



Blackwork Journey Blog

February 2016

Inspiration from Japan
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Kogin embroidery



Inspiration from Japan

During my recent visit to Japan, I had the opportunity to pursue my interest in Sashiko and Kogin embroidery and in Honshu in the northwest of Japan; I saw some examples of these intricate and complex counted thread techniques.

Sashiko is a traditional form of pattern darning which is an ancient technique in which rows of running stitches are arranged to form geometric patterns to turn old pieces of cloth into a new garment, similar to quilting. It was often used to make warmer and more durable fabrics for Japanese farmers. Sashiko stitching was also used to embellish a garment or object.



Simple Sashiko coasters and stitching in traditional colours

Kogin, like Sashiko is also a traditional style of embroidery often worked by farmers to join fabrics together and reinforce them for warmth and stability, rather like the British wartime tradition of 'make do and mend'. Again, many of the garments were very old and had been patched and re-stitched constantly with thick white cotton threads, but as both cotton fabric and threads were expensive, indigo dyed hemp cloth was often used.

The designs were usually geometric, often diamond shaped and the running stitches varied in length and were only worked in rows along the weft of the fabric. It was worked in the hand without using a frame, often with a number of stitches on the needle at any one time making it faster to stitch.

As Kogin and Sashiko are similar in origin, they are sometimes referred to as Kogin-Sashiko.

There are also regional differences and three different styles of Kogin embroidery can be found:

Nishi or western with diamond patterns and thick stripes over the shoulders, Mishima or three bands, dividing patterns on the front and back of the garment and Higashi or eastern where large designs cover the garment from the back to the front with no spaces.

An example of a Kogin kimono from the Victoria and Albert Museum is shown below and clearly demonstrates how the embroidery is displayed.



Front and back of Kogin kimono

Kimono from the Victoria and Albert Museum, London

- Place of origin: Aomori, Japan
- Date: 1890-1930
- Artist/Maker: Unknown
- Materials and Techniques: Indigo-dyed plain weave ramie with a stitched cotton design
- Museum number: FE.141-19

This kimono was made and worn by a woman living in Tsugaru, a peninsula in the very north of Honshû in Japan.

It is woven with fine indigo-dyed ramie. The decorative panel on the upper part has been stitched in white with a diamond pattern, a technique known as Kogin.

If she was to make a good wife it was essential that a Tsugaru woman mastered the skills of Kogin and training for this purpose began at an early age so that by her wedding day, the bride was expected to have woven and embroidered a number of fine garments for herself and her future husband to wear on special occasions.



Stitch details from the Kimono show the geometric diamond patterns and the dense stitching which characterises much of this embroidery.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London. ©

Kogin embroidery is becoming popular again in Japan and I was able to purchase several books, threads and material to try out my own ideas and see if I could integrate the technique into Blackwork Journey. It is very attractive and some of the modern pieces I saw had been worked in variegated threads, but for me the simplicity of white on blue or red on white were the most appealing.



Books on Sashiko and Kogin embroidery are available on-line through Amazon and Ebay

When I returned to the UK, I undertook some further research to see if I could find out more about Kogin embroidery and its history.

I found these particular internet sites of interest:

1. ‘Commenting on the World of Japanese Folk Textiles’

This site was most informative with illustrations of Kogin embroidery and its origins, explaining clearly where and how the art developed with examples of kimonos from the various areas and their construction.

threads.srithreads.com

2. Carolyn Fole from Brisbane, Australia of caro-rose-creations specialises in Hishizashi patterns. There are patterns to download and many interesting articles to explore. She has some of her own projects on display and an excellent article on working with hemp fabric and finishing hems

http://carorose.typepad.com/my_weblog/kogin-embroidery-patterns/

3. There is also a very informative video with English subtitles from Tohoku Standard.

Tohoku Standard 02 KOGIN-ZASHI, Aomori Prefecture

<https://vimeo.com/78054618>

4. Three other videos from YouTube also produced some interesting results.

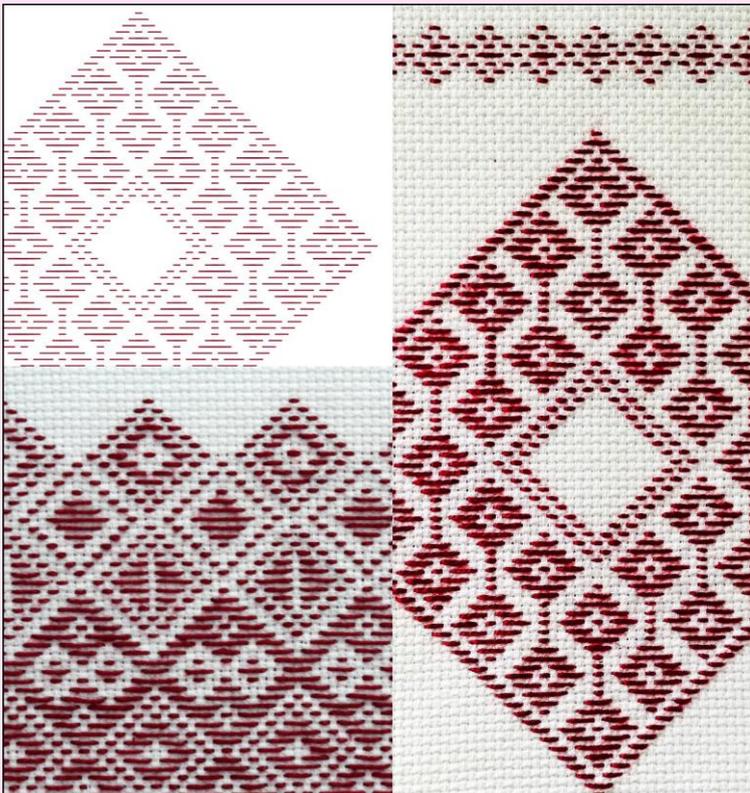
[kogin.net]To the world, Tsugaru Kogin Embroidery pattern.

<https://youtu.be/zYsQ7EkUQHI>

5. Kogin Broderie Japonaise sur www.style-du-japon.fr

<https://youtu.be/Py-GMmhaS3k>

Pattern Darning



Whilst I enjoyed exploring Kogin embroidery, I have already introduced pattern darning into small areas of ‘Pandora’s Box’ which is my current free on-line project from my Blackwork Journey site. I really enjoyed working the small pattern blocks and wanted to stitch some larger designs using threads and fabrics which are easily accessible to embroiderers worldwide.

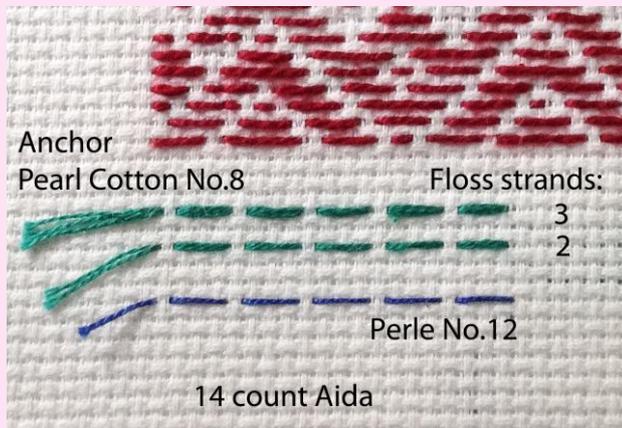
The fabric used for the sample designs were Zweigart 14 count, Aida blockweave and Zweigart 28 count evenweave. 25 count Lugana, 16 count Aida or 32 count evenweave are also suitable.

Because this is a counted thread technique, I would not recommend working this on dark fabric unless your eyesight is good, or you use a magnifying light/lens.

Sample designed for a drawstring bag

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Whilst traditional Kogin work was stitched on dark blue hemp fabrics with white thread, I reversed the idea and worked dark blue and red threads on white fabric. The stitches are worked in straight lines of running stitch so the threads need to stand out on the fabric.



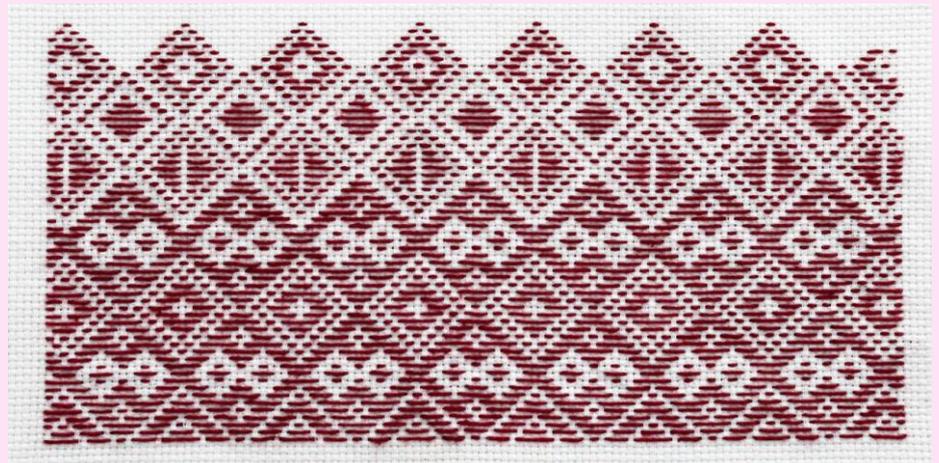
The type of threads and number of strands used is determined by the fabric chosen, but as a guide the photograph shows how the threads appear on 14 count Aida

Note: Three strands of floss are approximately equivalent to Pearl Cotton No.8.

Cotton Perle No. 12 is finer and would be suitable for a fabric such as 16 count Aida or 32 count evenweave.

The red diamond design was stitched in Anchor Pearl Cotton No.8 on 14 count Aida. It was thick enough to cover the fabric and the blocks were easy to count, making Aida a good choice of fabric for a first venture into pattern darning.

The border is being worked on Aida to create a draw string bag.



More information on fabrics can be found in the 'Techniques' section of Blackwork Journey TQ0011 Fabrics for Embroidery

The diamond and border worked in vibrant green on a navy background creates a different impression from red on white!

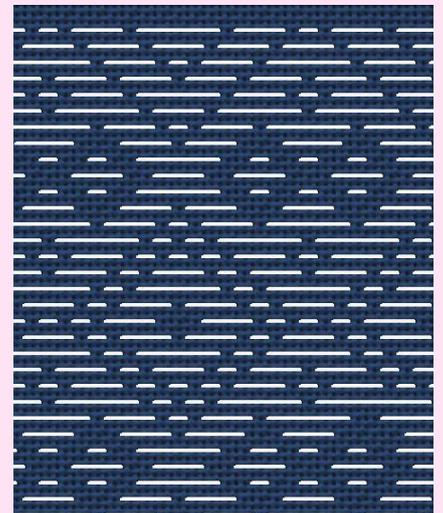


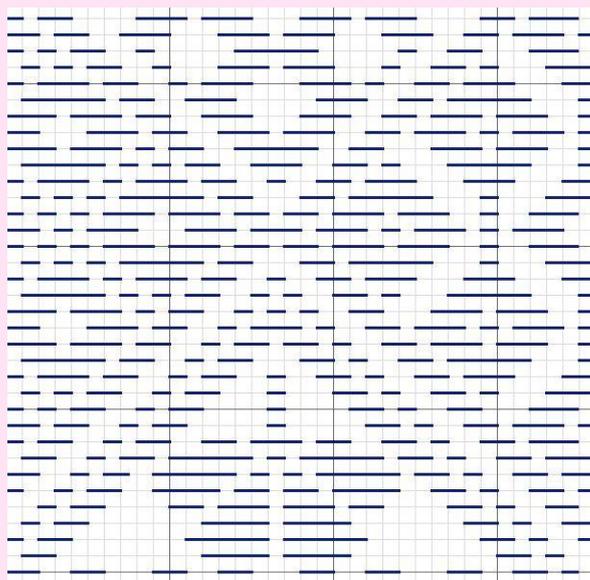


A new pattern CH0338 'Diamond Delight' has been added to 'Charts' this month as an introduction to the technique of pattern darning.

This will be followed by CH0339 'Pattern Plus' in March, which is a very intricate and challenging design

Extract from CH0339 'Pattern Plus' worked on 28 count evenweave with two strands of floss





CH0339 is being stitched for the March edition of Blackwork Journey.

The design which is being worked over two threads is more delicate and complicated, so very careful counting is required. Changing the fabric and the threads can make a heavy pattern more delicate, or a fine pattern more robust, so this design is suitable for both Aida and evenweave fabrics.

The construction of Aida makes it a good fabric to use for this type of work. It is easy to count and the holes are clearly defined.

Aida comes in different counts from 11 holes to the inch, the largest to 18 holes to the inch, the finest. Thicker threads can be used on the 11 count, making it suitable for people with serious eyesight problems. 14 holes to the inch is the fabric that most people use and is equal to 28 count evenweave.

Method of working pattern darning:

When learning a new technique, I suggest you choose a small design before embarking on a challenge!

Frame the embroidery up so the fabric is 'drum tight'.
Use a tapestry needle large enough to take the thread easily.

Choose a fabric you can see to work on comfortably. If using dark material, a white pillowcase across the knees will show up the holes in the fabric more easily. Good lighting and a magnifying lens will also help.

Finding the most effective way of working the stitches is best achieved on a smaller piece. Like blackwork, it is easy to spot a mistake and correct it at an early stage, but it does require careful counting especially when working the foundation row.

Start on the right hand side of the design and work the foundation row across the full width of the fabric. Turn the fabric round and work the second row. Repeat this process until the design has been completed.

Avoid taking the thread across large open spaces because the thread will show through when the embroidery is mounted. Work all the ends in carefully.

Removing threads from embroidery fabric will leave a line of fluff behind, so keep a small pair of tweezers handy to remove the excess!

This is a very interesting technique to work which grows quickly. I hope you will enjoy exploring and developing this technique.

'Pandora's Box Block 4

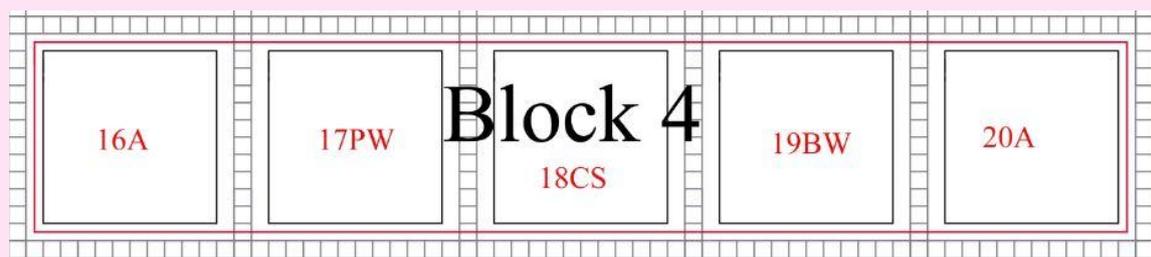
Chart and instructions can be found in the 'Freebies' section of Blackwork Journey.

Evenweave and Aida Patterns 16 - 20

Set within a border of four-sided stitch

Locate Block 4 Patterns 16 - 20 on the Master Chart.

Note: The patterns follow diagonally across the chart, so some blocks will have more than one block of the same technique. (See Master chart) The two charts are NOT identical.



Grid Size: 32W x 136H

Design Size: 2 x 9.57 inches, 28 x 134 stitches

Stitches Used:

Back stitch, one strand

Cross stitch, two strands

Detached Eyelet, Cotton P rle or two strands of floss

Anchor 1325 Iris - variegated, three skeins

Anchor 1325 - is represented by DMC-333 Lavender on the chart.

DMC Cotton P rle No.12, white, one ball

DMC Cotton P rle No.12 - is represented by DMC-666 Christmas red on the chart.

Do not add the beads until after the embroidery has been completed.



Block 4 Evenweave

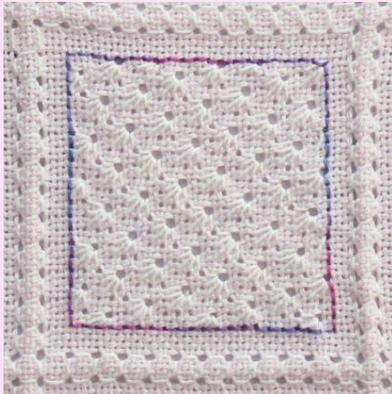
The four-sided stitch framework has been used to create squares and rectangles. The five pattern blocks are inserted into the pulled thread work frame.

Block 4 Pattern 17 Leaf Stitch is a pulled thread work evenweave design. This a very pretty stitch, simple to work and can cover large areas of fabric

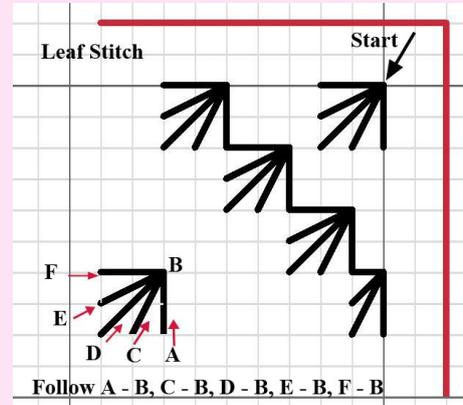
1. Work the leaf from the top right hand corner diagonally. Compensating stitches are added so follow the pattern carefully.

2. Pull **medium tight** to create the holes. This is a very attractive filling stitch suitable for covering large areas.

Last month it was shown in Block 3 Aida as an embroidery stitch, so it is interesting to contrast the two stitches on the different fabrics.



*Leaf Stitch worked on 25 count
Lugana*



Block 4 Aida

'Pandora's Box' Work in progress!

Photographs of the completed blocks are coming into the Facebook group every day now. There are so many imaginative colour combinations making every design different from the original idea.



Port Elizabeth Embroiderers Guild, South Africa – Happy stitching!

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As a designer, I would like to encourage original thinking rather than working from a chart and a design such as ‘Pandora’s Box’ enables people to add their own touches and personalise the design to their own requirements.

The results are very satisfying and when groups of people come together to work on a project it can be extremely rewarding.

Alice has sent some photographs of the Port Elizabeth Embroiderers’ Guild in South Africa who are working ‘Pandora’s Box’ as their second group project. They worked ‘Save the Stitches’ last year and produced some beautiful embroidery.

I really feel I know the ladies involved, since we have shared so many photographs of work in progress and if you are a member of a group working one of the projects, I would love to hear from you and see photographs of your work in progress.



When the free projects have ended, the charts still remain on line and they are available as extended e-books so people can start at any time.

Thanks to Patsy, Katyia, Niki and Marilyn and all the others who have posted on Facebook. I have added all the photographs to the Pinterest board for everyone to enjoy.



‘Save the Stitches’ was on-line last year and I am delighted to say that people around the world are not just finishing their projects, but new members are starting every week!

‘Save the Stitches’ free project from Blackwork Journey

These are just three of the photographs that came in this week from Angelique, Carol, Christine and Tamar

Whilst it is a very challenging design, it has been wonderful to see the number of people new to blackwork who have participated. I am always here to help and there are many photographs of the project on:

<https://uk.pinterest.com/Ashbourne1/save-the-stitches-blackwork-embroidery-project/>

and through the Facebook group on Blackwork Journey.

Happy stitching!

Liz