Blending Naturalism and Impressionism, Joaquín Sorolla chronicled life in Spain in the early 1900s. His work is characterized by its vibrant palette, fluid brushwork, and a mastery of capturing sunlight, particularly in his seascapes and outdoor scenes depicting people unposed. In 1911, Archer Milton Huntington, son of railroad magnate Collis P. Huntington, commissioned Sorolla to paint a series of murals depicting national identity and life in the regions of Spain for the museum and library he founded, the Hispanic Society of America, dedicated to the cultures of Spain, Portugal, and the countries they colonized. In 1912, the artist painted *Typical Lagarterans or Lagarteran Bride* as a study for the *Bread Festival* mural dedicated to the Castile region. The casual group of life-size figures rendered in loose brushstrokes looks at the viewer as if to say, "We see you seeing us, strong and proud."

The traditional festive clothing of Lagartera, a village in the province of Toledo, is known for its elaborate decorative traditions that include free embroidery, counted threadwork, lace, appliqué, and the use of sequins and trims to embellish nearly all surfaces, from the shoes to the *mantillas*, in women's dress. The vibrant embroidery that adorns the women's red socks inspired this project.

Create a kerchief to tie over your head or around your neck. You may also choose to embroider the motif in each corner of a larger piece of fabric, including or omitting the blue square around it, or adding a blue chain-stitch border around the edge of the kerchief.

MATERIALS

- Lightweight linen: black, 1 piece 22½" × 22½" (57.2 × 57.2 cm)
- DMC *Mouliné Six-Strand Embroidery Floss* (100% cotton), 8.7 yd (8 m)/skein: B5200 White, #817 red, #742 golden yellow, #906 green, and #3808 blue, 1 skein each, or shades of similar colors



Project photos by Matt Graves

- Needle: embroidery size 5
- Chalk pencil to transfer design, or printable, sticky water-soluble paper such as Sticky Fabri-Solvy
- Sewing thread: polyester or cotton, black
- Scissors
- Embroidery hoop: 6" (15 cm) hoop for stitching central main motif (optional)

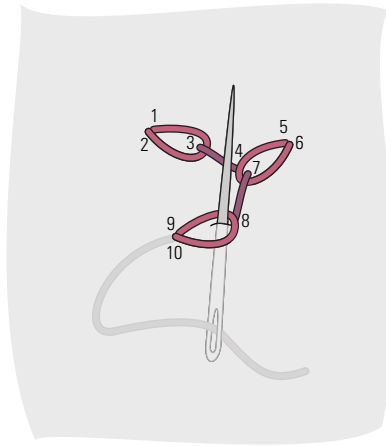
Design Size: 4⅜" × 4⅜" (11.1 × 11.1 cm).
Finished Size: 22½" × 22½" (57.2 × 57.2 cm).

Visit pieceworkmagazine.com/basic-embroidery-stitches for stitches you don't know.

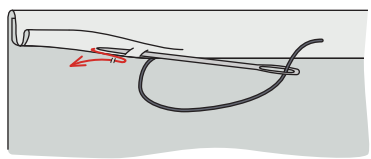
Special Stitches

Feathered Chain Stitch: Make a chain stitch, coming up and back down in the same hole, leaving a loop. Bring the needle up through the fabric inside the loop where you'd like to secure the stitch, stitching over the loop and down through the fabric a few millimeters away. Bring the needle up one stitch length away and make another chain loop, securing it the same way with a longer couching stitch. Alternate the directions of the chain and extended couching stitches.

Feathered Chain Stitch



Blind Stitch Hem



Instructions

Cut a 22½" × 22½" (57.2 × 57.2 cm) square piece of fabric. The pattern can be transferred to the linen fabric by tracing onto the linen or by using sticky water-soluble paper.

To trace the pattern, copy it onto thin paper. Tape the pattern to a window or light box. Tape the fabric over the pattern, placing the pattern in the corner 1⅛" (3 cm) from the edge of each side of the fabric. Trace the pattern onto the fabric with a chalk pencil.

To use sticky water-soluble paper, print the pattern on the paper. Place the pattern on the corner of the fabric, 1⅛" (3 cm) from each edge, and stick it to the fabric. Stitching on black or dark color fabric is easier with the pattern paper.

Prepare your thread by separating the six-strand embroidery floss into individual strands. Run your fingers over the threads to untwist them with a little oil from your skin. Then, grouping 3 strands of floss together, embroider the design in chain stitch except where noted. Follow the photograph and design chart for color placement and stitches.

Fill in the center flower with satin stitch. Outline the white upper petals with chain stitch.

Use the feathered chain stitch (see Special Stitches) to create the white diamond around the flower.

Stitch the four corner motifs in chain stitch, beginning with the white form. Each of the other color elements builds around that form. Use 2 or 3 tiny satin stitches in white, yellow, and blue at the top of the four motifs.

Finishing

Fold over about ¼" (0.6 cm) of the fabric edges and finger press or iron the fold. To make it easier to fold evenly, you can remove 1 thread ¼" (0.6 cm) from the edge of the fabric and then follow that line. Fold the fabric edge over itself again another ¼" (0.6 cm), press, and pin in place. Fold the corners straight or create mitered corners. Then use the blind hemstitch to secure the fold to the fabric. To make a blind hem, bury your knotted thread inside the hem. Bring the needle out of the hem at the fold and stitch through the front-facing fabric, catching a couple of threads. Bring the needle through the fold again, stitching under about ¼" (0.6 cm), then bring the needle out and pick up a couple of threads of the kerchief. Repeat and secure each corner with a few stitches on the folded or mitered corners. ❖





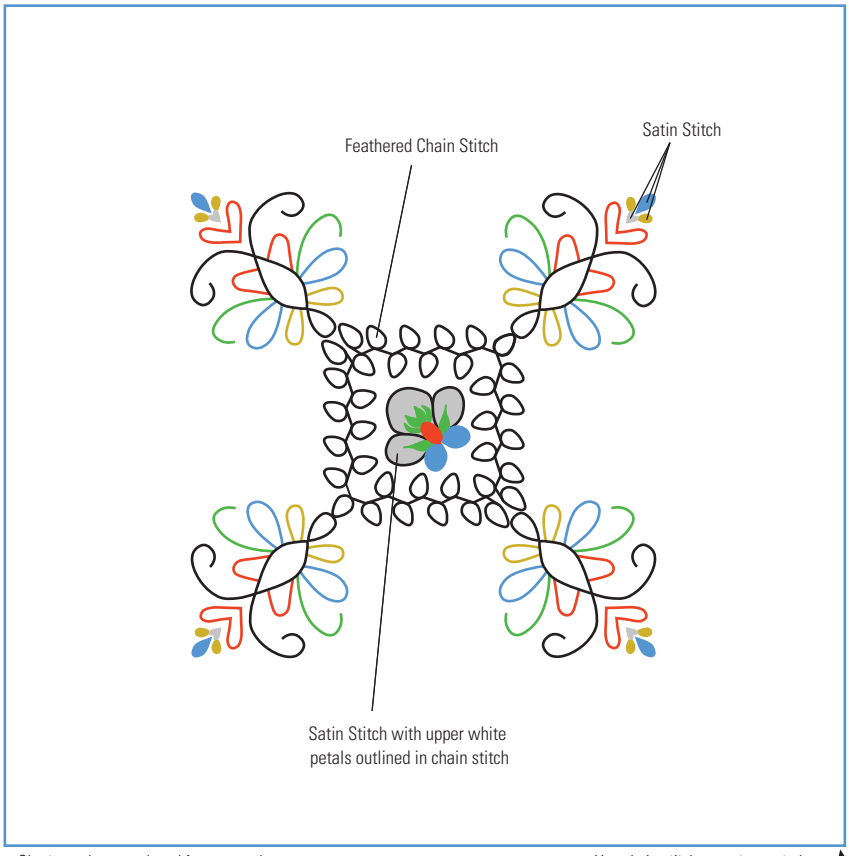


Chart may be reproduced for personal use.
Actual size

Use chain stitch except as noted.
Corner of kerchief

Key

- Chain stitch or feathered chain stitch, white
- Chain stitch, red, green, blue, or yellow
- Satin stitch, white
- Satin stitch, red, green, blue, or yellow

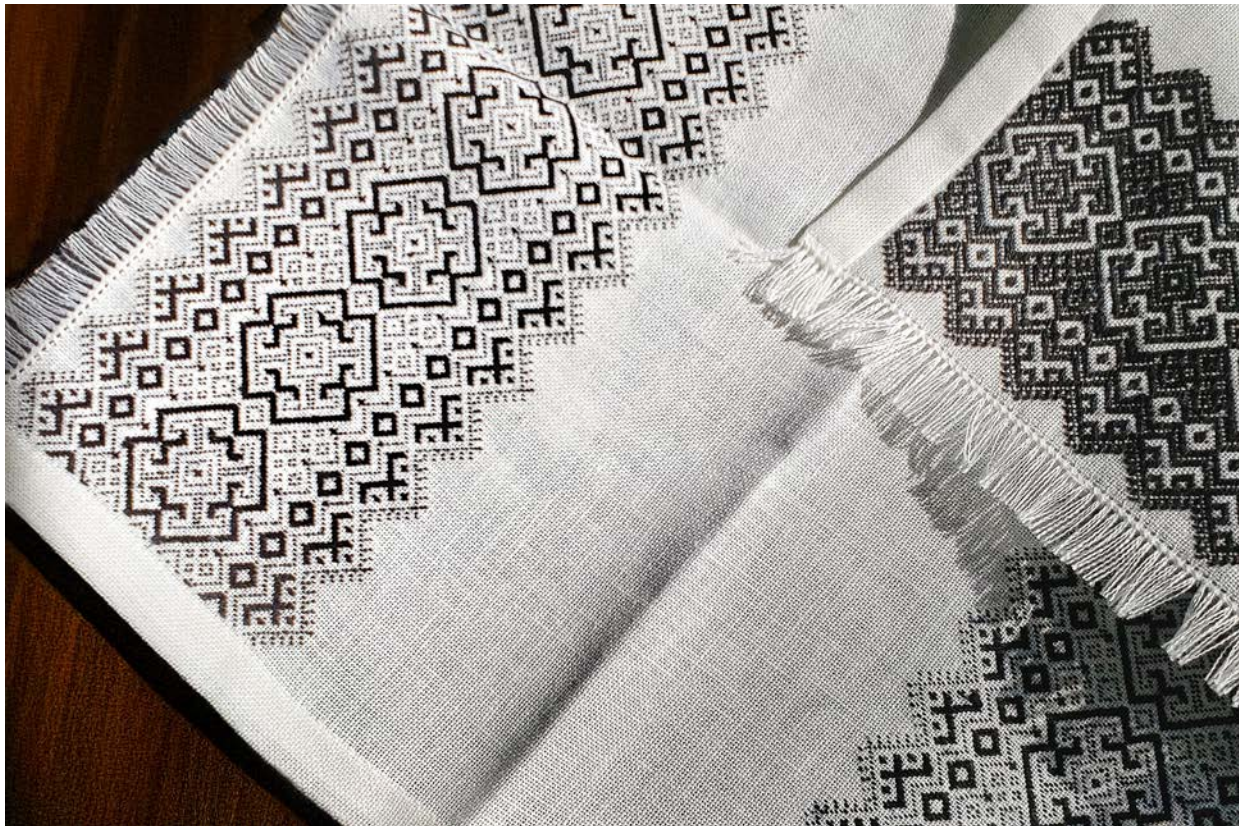
SARAH PEDLOW is an American artist and the founder of ThreadWritten cultural embroidery workshops and travel tours. She lives in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Find her work at threadwritten.com and sarahpedlow.com.

Exploring Needle Art

One Design in Four Methods

HANKA ROBERTSON

I enjoy embroidery of all sorts, crochet, knitting, and needle lace in various techniques. I have noticed that motifs and patterns such as hearts, diamonds, crosses, zigzag lines, and checkerboards are represented often in handwork designs and are found across cultures. This prompted me to spend a year exploring an idea: Could I create one design and work it using a variety of handwork techniques?



Photos by the author

The original project, a bread cloth worked in *nyzynka*, led to a series exploring the same motif in different techniques.

The Design: Nyzynka

My exploration began when I created a motif for *nyzynka*, or vertical weaving stitch, often used on clothing and household and religious items in western Ukraine. Done mainly in running stitch on evenweave fabric, the first layer of stitching is worked on the wrong side of the fabric in black or a rich dark red thread. The running stitches vary in length according to the design, reversing direction at the end of a design row. After completing the first pass, the piece is turned over and the empty areas of the design are filled in with brightly colored thread, usually red, blue, or yellow. These stitches don't show through to the back.

Using motifs and patterns I found in books and online, I developed a design that I stitched with 30-count evenweave linen and #5 pearl cotton to make a bread cloth. I preferred the look of the first layer of the embroidery—that is, the wrong side. I feel it is more delicate than the right side, which is very bold. The finished piece measures 16½" × 16¾" (42 × 42.5 cm).

With the overall concept in mind, I took elements of the bread-cloth design and created a new pattern. The design has four identical quadrants, so I charted one quarter and repeated it four times.



Version 1: The motif was easy to work in surface embroidery using simple stitches.

Version 1: Surface Embroidery

Using #12 pearl cotton and the same evenweave linen used for the bread cloth, I first interpreted the design in simple surface embroidery. I needed stitches forming square blocks, so I created a dotted four-sided stitch made up of a square stitch with a simple cross-stitch in the center for the bold areas of the design. I used Smyrna stitch for the lighter design lines and modified it to be more rounded than truly square. The finished piece measures 13" × 13" (33 × 33 cm).

Resources

West, Deanna Hall. "A Stitch in Time: Four-Sided Stitch." *PieceWork*, March 3, 2021. pieceworkmagazine.com/a-stitch-in-time-four-sided-stitch.

———. "A Stitch in Time: Smyrna Cross-Stitch." *PieceWork*, June 26, 2018. pieceworkmagazine.com/a-stitch-in-time-smyrna-cross-stitch.

Version 2: Valsesian Puncetto

Valsesian puncetto is a form of knotted needle lace particular to the Sesia valley in Piedmont, Italy. It is done completely in hand—no hoop or frame. Intrigued by an article and project in *PieceWork* May/June 2015, I bought every book published by the school in Varallo that teaches this type of lacemaking. After working from the books, I got stuck and ended up traveling to the school to spend a week learning from the teachers and students.

I used #10 crochet cotton for the piece, although #30 would have created a more delicate lace. I worked the piece from the bottom up, row by row. No design modifications were required. I love making this lace, which is very sturdy and holds up well to washing. The finished piece measures 19½" × 21" (49.5 × 53.3 cm).

Resources

Bacílková, Bronislava "Puncetto Lace Necklace to Make." *PieceWork*, May/June 2015, 36–40.

Robertson, Jeanine. "Valsesia Puncetto Needle Lace." *PieceWork*, May/June 2015, 30–35.



Version 2: This lace pattern was straightforward to create after learning the unusual needle lace method known as Valsesian puncetto.

Version 3: Filet Crochet

It took some time to figure out how many stitches I needed to create the square blocks of the design. Using #30 crochet cotton, I started from the bottom up but soon discovered that I didn't like how it looked. I then started in the middle, working in rounds, but turning the corner at the end of each side made it impossible to work a full block in the corner, so I had to modify the design. Once this problem was solved, I only had to follow the design chart. The finished piece measures 23¾" × 23¾" (60.3 × 60.3 cm).

Resources

"Easy, Elegant Filet Crochet." *PieceWork*, September/October 1998, 38–43.



Version 3: The chart required some modifications to work in filet crochet.



Version 4: Combining purchased net with darning, this method is also known as *lacis* or *filet guipure*.

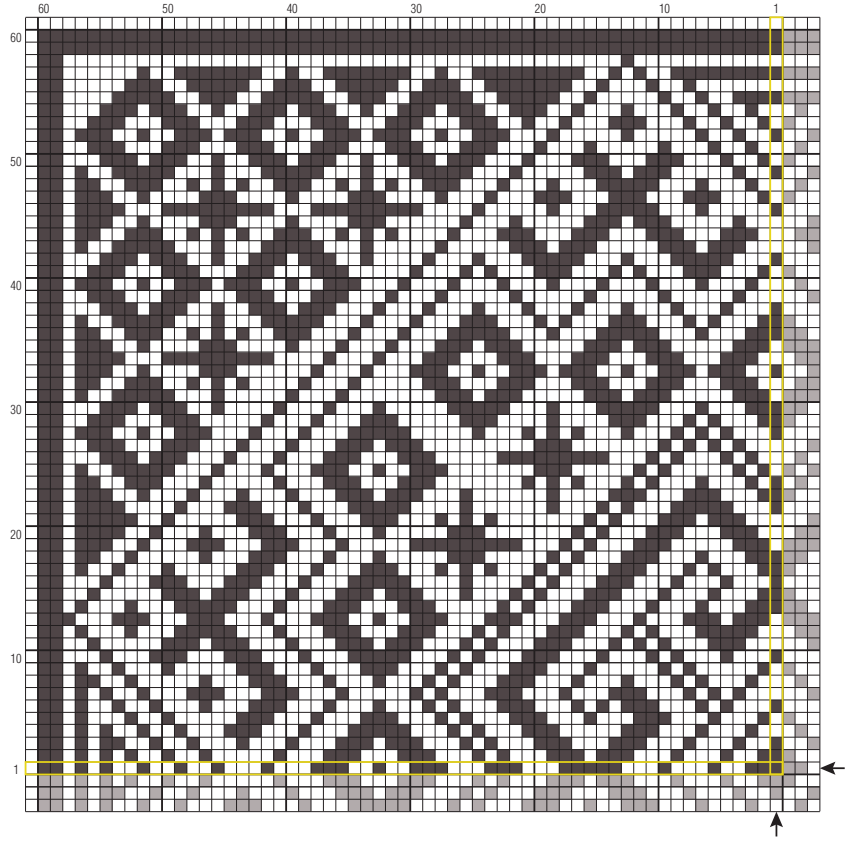
Version 4: Net Darning

Also known as *lacis* or *filet guipure*, this needle lace is worked on purchased net that is laced to a frame to hold it taut. I used #30 crochet cotton for the needle darning. The tricky part is burying the tails invisibly so, if you don't look too closely, the piece is reversible. The technique required no design modifications. The finished piece measures 12½" × 12¾" (31.8 × 32.4 cm).

Resources

Cadovius, Jacqueline. "Filet Net Inserts to Embroider." *PieceWork*, September/October 1996, 64–65.

It is possible to create a design and execute it effectively in a variety of handwork methods.



The pattern is made of four tiled quadrants of the same geometric motif.

Further Explorations

I tried to work the design in lace knitting but soon discovered that the design of full and empty square blocks isn't easily worked in this technique. Since knitting stitches are V's, not squares, I couldn't find the right combination of needles and thread to make the necessary square shape. After several tries between working on the successful pieces above, I gave up.

I have spent a year on this concept. What have I learned? First, it is possible to create a design and execute it effectively in a variety of handwork methods. Second, if the right methods are used, few or no modifications to the design are necessary. Third, choosing the right materials is important for a successful result. Fourth, the results can be very pleasing. Fifth, this exploration has absolutely been worth the time and effort.

I hope this inspires stitchers to look at their work and try a design in another method. ❖

HANKA ROBERTSON was born in Slovenia and came to the United States at age five. A lifelong needleworker, she dabbled with embroidery in her teens but only took it up seriously when her sister dragged her to the local Embroiderers' Guild of America meeting in the early 1980s. She is a member of needlework organizations including the American Needlepoint Guild and the New England Lace Group and teaches extensively.

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A Beautiful Needlepoint the First Time You Try

In the 1950s, the Palmer Show Card Paint Company began offering an art experience that took the world by storm: Paint-by-Numbers. Including the numbered canvas, corresponding pots of paint, and even a brush, the kits offered the experience of participating in a work of art. Adding colors to the canvas, dipping the brush in paint, and seeing the project take shape gave painters a hands-on opportunity to create a lovely finished piece with guaranteed success.

For needleworkers, the opportunity to stitch a work of art can also come from a painted canvas. Needlepoint and embroidery kits generally include the design, yarns, and even a needle to get started. Painted canvases depict old masterworks, contemporary pictures, and everything in between.

One contemporary artist who has embraced this collaboration is Kaffe Fassett, whose designs in fiber include fabrics, quilts, and an extensive range of needlepoint canvases. As Hugh Ehrman, who has produced Fassett's kits for decades, says,

> "Night Tree" was one of the first needlepoint kits that Kaffe designed for Ehrman. It was launched by Ehrman in 1985 and featured in Kaffe's groundbreaking book *Glorious Needlepoint* two years later. The original was stitched in glowing autumnal colors—ochres, burnt oranges, and deep yellows—on a black background. It was way ahead of its time. No other designer was producing such abstract work for mass production kits.
>
> Kaffe had always been fascinated by textile designs from Central Asia and by Persian carpet patterns. Three years ago, Kaffe had an urge to revisit "Night Tree" and try it in a completely different palette. He is the master of color, with a totally original eye. His needlepoint is bolder and more artistic than anything else on the market, and he is widely recognized as one of the world's leading textile designers.



Photo courtesy of Ehrman Tapestry

Whether you follow the canvas as directed or add colors and stitches to make it your own, a needlework kit can offer the sheer pleasure of building a picture as thread flows through your hands. ❖

The kit for this pillow is available at ehrmantapestry.com.