



SILK SHADING

Natural Silk Shading using Long and Short Stitch over a foundation outline of Split Stitch. Traditionally worked on a silk or linen fabric, using silk thread to create a life-like image. Now more often worked in a blend of stranded cottons to give an impression of 'painting with thread'.

AIM - To design and work silk shading embroidery on silk dupion or linen, depicting a simple but realistic flower, or appropriate fruit or vegetable using a single strand of stranded cotton. To demonstrate an understanding of long and short stitch, blending colours and the use of light and shade for a realistic three-dimensional effect. 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 a design and bring along some photographs; these could be from a book, seed catalogue, magazine or greetings card, or a photograph you have taken yourself. The photograph must be printed a similar size to the embroidery size otherwise it is very difficult to work. It is essential to work from a crisp, clear, well-focused photograph where you can see the individual colours and changes from dark to light. Illustrations can sometimes be harder to follow, and be wary of images from the Internet, which are often poor quality and may not print sufficiently well. However there are many places online from which you can purchase high quality images.

The tutor will be able to make suggestions and help you bring your ideas together. **Do be flexible in your approach, listen to your tutor's experienced advice and be prepared to alter your initial ideas if necessary.**

- The flower head should be between **5-7 centimeters (2in x 2.75in)** and overall the piece should be in between **8-13 centimeters (3in x 4.25in)**. Your embroidery once mounted should fit comfortably within **the measurements of 18cm x 24cm (7in x 9.5in)** though the proportions may be different if appropriate.
- It is possible to use more than one source image in order to identify an additional leaf or turnover, but take care to unify the direction of the light source when bringing elements together from different sources.
- It is inadvisable to work from an additional picture for the colour scheme.
- Your design must include a leaf or leaves, a turnover and a stem, along with the main flower, fruit or vegetable. Please note the turnover can be on the main subject or the leaf.
- Recent examples include a pansy, a fuchsia, a lily, a tulip, an artichoke and autumn leaves. These have worked well because they include some large areas.
- **Please be realistic about your choice of design as this will be your first piece of natural silk shading.** Be careful not to make the design too complex as the emphasis of this technique is on natural shading - too many colours and awkward angles cause confusion.



SILK SHADING

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.

PREPARATION

Prior to starting silk shading it is a good idea to have framed up a piece of calico (40x60cm) so that you can apply silk on the first day. Ask your tutors for advice on this.

On the first day you will be working on your design and some stitch exercises. You will not be stitching your main piece until the second day (see Pg3).

- Before you start to stitch, make a shaded pencil drawing of your design. This helps you to define the original light source within the design and to consider structure and where the shadows and highlights fall. You can take a black and white photocopy to help you (this does not replace your pencil drawing), and your tutors can help you get started. **This drawing must be handed in for assessment.**
- Along with the black and white version, make a coloured drawing of your design with pencils or paints. Completing this task will inform your colour choice when silk shading. Your tutors will be able to help you get started. **This drawing must be handed in for assessment.**
- Work through the stitch exercises as instructed by your tutor. These allow you to practice blending your colours and improve stitch accuracy.

STITCHES

Long-and-short stitch is used throughout Silk Shading, but other stitches may be used for detail – for example, French or bullion knots for stamens.

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

TIPS

- Make sure you frame up correctly and that the applied silk/linen background is taut to avoid puckering while you work. Stab stitching within the design is essential to help to avoid this.
- Keep tightening your frame as you work this project to prevent wrinkles.
- Use acid-free tissue paper while you work to keep the background clean at all times.
- Use short lengths of thread at all times as you are stitching through two layers of fabric and this can cause the thread to lose its sheen.
- Ensure that stitches are close together to avoid the background fabric showing through the long and short stitch.
- Choose a clear and crisp image to work from that has a consistent light source
- Photographs are better than photocopy
- Colours will be selected from the design source so it needs to be clear.
- It is important to resolve any design issues on paper before starting the embroidery



SILK SHADING

TIPS ON SELECTING THE RIGHT IMAGE

What to look for:

- Large open petals
- Consistent light source
- A good sized turnover
- One entire image, try to avoid composite images (it is unavoidable at times)
- Gradual shading

What to avoid:

- Large complex flowers
- Small petals
- Ruffled petals (iris)
- Protruding elements (orchids)
- White flowers, these often look dirty once finished.
- Dramatic or hard shadows
- Dramatic angle changes
- Spotty flowers



Your Tutor will have a series of exercises for you to work before commencing your piece. It is important to work through these to fully understand the technique of long and short stitch.

MATERIALS

- Calico mounted onto a slate frame 50cm (approx 20ins) square
- Closely woven silk or linen measuring 30cm (approx 12ins) square. If in doubt of design size and layout buy a slightly larger size of fabric and discuss with your tutor. For more choice of fabric colour, students can purchase their own silk/linen (see supplier list).
- Anchor or DMC stranded cottons (not silk threads).
- Needles – Embroidery No.10, No.11, No.12.
- Gütermann thread to match your background fabric.

We have a wide range of Anchor and DMC stranded cottons at the RSN.

2024-2025
ACADEMIC YEAR

ROYAL SCHOOL OF NEEDLEWORK

CERTIFICATE

SILK SHADING



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



BOOKS

- Sarah Homfray “The Royal School of Needlework Essential Stitch Guide – Silk Shading” ISBN: 978-1-84448-585-7
- “Royal School of Needlework Embroidery Techniques” ISBN: 0-71348817-4
- Thomasina Beck “The Embroiderer’s Flowers” ISBN: 0-7153-9901-2

There may be other books available, but be aware that often long & short stitch is not described in the same way that we teach it at the RSN; if in doubt check with your tutors.

STOCKISTS

- Royal School of Needlework 020 3166 6935 www.royal-needlework.org.uk
- The Silk Route (Silk dupion) 01252 835781 www.thesilkroute.co.uk
- MacCulloch & Wallis (Silks, fabrics, threads) Dering St, (Nr Oxford St) London 020 7629 0311 www.macculloch-wallis.co.uk

Royal School of Needlework, Apartment 12a, Hampton Court Palace, Surrey KT8 9AU, UK
T: +44 (0)20 3166 6932, F: +44 (0)20 8943 4910, E: enquiries@royal-needlework.org.uk, W: www.royal-needlework.org.uk

A Company Limited by Shares and Registered in England No.12192C with Registered Office at above address.
Registered with the Charity Commissioners No.312774, VAT No. GB238871626