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Free Motion Embroidery

This technique is all about creating free-form lace, machine openwork and thread-painted motifs onto fabric. As a special bonus I'm including directions to make an apron with a thread-painted motif.

There are a number of different types of dissolvable stabilizers on the market and I prefer the Sulky Heat-Away brush-off stabilizer for this particular project. Using the heat-away stabilizer avoids having to wet the lace which can cause some distortion. If you have to use the water-soluble type then you may want to pin your lace to a piece of Styrofoam before you dissolve the stabilizer to keep the lace from distorting.

Step 1

Choose a motif for your lace panel. I am using a simple flower that I've copied from a copyright-free image book. Open a piece of the heat away stabilizer and draw a 4" box using a light pencil mark. I've used a black marker in these examples so it shows up in the photograph, but I don't recommend this as the black may transfer to the thread. This will be the area that you will create your lace motif in.



Step 2

Draw or trace your motif in the box.

Step 3

Now we will begin stitching. I don't find it necessary to use a hoop with this particular stabilizer but if you are more comfortable using one, then by all means go right ahead.

Begin by stitching the outline of the motifs. The outline of your motifs should be stitched heavier than the rest of the piece. This will help to define the motifs once the area is completely filled with thread. Remember that your bobbin thread will show so choose a color that coordinates with the top thread. I'm using two shades of yellow for my flower, a darker one in the top and a lighter one in the bobbin. Remember that the drawn lines are only a guideline. Don't fret if your stitching doesn't follow the lines exactly!



Step 4

Once you have finished outlining the motif you need to fill it in with some additional stitching. Fill in the motif with small overlapping stitches of loops. It's important that your stitches overlap and connect with the outline stitches or your piece will fall apart when you remove the stabilizer. You may find it helpful to use a hoop at this stage to give you more control over the movement of the fabric.



Step 5

Now fill in the background using the same method of small, overlapping loops. Make sure that you connect with the motif's outline or your flowers will fall out when you burn away the stabilizer.



Step 6

Once you have completely filled your design with stitches, it's time to burn away the stabilizer. Trim away the excess stabilizer from the edges and then heat with an iron following the manufacturer's directions.

You can now use your piece to embellish a ready-to-wear item, a handbag or even use it on the front of a greeting card.



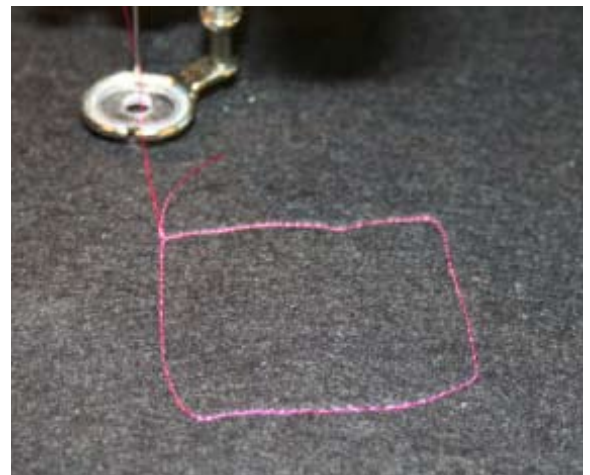
Part 2 - Machine openwork

This is a fun technique to do that has a lot of visual impact.

Supplies: Wool felt & thread

Step 1

Cut a piece of wool felt and stitch a square outline.



Step 2

Build up the outline border with stitches. You want this border to be relatively heavy especially if you are using a fabric that frays when you cut it.

Step 3

Cut away the fabric close to the border stitches. Be careful not to cut through the border stitches. Use a sharp pair of scissors for this.

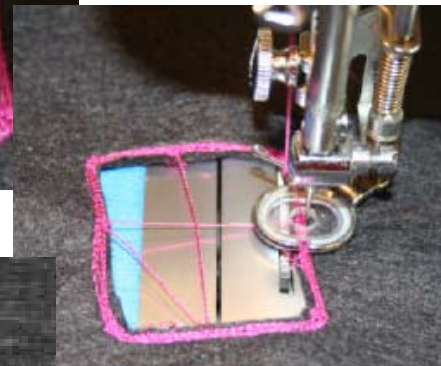
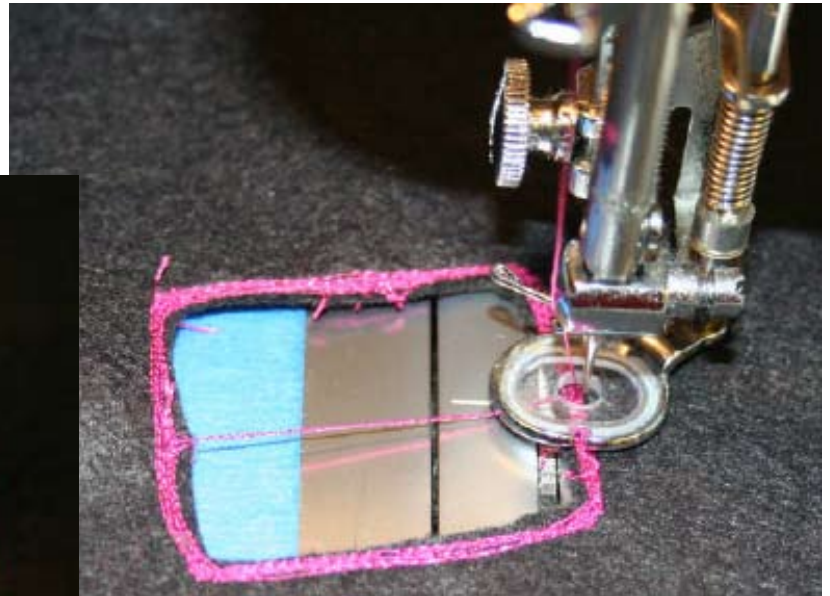
Step 4

Now we'll add the center stitches. Sew on the border for a few stitches and then stitch right across the opening to the other side. Stitch and move the fabric sloooooowly. If you go too fast you'll end up with too much tension on the thread and your design will pucker. If your machine balks at you about stitching through the open space, try pinning a piece of water-soluble stabilizer over the hole.



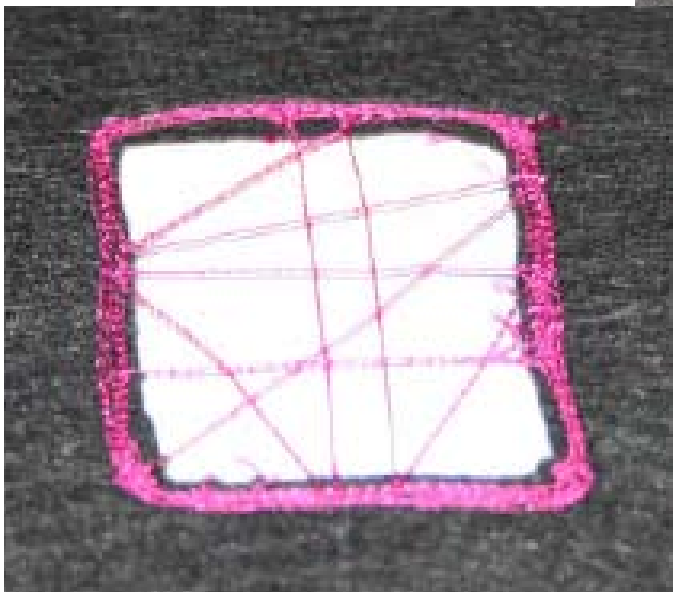
Step 5

Continue sewing from side to side.



Step 6

Continue until you have a design you like. When you are finished take a few anchor stitches along the outside border.



Some ideas for cutwork fabric:

Back your cutwork fabric with a contrasting fabric and stitch around each motif border to anchor it. Use it for journal covers, bags and even hats and other wearables.

This technique will work on paper too so you can use it to create custom greeting cards. You won't need to stitch a heavy border, just one line of stitching should be plenty or you can even skip the border outline. Use a good sturdy cardstock.

Part 3 - Thread painting

Supplies: Cotton fabric
Pellon ShirTailor® Tailoring Fusible #950 or suitable substitute
Water-soluble stabilizer

Thread painting is another relatively easy technique but one with a lot of versatility and visual impact. You can thread paint on just about any type of fabric as long as it's sturdy enough to support the amount of stitching you'll be doing for your design.

Our project is an apron with a thread-painted motif. Choose a motif that is relatively open without a lot of details. I've chosen a strawberry design to use as my motif that I got from a copyright-free design book, but you can also draw your own or trace something from a photograph that you've taken.

Step 1

Cut the following from your apron fabric:

- One piece 24" x 30" (body of the apron)
- Two pieces 2½" x 38" (ties)
- One piece 14" square (pocket front to thread paint on)
- One piece 9" x 12" (pocket lining)

Step 2

Apply a heavyweight fusible interfacing to the 14" square piece. I used Pellon ShirTailor® Tailoring Fusible #950.

Step 3

Cut a piece of the water-soluble stabilizer 14" square and trace your thread painting motif onto it in the center.

Step 4

Place the stabilizer onto the 14" square pocket piece and place it in an embroidery hoop.



Step 5

Begin by outlining the design. I used a black thread to outline my design.

Step 6

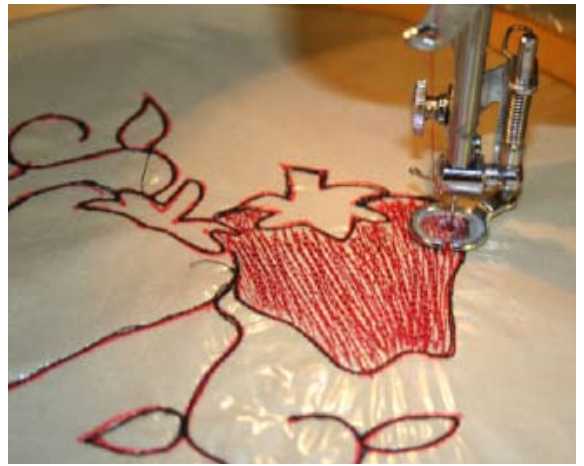
Now fill in the design with long brush stroke stitches.

Step 7

Go back and fill in the design using shorter strokes. You should fill in the entire surface. Take your time with this and get up and take a break every 15 minutes to stretch.

Step 8

Continue working in this manner until you've completed stitching the design. When I've finished filling in all the spaces I like to go back and re-stitch the outline again.



Step 9

Remove the fabric from the hoop and cut away the excess stabilizer. Dissolve the remaining stabilizer according to the manufacturer's directions and hang the piece to dry.

Step 10

When the piece is dry, press it well with a hot iron.

Step 11

Trim your thread-painted piece to 9" x 12", centering the motif.



Step 12

Sew the pocket lining piece to the pocket piece, right sides together, using a 1/2" seam allowance leaving a 3" opening for turning. Clip the corners and turn the pocket right sides out and press it well.

Step 13

To make the ties fold one end of each tie strip in $\frac{1}{2}$ " inch and then fold each tie strip in half along the length and press.



Step 14

Fold each long raw edge to just before the center fold line and press.



Step 15

Now fold the strap again enclosing the raw edges, press and top stitch. Set aside.



Step 16

Turn in each side edge (30" side) of apron piece $\frac{1}{2}$ " and then $\frac{1}{2}$ " again. Press and top stitch.

Step 17

Hem the bottom edge by folding up $\frac{1}{2}$ " and then $\frac{1}{2}$ " again. Press and top stitch.

Step 18

Sew the ties onto the top edge of the apron. Match the raw edge of the tie with the side of the turned in edge.



Step 19

Turn the top edge down enclosing the tie and the raw edge of the apron top. Press and then turn again enclosing the raw edge. Press and top stitch.



Step 20

Center the pocket piece on the apron 3" from top edge. Sew along side and bottom edges of the pocket.

Step 21

Press your apron and it's ready to wear!

