

2024-2025

ACADEMIC YEAR

ROYAL SCHOOL OF NEEDLEWORK

# CERTIFICATE & DIPLOMA

## BLACKWORK



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



**Blackwork was traditionally used as decoration on caps, collars and cuffs. It usually featured a repeated design of small floral motifs. Both sides of the embroidery were to be seen so it was worked in a double running stitch (also known as Holbein stitch), making the front and back identical. Originally thought to have been introduced to England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Blackwork designs have developed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and frequently portray realism and form through differing densities of thread and pattern to create tonal shading.**

**AIM** - To design and work Blackwork embroidery using a minimum of five counted stitches on linen with black thread of various thicknesses, and differing densities of stitches to create shading. Experimentation with the deconstruction of patterns will help develop tonal areas. Stitches should be chosen with care to replicate the texture of each area. Your work should demonstrate effective use of stitches and thread thickness to achieve the tonal values in the design. **In at least one area of gradual transition between two or more similar 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.**

### **DESIGN**

Try to come with some ideas for your design. The tutor will have source material for you to look at and will make suggestions and help you bring your ideas together to create your own image. Photographs are very good source material for blackwork, they must have a good balance of light and shadow and be very clear and crisp.

**Do be flexible in your approach, listen to your tutors' experienced advice and be prepared to alter your initial ideas if necessary.**

- **Keep design within A4 measurements, 21cm x 30cm (approximately 8in x 12in)**
- Faces, animals, landscapes and architecture can be very effective designs.
- Designs with a clear light source translate most effectively.
- At least 5 different counted stitches should be used, including a darning stitch if appropriate to the design.
- Varying the thickness of the thread and density of the stitch gives different shaded effects.
- At least one stitch should be subtly deconstructed to show a highlighted area.
- Choose stitches which suggest the texture or pattern of an area; your tutor will help you.
- Within at least one area two or more stitches should gradually transition into one another sympathetically (so that there is not an obvious change or join between the stitches).

**If you are using images from the Internet please be aware of any copyright restrictions and make sure the image is clear and crisp to use.**

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### PREPARATION

- Blackwork should be worked through a single layer of evenweave Linen.
- A starter pack of threads will be supplied, **all** of these threads should be used in the piece.
- Once the linen is taut the design outline is traced onto tissue paper and tacked onto the linen through the tissue paper with a light coloured thread (usually blue).

**ASSESSMENT CRITERIA:** Please see *Project Evaluation* sheet for details

### TIPS

- The emphasis is on **shading** and the appropriate use of stitches within your design, not on the number different stitches are used. Try to choose stitches that suggest the texture of what you are trying to achieve.
- Before you start to stitch, make a shaded pencil drawing of your design to gain understanding of the contrast of light and shade in your design. You can take a black and white photocopy to help you, and your tutors can help you get started. **This drawing must be handed in with your assessment, along with your original design source, stitch plan and any other working drawings.**
- When working the design it is important to reference and compare the different areas to achieve tonal parity. Working similarly shaded areas in a lighter or darker tone than the original will unbalance the piece leading to a lack of dimension.
- 'Outline' stitches are only to be used where necessary, try to use blackwork stitches to create the outlines naturally. The outlines should enhance the embroidery not detract from it.
- A full tonal range should include strong shadows, areas of highlight using negative space along with smooth graduation through the tonal range - be aware that open and broken areas of stitch on white linen can create a harmony and balance within your composition. You should be mindful of over-stitching blackwork.
- Be careful where you bring up your needle as black dots can be left in the linen if the area is not worked over. It is better to 'park' your thread in an area you know will be covered with stitching.
- Threads that have been trailed, darned or travelled behind lightly stitched areas are easily visible from the front; try to avoid this by starting and finishing threads in the darker areas.
- Metallic threads may be used for highlights if it complements the design.
- Make sure all tacking lines are removed; it is best to remove them as you finish each area.
- Use Acid-free tissue paper while you work to keep the background clean at all times.
- Blackwork needs to be stitched with a firm tension, as it is very easy for the stitches to become loose, which can distort the patterns.
- It is important to mount on the grain. White, grey or black cotton is used to cover your mountboard. However, if you use black or grey cotton to disguise any trailing threads, this will dull down the whiteness of your linen.

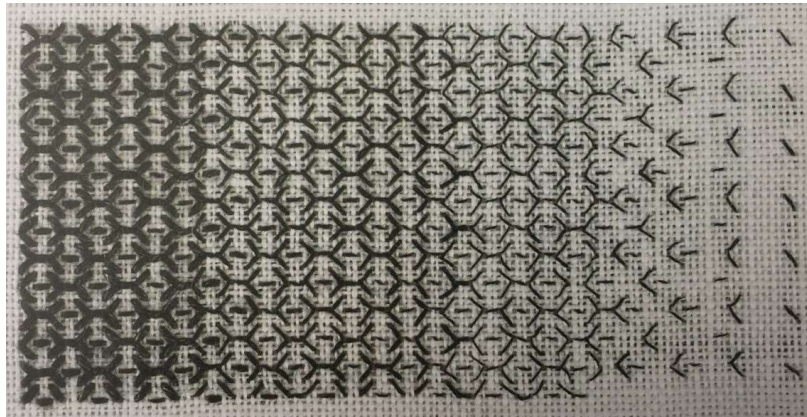
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**BLACKWORK**

This image shows different weight threads in combination with breaking down the pattern. This gives the complete tonal range available in this technique.



**MATERIALS**

- 36 TPI Edinburgh linen is usually used although 28 TPI Bantry linen can be used if necessary. The linen is an even-weave (the same number of threads going horizontally as vertically).
- Coton a broder no.16
- Anchor and DMC stranded cotton
- Machine thread no.50
- Silk gossamer
- Metallic threads are sometimes used to add a highlight, usually silver or gold. Stranded metallics or Elizabethan twist are recommended however this should be discussed with your Tutor
- Needles – Tapestry No. 24, No. 26.

*We stock all these at the RSN*

**BOOKS**

- Becky Hogg “RSN Essential Stitch Guide: Blackwork” ISBN 978-1-84448-551-2
- “Royal School of Needlework Embroidery Techniques” ISBN: 0-71348817-4
- Elizabeth Geddes and Moyra McNeill, “Blackwork Embroidery” ISBN 978-0486232454
- Marion Scoular “Why call it Blackwork?”

**STOCKISTS**

- The Royal School of Needlework 020 3166 6935