

2023-2024

ACADEMIC YEAR

ROYAL SCHOOL OF NEEDLEWORK
ADVANCED DIPLOMA

FINE WHITEWORK



Patron: HRH The Duchess of Cornwall
President: HRH The Duchess of Gloucester



'Whitework' encompasses a diverse range of techniques, whose execution spans history from earliest times to the present day, linked by the common theme of neutral threads worked on a neutral ground.

The term 'fine whitework' can be used to refer to any form of whitework embroidery which has been executed on a fine scale. However, at the RSN, the term refers to a technique which facilitates combining the principal forms of fine scale whitework within one piece of work. This fundamentally allows exploitation of the full potential of the whitework 'tonal scale' from solid, sculptural techniques, through to the most translucent or open.

AIM – to design and work fine whitework embroidery encompassing key techniques of the whitework tonal scale from solid to open work on one piece of fabric. A fine whitework embroidery demonstrating effectiveness of design for purpose and a high level of skill in execution of the stitches. Designs should not be directly copied from other sources; referencing, interpreting or stylising shapes or designs is acceptable however designs should be original you, which your tutor will encourage you to do.

Please note: All preparatory work (e.g. outlines, drawings, stitch plans, original source material) **MUST** be handed in for assessment or the work will not be marked.

MATERIALS:

- The ground cloth is a **linen batiste or cambric**. Two weights are available to select from: fine and very fine. The necessity to count the linen threads for this work should determine this choice. Two layers of linen will be used in parts of the design, one in others.
- A layer of **net** will also be sandwiched between the layers. A choice of fine, nylon conservation net, or heavier cotton bobbinet can be made, again according to ability to count the segments of the net.
- **Threads.** The following may be used: white stranded cotton, white cotton à broder (various sizes), white cotton perlé (finer sizes only), DMC floche à broder (for padding only, unless all other threads used are also DMC), Brok Egyptian Cotton lace threads in a range of sizes, Belgian 'Egyptian Cotton' lace threads in a range of sizes.
NB: You must choose whether to use all DMC or all Anchor threads for your surface embroidery since the level of whiteness varies between the two. Either can be used for padding however.
- You may also like to add white threads of your own, ribbons and beads etc, under guidance from the tutor.
- A slate frame is essential and should be framed up with string piping at the sides, rather than webbing.
- You will also require a blue pencil for drawing on your design.

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DESIGN:

Background:

The key techniques which can be included, from the most solid to the most open, are: raised surface stitchery such as padded satin and trailing, together with many other textured surface stitches (eg. raised fishbone, Cretan, French knots and bullion knots etc), counted satin work, shadow work and shadow appliqué, needle-made lace fillings, pulled thread work, drawn thread work, Broderie Anglaise, cutwork and net embroidery.

This work is influenced and inspired by several historic techniques which form a wonderful source of inspiration for stitch and design:

Ayrshire Needlework: the exquisite form of whitework which developed in Scotland and became a thriving cottage industry during the 19th century. Extremely delicate designs, inspired by nature, were worked principally using forms of padded satin stitch and trailing, on a ground of sheer cotton lawn, with the addition of delicate and complex needlelace fillings in eyelets, and areas of drawn and pulled thread. Used principally on items of dress such as baby gowns and bonnets.

Dresden Work: The delicate form of 18th century whitework which imitated lace and combined a vast array of tiny pulled thread stitches, together with shadow appliqué, shadow work, eyelets, cording and tambouring, all on sheer muslin. Used principally to create a lace-like effect of items of women's clothing such as aprons, kerchiefs, sleeve ruffles, lappets and in a more solid form on men's linen waistcoats.

Carrickmacross Lace: The famed form of embroidered lace which developed in Ireland during the 19th century. Fine cotton lawn was applied to machine-made cotton net, the design outlined with overcasting and the excess lawn then cut away to reveal the net, onto which net darning patterns were worked to add extra detail. 'Carrickmacross Guipure' also involved areas of cutwork with buttonhole brides.

DESIGN SIZE: The design should be approximately 15x15cm (225cm²), but does not have to be square. The design size may be adapted under guidance from the tutor, according to complexity and density of stitching involved etc.

DESIGN IDEAS AND TIPS:

- Reasonably **simple, stylised** and **elegant** designs tend to read most effectively in fine whitework. Complex designs can appear confused and, since the work is time consuming, may take a very long time to complete. Ensure you have a **variety of sizes of shape** within the design.
- **Subjects which work well:** stylised patterns, stylised natural forms including plants and animals / birds, architecture and buildings, decorative monograms.
- Symmetrical designs can be challenging!
- Your design should **demonstrate originality** and should **NOT** be directly traced from another artist's work.

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- **Designs in the past have included:** a woman's face with flowing hair, stylised dragonflies, an old wooden door, a decorative shoe, an abstract pattern of curved shapes, part of an old map, a butterfly and flower design and a stylised jellyfish!
- Think very carefully about how the **open and solid areas** of work will fit within the design since these are often the **most eye catching** parts of a design and must be used to create a strong sense of depth and draw your eye into the image.
- Think carefully about using **openwork correctly** as a **negative space**. Eg. Net would be effective as a butterfly's wings as these are delicate and translucent. Net would be wrong for a butterfly's body as this should be solid.
- Design areas for drawn thread work and net embroidery **must not be too small** as they will be **too fiddly** to work.
- Design areas for net **should not be too large** as they will **stretch and distort**, which will be particularly obvious if the design shape has **straight sides**.
- Areas of net and drawn thread must be **surrounded by strong stitching** to provide sufficient support to be able to cut the fabric away. This must be **trailing**, followed by a **row of another stitch** such as: a second row of trailing, chain stitch, stem stitch, French knots, satin stitch etc.
- Once you have drawn your outline design, it is important to shade the design in various tones of one colour, in order to plan and illustrate the various weights of the techniques. This will enable you to check whether you have achieved an effective balance of open and solid areas. i.e.:
 - Use very dark blue for net areas and open stitches such as eyelets and ladder stitch.
 - Use dark blue for drawn thread.
 - Use mid blue for pulled thread.
 - Use light blue for areas of single linen.
 - Leave white areas of double linen and surface stitchery. It is also helpful to sketch in the textures of the surface stitchery using pencil or a fine liner.

Your tutor will then assist you to plan an order of work and to decide what stitches should be worked on which layer. Care must be taken to avoid trapping the second layer unnecessarily.

TECHNIQUES WHICH MUST BE INCLUDED:

- **Net insertion** with at least one net darning pattern.
- *NB. If it is not appropriate to include a net darning pattern within your design, you may work a finished sample of this technique to demonstrate that you have learnt the process. The design must include insertion of plain net however.*
- **At least one area of drawn thread:** this may either be a filling within an enclosed space or could be worked as bands of drawn thread.
- Areas of **double and single linen. Padded satin Stitch, Trailing, Eyelets and Ladder Stitch.**

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YOU MAY ALSO LIKE TO INCLUDE:

- Other open work stitches such as: three sided stitch, beading. Ayrshire style needlelace fillings
- Other surface work stitches such as: stem stitch, back stitch seeding, French knots, woven and whipped wheels, chain stitch, counted satin patterns etc.
- Three dimensional elements such as wired organza, wired embroidered or needlelace shapes, to add a further dimension (eg. for the petals of a flower or the wings of a butterfly).
- Fine ribbon may also be used within drawn thread patterns.

TRANSFERRING YOUR DESIGN:

If you have straight lines within your design – these must be tacked along the fabric grain, **BEFORE** you trace on the rest of your design.

If your design is circular, it is best to draw the circle with your blue pencil in a compass, before tracing on the rest.

The design can be traced through the linen fabric, using a light box if necessary. You will draw onto the linen using a blue pencil.

NB. Do NOT use a blue pencil which will bleed into the fabric when wet – test the pencil before use if you are at all uncertain!!

You may use a wash-out fabric marker pen as an alternative, since the lines will be a lot brighter. The lines are never as crisp as a blue pencil however.

WASHING YOUR COMPLETED WORK:

Your design should be washed, **BEFORE** you cut the linen away to reveal your areas of net. Wash the work on a tight slate frame according to your tutor's instructions.

The work should **NOT** be washed once you have revealed the net since the slate frame cannot be fully tightened after this process.

MOUNTING YOUR COMPLETED WORK:

The work will be mounted over museum grade card with herringbone stitch at the reverse.

You will need to select a coloured fabric to be placed behind your design, in order to show the whitework to best advantage. Plain cottons and silks are usually best although occasionally a patterned fabric or a hand painted silk etc can be effective.

A coloured fabric (such as a silk or cotton) may be used to line the reverse of the piece, rather than sateen, if desired.

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TIPS:

- Avoid overly complex designs and try to achieve a good balance of solid and open stitchery.
- Take great care to keep your work clean, washing your hands regularly and keeping all work covered with tissue apart from a small working area
- Keep your threads in clean bags.
- Avoid overworking threads since they will appear worn and discoloured.
- Take regular breaks whilst working on your piece since fine whitework can be a great strain on the eyes. Use magnification if necessary.
- Using a dark coloured cloth over your knees assists with seeing the linen threads.
- Using a white cloth over your knees will assist with seeing the design lines clearly.
- Practise stitches on a coarser evenweave fabric, before attempting them on the fine fabric.
- Take guidance on cleaning your completed piece; do not attempt this process without help.
- Take great care not to over stretch your work when mounting else you will risk damaging delicate areas of your design. Fine whitework does NOT need to be pulled very tight when mounting. Request tutor guidance on this process.

BOOKS TO CONSULT FOR INSPIRATION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

- **Contemporary Whitework**, by Tracy A Franklin and Nicola Jarvis, ISBN: 0-7134- 8964-2.
- **Whitework Embroidery**, by Barbara Dawson. (Very useful encyclopaedia of all whitework techniques).
- **Ayrshire Needlework**, by Agnes F Bryson, ISBN: 0-7134-5928-X
- **Ayrshire and Other Whitework**, by Margaret Swain. ISBN: 0-85263-589-3.
- **Embroidered with White – The 18th century fashion for Dresden lace and other whiteworked accessories**, by Heather Toomer, ISBN: 978-0-9542730-2-6.
- **Baby Wore White – Robes for special occasions**, by Heather Toomer, ISBN: 0-9542730-1-X
- **Carrickmacross Lace**, by Nellie Ó Cleirigh, ISBN: 0 85105 436 6.
- **Encyclopaedia of Needlework**, by Thérèse de Dillmont, published by DMC Library. (Needlelace, drawn thread, pulled thread, counted satin patterns, monogramming, net embroidery etc).
- **Anchor Manual of Needlework**, published by Batsford. (Drawn thread, pulled thread, counted satin patterns, cutwork, needlelace, net embroidery, wonderful continental examples of fine whitework, worked in a similar way to RSN method, etc).
- **Embroidered Machine Nets, Limerick and Worldwide**, by Pat Earnshaw. ISBN: 0 9513891 7 3. (Very useful for net darning patterns).
- **Pulled thread Embroidery**, by Moyra McNeill. ISBN: 0-486-27857-3. (Very useful source of pulled thread patterns).
- **A-Z of Whitework, Book 1 – Surface Embroidery**, Inspirations Books. ISBN: 0-9757094-9-6.

STOCKISTS:

All materials required are available from the RSN.

Threads and books are available from the on-line shop: www.royal-needlework.org.uk

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