

Royal School of Needlework  
**Silk Shading** – Diploma: Animal or bird  
Academic year 2025/26

**This module builds on skills acquired at Certificate level. Advanced Silk Shading uses directional Long and Short Stitch to depict an animal or bird. The emphasis is on creating texture (fur, feathers etc.) based on the source image. The technique is worked on silk dupion, linen or cotton using a single strand of stranded cotton**

**Aim**

To design, work and mount a piece of silk shading demonstrating an advanced level of technical skill in interpreting the texture of feathers or fur (hair etc.) to produce a naturalistic representation of the chosen image.

Discuss ideas for this module with the tutor at an early stage. RSN tutors have considerable experience in working this technique and in teaching it. Please listen to their advice.

**Materials and equipment**

There is no starter kit for this module. Calico, a limited range of silk dupion, needles and stranded cottons (DMC and Anchor) can be purchased from the RSN.

Fabric: Calico (medium weight) base fabric approximately 50 x 50 cm (20 x 20 in). Closely woven silk dupion, linen or cotton approximately 30 x 30 cm (12 x 12 inches).

Threads: Stranded cottons or silk threads may be used. When choosing any brand of thread ensure that a sufficient range of colours is available. Different brands of stranded cotton e.g. DMC and Anchor can be mixed. Silk and cotton threads do not mix.

Ultrafne threads may be used for whiskers, fine fur and other small details.

Gutermann sewing thread in the colour of the background fabric.

Needles: Embroidery 10 and 12.

**Reasonable adjustments**

If there is a reason you may have difficulty completing the module e.g. visual impairment, allergy to some materials, please discuss this with the tutor and the C and D team before starting. Adjustments are possible.

**Essential requirements**

Design area

- The main body of the stitched area should be no smaller than 10 x 10 cm (4 x 4 inches) square and no larger than 15 x 15 cm (6 x 6 inches) square, or

equivalent. Cropped images such as a close-up of an animal or bird face may be used.

#### Elements in the design

- The chosen image must include at least one eye (i.e. in a side view) and another feature (nose, mouth, claw, hoof etc..).

#### Texture

- The chosen image should include a variety of textures – rough and smooth, e.g. ruffled fur or feathers.

#### Consistent light source/direction.

- If it is necessary to combine two or more images, care must be taken to ensure the light source is consistent. Decide where the light comes from on the main image and make sure the direction is matched for all added elements. This can be worked through on both the colour and the black and white drawings. The tutor will help with this.

#### Finishing

- The finished work will be mounted on card and backed with a suitable fabric.

The background may be painted. Other stitches may also be used to provide a suitable setting, but the focus of the embroidery should be the animal or bird. Optional elements will not be assessed.

### **Getting started – before class**

It is not necessary to arrive at the first class with a finalised design, but you should come with some ideas. For examples of work by other C and D students look at the C and D gallery on the website. <https://royal-needlework.org.uk/courses/certificate-diploma/canddgallery/>.

### **Getting started – in class**

#### Preparatory work

Preparation prior to stitching is an important part of the learning process. Your tutor will give guidance on how to prepare the following:

- A line drawing on tracing paper. The tracing will be photocopied several times and used to create:
- A detailed colour drawing/colour studies of complex areas to understand fully the placement of colours and transitional shading between.
- A black and white tonal drawing, defining the light source, working out the highlights and the shadows. A black and white photocopy of the image can help with the tonal study.
- An order of work.
- A stitch direction plan which shows the direction and angle of the stitches.
- The original tracing will be turned into a pricking and used to transfer the design to the fabric.

- Sampling exercises, such as tonal bands, are also a key part of preparation for this module. These provide practice with the long and short technique, help identify the colour palette, develop stitch accuracy, blending of shades and working the textures in the design.

Initial plans can be amended as the embroidery progresses. If you choose to have your work formally assessed, you should submit the preparatory work listed above together with your source material. All this paperwork will form part of the assessment.

### Things to think about when planning the embroidery

- Photographs are a reliable source. Illustrations, paintings and sketches can be harder to follow and may not include the required detail about shading and light source.
- The image should be clear, crisp and well-focused with clear colours and well-defined areas of light and dark.
- Be wary of images from the Internet, which are often poor quality and may not print sufficiently well. There are online sources, some of them royalty free, from which high-quality images can be obtained.
- Ensure the light source makes sense, i.e. the light/shade falls in the same way for all elements. This is especially important when combining elements from different sources.
- Tiny blemishes on the image do not need to be translated into stitch. They can be edited out.
- Once you have determined on an image and sized it to meet the brief stay with that image and sizing. Print the photograph to the same size as the finished design otherwise it is very difficult to stitch at the right scale. Do not move between different versions when stitching.

### Intellectual property

The final design must be original to you. Use of your own visual media (photographs, drawings) is encouraged. Referencing and interpreting other visual media is acceptable. Copying is not. The intellectual property of others must be respected.

### Additional information

Additional information can be downloaded from the website.

- Resources - Websites, Books, Suppliers for C&D