



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

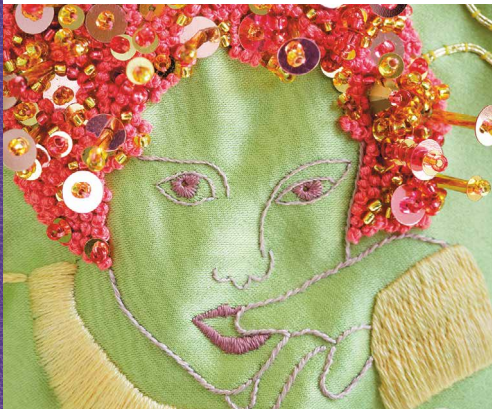
RSN
ROYAL SCHOOL
OF NEEDLEWORK

Founded 1872

Embroider a Selfie

A project for schools

Express yourself through stitch



The International Centre of Excellence
for the Art of Hand Embroidery



royal-needlework.org.uk



Chiswick School

Introduction

Welcome to the 'Embroider a Selfie' project by the Royal School of Needlework (RSN). Since we were founded in 1872, our mission has been to keep the art of hand embroidery alive. One of the ways we do this is to facilitate more needlework in schools by providing ideas and materials to engage the younger generation.

This project has been established to help school children to learn about the fun, creativity and also, the therapeutic aspects of stitch. The Kit can be used within a class lesson in textiles or art and design, for an after school programme or in any other format. While predominantly aimed at Y7 or Y8 it can be adapted to be used with any age group.

Why do we talk about the therapeutic aspect of stitch?

Our experience is that many people find the slow, deliberate aspects of stitch provide a good break from the demanding aspects of life (from social media to exams). As such, it can physically enable people to breathe easier, better focus on what they are doing, and concentrate.

We speak with embroiderers of all ages who tell us that after a period of stitching, they feel much calmer.

How you might use this booklet in the classroom

This booklet provides some fun ideas on what to stitch to engage your pupils based on two Self Expression themes – 'Stitch a Selfie' and 'Stitch a Power Mantra'. The creations can be used in textiles lessons or in association with other aspects of art and design. You are free to copy and adapt the booklet to suit the needs of your pupils and school timetable.

The ideas in this booklet feature pieces worked by school children and RSN students. The booklet aims to provide inspiration and useful tips, whether the

pupils are new to stitching or would like to take on something more challenging.

The examples use different techniques to give students ideas of what is possible, from a simple line drawing rendered in stitch to more complex hand embroidery techniques. Students can work on traditional linen, cotton bags, handkerchiefs, scraps of fabric and even sieves!

Online Video Resource

To help guide you through the technical aspects of stitch, you can access free 'Stitch a Selfie' video content on the Royal School of Needlework's YouTube channel. We have created a series of videos which include inspirations as



well as a step by step guide to creating your own power mantra with a range of filler and outline stitches. Simply scan the QR code (left).

RSN Stitch Bank (rsnstitchbank.org)

If you would like to learn more stitches and learn about different techniques, you can also access RSN Stitch Bank which is a comprehensive online

resource and free to use. It includes information on over 400 stitches with videos, written instructions, illustrations and photographs for each stitch.

Kit

Each RSN Kit contains everything you need to get you started including embroidery hoops, needles, needle threaders, scissors, a selection of different thread colours and fabrics. If you need further supplies, we would suggest online shopping as it is often difficult to find embroidery materials in local shops.

Next steps for students

We hope this activity gives your students the chance to have fun in the world of stitch and hopefully provides them with a new hobby or even career!

Please do share your students' work-in-progress photos and also final pieces with us. For reasons of safeguarding, we ask that no names of individual students are included. Thank you.

Email your photos to enquiries@royal-needlework.org.uk or post them on Instagram. Include the hashtag: **#RSNSelfie** and tag us **@RoyalNeedlework**.



Stitch a Power Mantra

The RSN 'Embroider a Selfie' project is all about self-expression and we are very excited to be working with Jamie Chalmers, better known as Mr X Stitch. Mr X Stitch is a creative stitcher who not only brings boundless positive energy to the world of needlework, but also helps break down the misconceptions of the craft.

Mr X Stitch is a guest lecturer at the Royal School of Needlework and plays a vital Ambassador role for this project, helping us to promote more stitch in schools. He met with some of our Degree in Hand Embroidery Students and inspired them to express their feelings by 'Stitching a Power Mantra'. The Mantra could be an inspirational word or expression to help motivate or provide a goal. The students used the simple Cross Stitch technique for their words.

Stitching a Mantra provides a focus for pupils and teachers, enabling the children to reflect on their emotions and prompt discussion points during class. Combining a personal mantra with the soothing flow of stitch can be a powerful exercise. The mantra helps

to build self-esteem and motivate, whilst the focus on stitching can work to block out anxiety and stress.

Mr X Stitch Interview

Why do you think learning stitch in schools is important?

Embroidery is a very positive pastime on many levels, not only from a creative standpoint but also from a pastoral perspective; the process of stitching is naturally meditative and it creates inner peace for the majority of people who try it. I have worked with many schools and other groups where the sessions have become very peaceful and filled with happy stitchers who are engaged in a truly mindful activity.

It is a shame that it is not included in the school curriculum in the same way as it once was. This prevents young people from trying stitching at a time when they are coping with change and often feeling pressure. Stitching projects, not only provide a creative direction, but also allow time for reflection and the processing of other experiences.



"I'm not what you might expect from a stitcher and my mission is to dismantle those outdated preconceptions that only women do needlework. I love teaching people to stitch and seeing them enjoy the craft."

Mr X Stitch

RSN Degree



What do you like about needlework?

Over and above the benefits already mentioned, one of the things I love about needlework is that it is a craft that's been practised by thousands of people all over the world for centuries. It is rare to find an activity that is such an important part of history. Therefore it makes it more important than ever that we encourage and inspire young people to try it.

Needlework is also very resilient and can last a long time, so I love the idea of using it to create future heirlooms for people. We take it lightly these days, but you can't guarantee that your digital photos will be around in 200 years, whereas that stitched phrase you made for your best friend has a good chance of outlasting all of us!

Mr X Stitch Top Tips

Take time to choose a word that is a good fit for you. If you find a word that genuinely inspires you, then you will enjoy stitching it and repeating it, giving yourself inner power. As you stitch, you can't help but think about the subject you're stitching and this is the power of this mantra.

Don't worry about how it looks. When you are starting out, there will always be simple mistakes that happen and lumps and bumps along the way. Don't let them put you off - enjoy the process and know that you're spending time making something for yourself that will last forever. If you enjoy it, you can stitch more things and each one will get better.

Emily Whittaker, RSN Degree

I was inspired to use the mantra 'Sparkle and Shine', because even though it is from the film 'Nativity' and I was in the festive mood, I felt it had a deeper meaning. To me it is important, especially in a creative environment, to express yourself and not be afraid of standing out. In the past I have stood out because of my hair colour, when I wanted to blend in. However, now I am older, I understand that it is not a bad thing to look different and we should embrace our differences.

For our workshop with Mr X Stitch, we focused on the technique of Cross Stitch and to emphasise my mantra, I used a range of bright threads; I used metallics, chainette and silks. I found it particularly interesting to see how each thread differed when applied to create the Cross Stitch and I love the different textures they created.

I aimed to use a range of fonts and threads to ensure that the 'sparkle' and 'shine' were bold and stood out. I also wanted to add an image to my Mantra and I felt a star fitted it perfectly, especially with my colour scheme and gave it an astrological quality.

Like my mantra, I believe needlework is very personal. It allows us to express ourselves in a creative way and therefore to not worry about perfection. We can learn from our mistakes and find a new way of creating.



Top Tip

Choose something that means something to you and makes you smile.

Emily Barnett, RSN Degree

The word 'Resilient' works well as a mantra for me. It is a powerful word that makes me feel that I can take on any experiences that come my way with a positive attitude. A pack of brightly coloured fine pens were the inspiration for the colours chosen to create a simple, yet bold, text.



Sarah Dempsey, RSN Degree

I chose the word 'Focus' because I wanted something short that would 'hit' me when I looked at it, rather than having to read through a text. I wanted a bolder pattern so I outlined my Cross Stitch letters with Back Stitch. I really enjoyed the day with Mr X Stitch. Jamie's workshop opened my eyes to all sorts of different and fantastic Cross Stitch options.

Top Tip

I would say to start small and simple. I chose one word as I felt it had much more impact than a quote.



Stitch a Selfie

We launched this theme to inspire a new generation to put down their mobile phones and use stitch to create a 'Selfie' instead! This initiative has driven the imagination of pupils and we have seen a wide range of wonderful pieces. It doesn't matter what level of needlework skills you have or even whether you are shy about your appearance, there are many different ways to capture yourself in stitch. Here are a selection of ideas from schools, our own students and also comedian and presenter Jenny Éclair, who created her very own Selfie with us.



Cardinal Newman School



Debenham High School



Waldegrave School



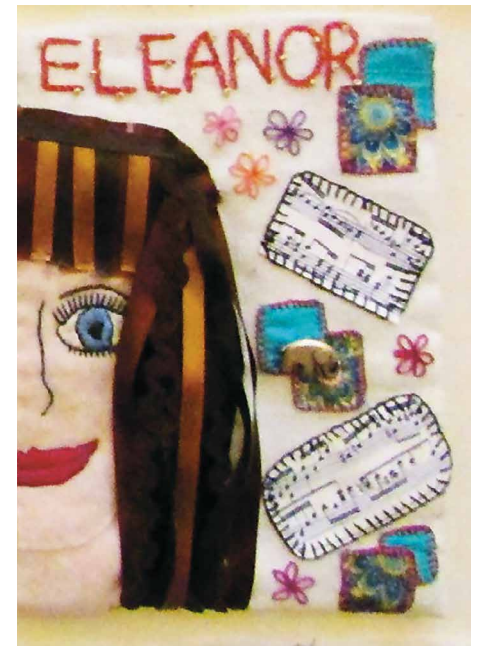
Jonel van Schalkwyk, RSN Degree



Comedian and presenter, Jenny Éclair

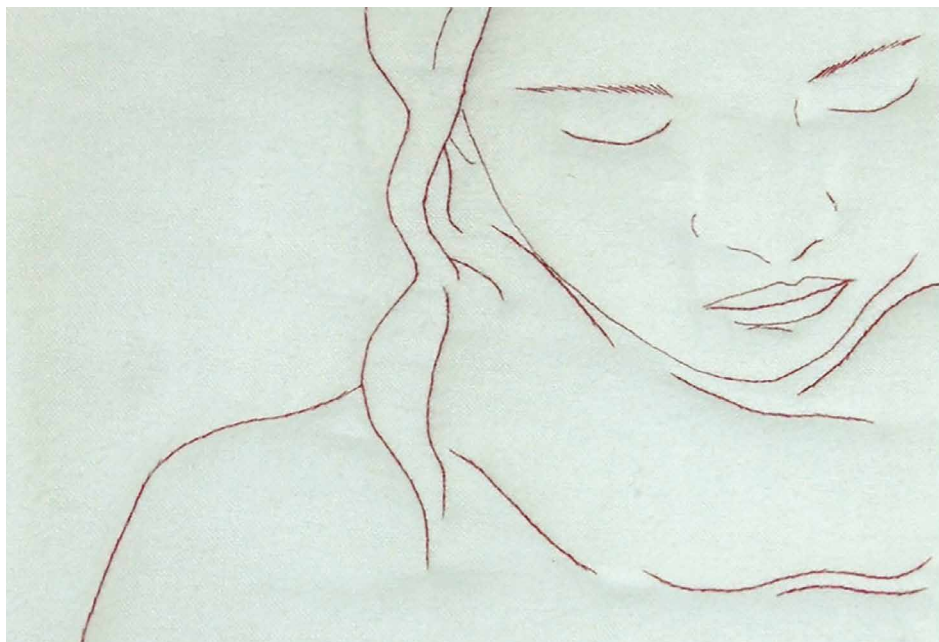


Eve Pavis, RSN Degree



Eleanor Latham, RSN Degree

Just a Simple Line



Lizzy Pye, RSN Apprentice, now RSN Tutor

This 'Selfie' was stitched in the days before selfies were a thing. It was set as a project in our weekly art class during my Apprenticeship. To begin with I was not enthused by this topic as I'm rather self-conscious, but I set to work finding suitable photographs to stitch from nonetheless.

Image

I found so few photos of myself that I had to ask a friend to take some, and then couldn't decide which one to choose. One of the criteria was that it should show our personality in some way, so in the end I chose three images which I felt together reflected that.

Stitches

I chose to stitch very simply – mark making with stitch rather than anything too specific. The stitches

were variations of Stem Stitch, Back Stitch and Straight (or Long) Stitch. For each embroidery, I worked directly from the photograph, choosing the most important lines and leaving out anything which didn't inform the eye. There is a bit of a knack to this – a lot of it is down to the contrast of light and shadow, and knowing the characteristic expressions of a face. Simple things like leaving out the corner of the mouth and using just a few short lines to indicate the nose can make all the difference.

Top Tip

This is a technique where less is more. Using just a few stitches can indicate a feature like a nose or lips without slavishly stitching every last detail.

Experimenting with Materials



Bethany Duffy, RSN Degree

My embroidery is on a cotton handkerchief, featuring my face and the facade of Hampton Court Palace at the bottom. The idea to include Hampton Court Palace was an easy decision for me. It was where I was going to study for the next three years and I knew it was going to become an important part of my life.

Image

Deciding on my face took a while. I knew I wanted it close to life size and use as much of the space on the handkerchief as possible. I also wanted to express some personality, show the excitement I was experiencing at that time of my life and have fun with the piece. The composition was quite natural, I just played with the drawings, overlaying them until I found one that I was happy with and which was visually pleasing.

Stitches

I stitched Hampton Court Palace first, using a simple Back Stitch to outline

the building. I used Seed Stitch to fill the building to give the idea of brick work without having to stitch individual bricks. This created texture and I could work it quite quickly. I then moved onto the face, doing larger Seed Stitches to cover the face and using different tones to create a 3D effect. Moving onto the glasses I wanted to make them stand out because they are such a large part of the way I look. I chose to cover them in stitches. The hair was definitely one of the most difficult parts of this piece. I finally settled on Chain Stitch which I worked quite loosely to create volume and texture.

Top Tip

Be creative, with your materials, your fabric and your 'Selfie'. Think outside the box and do what you want to do. You don't have to be traditional.



Experimenting with Materials

Elena Thornton, RSN Degree

My 'Selfie Sieve' was created using crewel wool and a basic household sieve. We had been tasked to stitch our portrait onto the sieve using the technique of Canvaswork. These stitches are usually on a fabric with premade holes. This made the transition of stitch from fabric to metal fairly simple.

Image

To begin transferring the basic facial features, I traced my face onto tissue paper and cut it to the required circular shape. This is then tacked onto the sieve using a few stitches around the outside edge. I chose a contrasting thread colour to stitch the feature outlines as a guide.

Top Tip

The main thing to remember is that even if you are not 100% happy with the outcome, the project will have taught you about different techniques.

Stitches

I chose Appletons Wool for the main body of stitches. I find that it has good strength and seems to hold up well. I tried my best to colour match the wool to my skin tone and found it easier to stick to a maximum of five colours as any more seemed to give a muddier appearance. There are hundreds of stitches to choose for Canvaswork, however I quickly made the decision to keep it simple and use Tent Stitch – a small, diagonal stitch.

When nearing the end of this piece, I decided that the unfinished sections, left raw and bare, looked far more exciting than a full face. These are ideas that you may not know work until you are actually making the final design. Not everything can be planned. Some things work better than others once we can see them in progress, rather than in the initial drawings.



Alice Brady, RSN Degree



Focus on your Best Feature

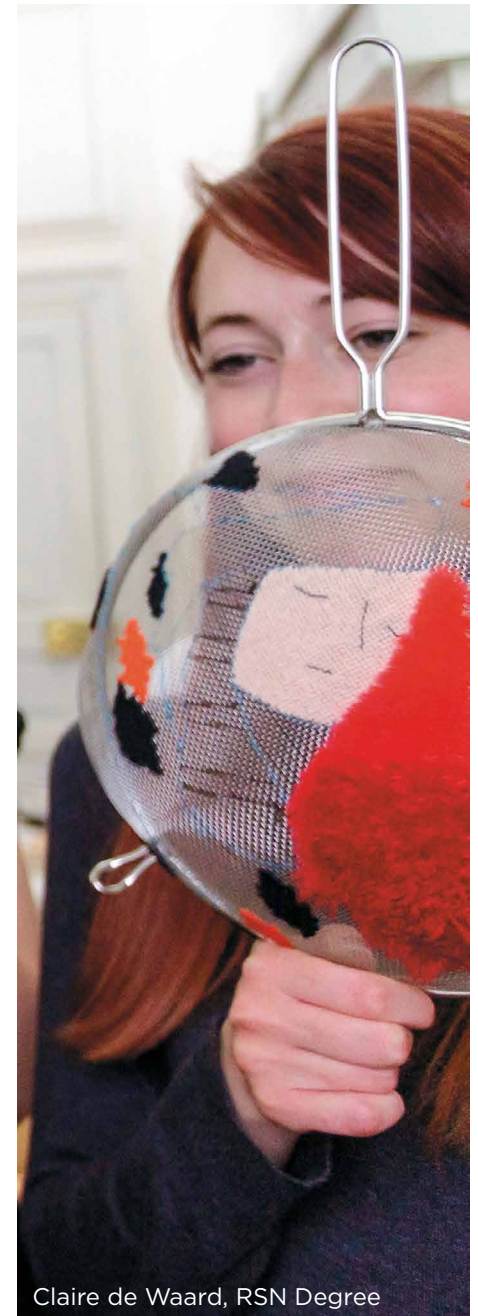
These two pieces both feature what the stitchers thought were their best features, their red hair. Alice worked hers on a handkerchief, first working the top of the head and then she moved the hoop to work the lower section.

Images

To give the shape to the face Alice has carefully sculpted the shape of the hair, especially as it comes under the chin. Our eyes adjust to read the empty space, not as a white shaped column, but as a clear face and neck. The hair is stitched in Long and Short Stitch. She has also incorporated a number of colours in the hair, including blues for shadow and ginger for light areas, which are not in her actual hair.

Claire has red/brown hair, but she has further accentuated the colour in her Selfie. The face is simple, almost cartoon-like, worked in a flat Tent Stitch with virtually a single colour for the skin and simple lines to evoke eyes, nose and mouth which are used to give a sense of scale. Then in contrast the stitching for the hair is rich in colour, shaded and blended, especially in the lower area, and worked in Turkey Rug Stitch to give a thick and textured surface. In this way, she not only highlights that she thinks her hair is her best feature, but makes it even more red, thick, lavish and special in the stitched interpretation.

The sweep of the hair is further highlighted by the fact that the working surface is a sieve with its convex curve for dramatic effect.



Claire de Waard, RSN Degree



Embroidery on a Canvas Bag

Abigail Frusher, RSN Degree

Image

This project is a combination of a Selfie and a postcard from home. I took inspiration from the green fields around Norfolk and manipulated the plain canvas bag by adding woollen and velvet fabrics to represent the fields and farming.

As this was one of my first projects, I did not have much stitch experience, so I chose to use the Appliqué technique where large parts of what you are trying to represent can be achieved with the use of fabrics.

Stitches

For the face I chose a pale, plain fabric and then combined watercolour painting, further Appliqué and stitch to give colour and detail. My hair is brown, but I decided to use a patterned fabric which in one way makes it look like the hair is highlighted. I deliberately cut the brown fabric to look like it had some movement in the hair. This worked well and I was pleased with the result.

Elliott Reynolds, RSN Degree

Be innovative and combine techniques. I used a range of media: charcoal, paint, paper, and stitch techniques. I was inspired by Andy Warhol through his use of strong contrasting colours and outline. Hence the bold mouth and left eye, with the nose and right eye being more part of the background.

Top Tip

Think about the design before you start. Whether you start with a photo, image or something you have drawn yourself, take some time to think about the way you want to translate it into stitch.





Going Incognito

Kat Diuguid, RSN Certificate & Diploma

Image

The design is from the May 1936 Vogue UK cover, celebrating Royal Ascot. I loved the soft effect of the illustration and I wanted the stitching to preserve as much of that feeling as possible. The stripes on the blouse provided both a really interesting visual pattern and a technical challenge. I had to figure out how to render the stripes and the draping effect, while also managing the stitch patterns on canvas.

Stitches

I wanted to exaggerate the contrast between the smooth sky, blouse and skin and the knobby greenery. I did this through both stitch choice and thread choice. The threads I used for the sky, blouse and skin are all very subtly mixed, with solid and variegated threads. The stitches I used were Smooth Diagonal and Straight Stitches. The Diagonal and Straight Stitches provided more stitch surface area and gave a more lustrous effect. I created a very subtle graduation with the sky colours in the background through thread mixing.

For the greenery, I mixed threads of wools and cottons and used Cross Stitch patterns to create very textured areas. In order for the flowers and butterfly to visually stand out, I picked pink and red colours and used glossy silk and rayon threads with some metallic threads. This ensured the flowers did not get lost in the greenery and helped them pop out against the textured shrubs.

It was an interesting challenge to interpret an existing artwork through stitch, especially the challenge of the striped blouse and the shading on the neck and jawline. It also provided some constraints that I would not have had if I was creating the entire design myself.

Make it personal

I worked lily-of-the-valley flowers into this piece on top of the greenery and altered some of the flowers so it felt more balanced for the stitched piece. Lily-of-the-valley was a motif that I worked into each piece of my projects on the RSN's Certificate in Technical Hand Embroidery course and is a motif that I use repeatedly in my creative practice.

Top Tip

When working with threads you are going to shade, first sample the two or more shades close to each other to ensure they work. (Three-dimensional thread can look different even unexpected when put next to another thread so always good to check). In this technique, the stitch choice can change how the colour is perceived, sometimes dramatically. So test out your colour combinations before you start.

More technical challenges using Blackwork



**Alena Chenevix Trench,
RSN Future Tutor Student, now RSN Tutor**

My 'Selfie' embroidery is of my daughter, Annabella, when she was 11. The embroidery is done using Blackwork. This is a technique where traditionally

only black threads are used to stitch geometric patterns which are called 'diaper' patterns. However, we can also use red, blue, green etc. threads.

By using threads of different thickness, we create highlights or shadows. Shading can also be achieved by breaking up diaper patterns eg. from a full star, through to 3/4 and 1/2 star to nothing.

Image

I brought in a selection of black and white photos to the class. Among these, was a photo of Annabella wearing a hat that she had tried on, just before going away to school for the first time. It was a special photo for me, so I was looking forward to making an embroidery out of it.

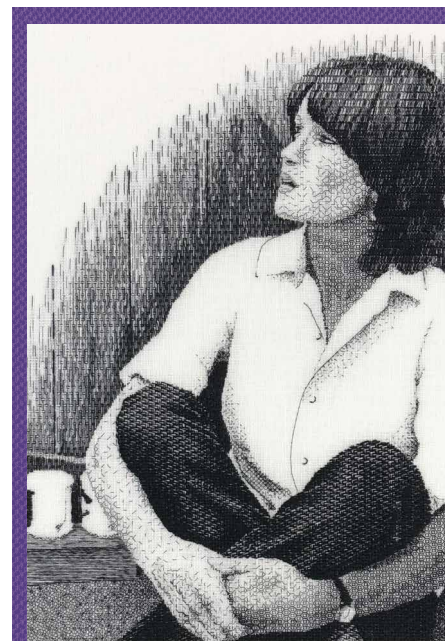
Stitches

I enlarged the photo a bit so there were big enough areas for stitching and breaking up different patterns. Once I settled on the appropriate size (17x18cm stitched area), I traced the image outlines and main shadows onto tissue paper. Then, with a light blue Gutterman tacking thread which doesn't mark the white linen, I tacked it onto 35 TPI (threads per inch) Edinburgh linen. This linen is an evenweave fabric, and good for detailed embroidery. 'Tacking' is one way of transferring a design. It is done by stitching tissue paper with the traced design, onto the chosen fabric using a Running Stitch.

Once all the traced lines had been stitched, I tore the tissue paper away, so only the Running Stitch was left on the linen. This Running Stitch is only temporary and it will be removed at the end of the project. Before starting to stitch any patterns, the RSN Tutors helped me make a stitch plan. This helped to decide on appropriate patterns for different areas such as the face, hat, hair, clothes and took into consideration the density of

patterns and thickness of threads. To be sure I had chosen the right pattern, I sampled them on linen in a separate ring frame.

My friends and family admire 'Annabella' whenever they visit us. I'm particularly pleased with the dots on the shoulder, stitched with silver machine thread. I also think that the broken down pattern works well on the shoulders. The black hat was hard work, stitching the rather dense pattern with a thick coton à broder thread – and you can't even see the pattern! I wouldn't recommend doing this!



**Jessica Ingram,
RSN Future Tutor**

The image does not have to be facing towards you. It can be just as effective to have an image from a different angle as worked here in Blackwork.



More than just an image

Livia Papiernick-Berkhauer, RSN Degree

I have always loved brooches, they are a piece of luxury that my family have passed down through the generations. I want this brooch to become an heirloom for my future family.

Image

This is a hand embroidered portrait of my Father who had very curly hair when he was younger.

Stitches

It is made with French Knots for the hair and the details are in Gold and Silk threads with a variety of stitches, including beads to help give texture. I was originally inspired by a bag in the RSN Collection with gold angels on it.

To make this look in proportion, the French Knots had to be very small which took a long time and was quite fiddly.

It is not easy to work French Knots evenly and very close together but it was worth it to get the overall look right. I wanted the finished piece to be a combination of detail and abstractness.

The face was made first, then I put padding behind it and stitched the front to a backing piece of fabric to which I had affixed a pin mechanism. The soft backing allowed me to keep to the exact shape of the piece without any additions.

Top Tip

Start with an easy shape when making something three-dimensional. For example, you could give the image a border to avoid working with odd shapes and angles.

Creating a career in stitch



The Royal School of Needlework offers two professional courses at its base in Hampton Court Palace – the BA (Hons) Hand Embroidery and Professional Embroidery Tutor Programme.

BA Degree is a specialist three year course validated by the Kingston School of Art, Kingston University. It is a springboard to a creative career in fashion, interiors and textile art, combining traditional hand embroidery methods with contemporary approaches. Degree Students have collaborated on a wide range of high-profile projects including with Alexander McQueen, Burberry for Makers House, Zandra Rhodes, PJ Harvey and Lock & Co Hatters.

Professional Embroidery Tutor Programme is a flexible three year course for anyone seeking a career as a professional embroiderer and tutor. Students are trained to the highest level in technical hand embroidery. The course also covers Art & Design and Business Skills, as well as opportunities for Teaching Practice. As part of the

intake each year, the RSN will award a scholarship to support young talent.

School Workshops & Family Stitch Days

The Royal School of Needlework regularly runs School Workshops and Family Days at a variety of venues around the country. These are run by an RSN Tutor and give an excellent introduction to stitch for children of all ages.

You can find out more about our courses and events on the royal-needlework.org.uk website. We hold a number of Course Open Days throughout the year.



More about the RSN

We offer a range of courses for beginners through to advanced. Students can choose to study Day Classes, a Certificate & Diploma in Technical Hand Embroidery, BA (Hons) Hand Embroidery and the RSN's Professional Embroidery Tutor Programme. We also host Embroidery Exhibitions and Online Talks throughout the year.

Founded in 1872 and steeped in history, the RSN has taken the traditional art of hand embroidery and made it relevant today. We teach across the UK, at the magnificent Hampton Court Palace in south west London, in Bristol, Rugby, Durham and Glasgow, and internationally in North America and Japan.

About the Worshipful Company of Girdlers

The Company is one of the 110 City Livery companies and its origins were involved with the making of girdles (or belts). The Company received its Letters Patent from Edward III in 1327. While it no longer practises its craft – although it has the honour of presenting the girdle and stole worn by the Sovereign at each coronation – it has a long-standing relationship with the Royal School of Needlework and particularly supports educational projects.

Thank you to the Worshipful Company of Girdlers and our partners who have helped make this project possible.



To be part of the RSN Embroider a Selfie project and for more information:

email [**enquiries@royal-needlework.org.uk**](mailto:enquiries@royal-needlework.org.uk)

visit [**royal-needlework.org.uk**](http://royal-needlework.org.uk)