

Royal School of Needlework
Tapestry Shaded Figure - Diploma
Academic year 2025/26

Tapestry Shading uses a vertical Long and Short Stitch to embroider a figure capturing drapery and musculature. Traditionally it has been used for church work but a human figure from any time or place or from mythology or fable may be chosen.

Aim

To design, work and mount a piece of tapestry shaded embroidery, demonstrating an advanced level of technical skill in using vertical Long and Short Stitch to depict anatomical features (face, musculature, arms, feet etc.) and the drape of clothing, to produce an accurate 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, stranded cottons and needles can be purchased from the RSN.

Fabric:

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

Threads: Stranded cottons or silks 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. DMS and Anchor can be mixed. Silk and cotton threads do not mix.

Ultrafyne threads can be used for facial features 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

- A standing figure should be no more than 12 cm (5 inches) tall. Other positions should be sized in proportion to this.
- The overall design area should be no larger than 15 x 21 cm (6 x 8 inches) or equivalent.

The figure

- It may be in any position e.g. standing, seated, reclining or in motion.
- It must include facial features, hand(s), a foot (or feet) and hair. Feet may be in shoes. Their face should be proportionate to the rest of the figure.
- For a naked figure muscle tone must be depicted.
- All designs, clothed and naked, must include an element of drapery.
- Jewellery, held objects etc can be interpreted with other threads, including metallics.

Consistent light source

- 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 element(s). This can be worked through on both the colour and 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. These optional background elements will not be assessed. The focus of the embroidery should be the figure in vertical Long and Short Stitch.

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 vertical long and short technique, help identify the colour palette, develop stitch accuracy, blending shades, and working the drapery/musculature according to the chosen 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

- What to look for - images with plentiful and varied drapery. If choosing a naked figure, detail of muscle tone is important. In both cases clearly defined facial features and hands are needed.
- What to beware of - if the figure is in motion think about how it will look if taken out of its context. It may be necessary to include a background.
- 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