



Blackwork Journey Blog

December 2019





Happy Christmas to all my readers and friends.

Thank you so much for all the support and love that you have shown me throughout 2019. In return, may I take the opportunity to wish you a peaceful and happy Christmas.

Many new members have joined the Blackwork Journey family and have added their own contributions to what I hope is a vibrant and interesting site. 2020 will be full of new ideas and designs to stimulate, encourage and inspire! It is a wonderful challenge for me to keep you interested and entertained and to encourage you to try new techniques and expand your boundaries.

December 2019 marks the end of another hectic year for Blackwork Journey, not least because during the last three weeks in November we travelled to Vietnam and Cambodia visiting Hanoi, Halong Bay and Hoi An to Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) and then to Siem Reap visiting temples, UNESCO sites, markets and rural villages.

I am fascinated by the countries in the Far East and have been fortunate to visit many of them. Two aspects always impact on me, one is the part that religion plays in everyday life and how natural it is to see the rituals performed during the day. The other is how few material possessions many families have and the conditions in which they live their lives and raise their families.

So many of the possessions we deem fundamental to our lives are just not available. However, the mobile phone is considered essential almost everywhere in the modern world and to see a child in a Cambodian rural village watching 'Pepper Pig' shows how things are changing.



Developments in the infrastructure of both countries are happening especially with investment from China and Japan and slowly the pace of life is changing. Both countries have a very turbulent recent history and there is evidence of its effects throughout both countries. However, all their children receive an education however basic and mopeds and motor cycles are taking the place of the ox cart even in the villages. The staple crop of rice is still harvested in the traditional way in the rural areas, but mechanisation is slowly being introduced and twenty years from now both countries will have changed considerably as people move from the countryside to the cities in search of a better life.

When we consider how complex our lives have become and how the pace of life has become so frantic, to step back and take stock and look at a slower way of living, where families play such an important role and where communities work together can be a very humbling experience.

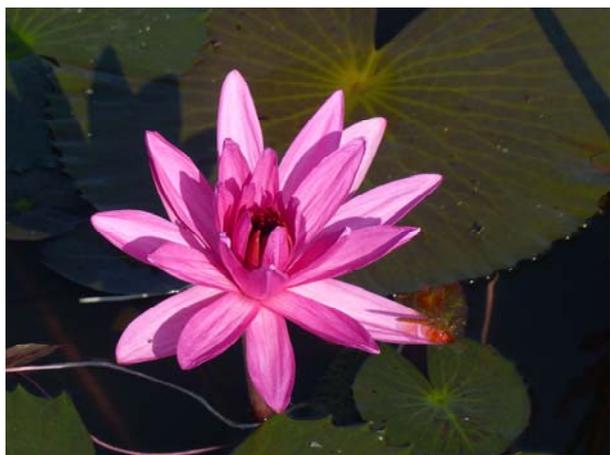
I stitched my way round both countries from Halong Bay to Siem Reap looking all the while for new crafts, different ideas and techniques and was fortunate enough to come across a number of different

craftsmen and women from brush makers to embroiderers and to find new fabrics that I was not aware of. Over the coming few months I will share some of these findings with you.

Finding inspiration!



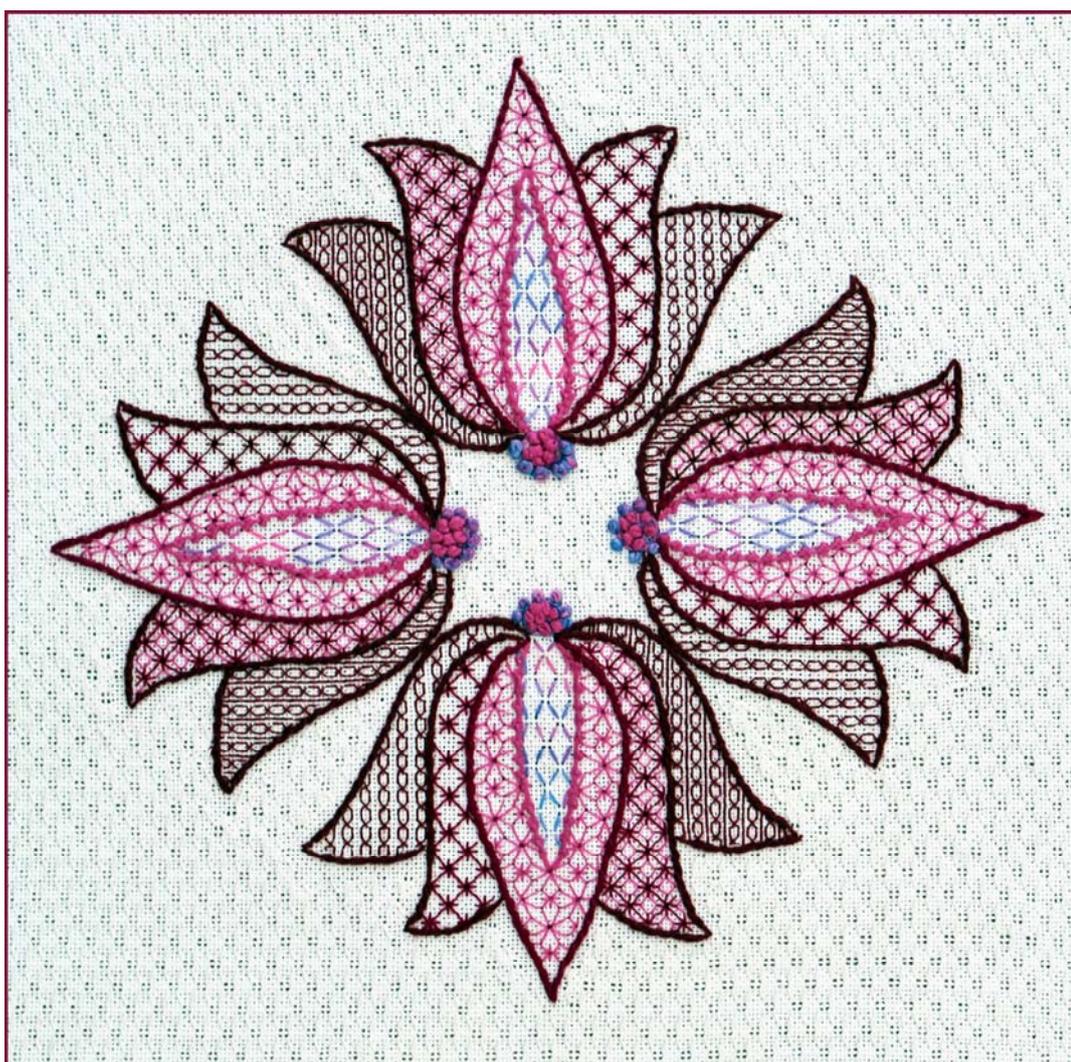
Angkor Wat in Cambodia



Lilies at Angkor Wat

Lotus flower

Lilies and lotus flowers have inspired me as long as I can remember and this time, in the moat surrounding Angkor Wat in Cambodia I found the most beautiful examples of dark coloured lilies I have ever seen. The setting was idyllic and the colours so unusual that I decided to create a modern piece of embroidery focusing on these dark colours. I completed the design yesterday and worked a pulled thread work background in white. The design could also be worked in pale pinks to create a more traditional design and an individual motif could be worked as a card or small picture.



**New design
PR0055 Angkor Lily**

Blackwork and pulled thread work combine to create this reminder of the traditions of Cambodia.

As the motifs rotate shading is added into the patterns to create depth and texture. The background is worked in wave stitch which is a pulled thread work technique.



Extract from Angkor Lily showing the window stitch pulled threadwork background

How can you tell the difference between a lotus and a lily?

The biggest difference is that water lilies (*Nymphaea* species) leaves and flowers both float on the water's surface, while lotus (*Nelumbo* species) leaves and flowers are emergent, or rise above the water's surface.

The meaning of the Lotus flower is rebirth and in Buddhist symbolism the lotus is symbolic of purity of the body, speech and mind as while it is rooted in the mud, its flowers float above the muddy waters of attachment and desire. In addition to its religious meaning, the lotus is also a symbol of all that is true, good and beautiful, representing good fortune, peace and enlightenment

The meaning of the water lily depends on the different cultures and religions.

In Hinduism, the concept of resurrection is symbolically denoted by the water lily. This is because at night (or during darkness), the lilies close their blossoms and with the first ray of the sun, they open. It is also a symbol of purity, because even though the plant grows in mud, the flower is pure and free from blemishes.

In Buddhism, enlightenment is associated with this blossom. Different coloured water lilies have different representations according to the ancient Buddhists, and the practice is still carried out. A red lily connotes love and passion, and is considered to be the lotus of the heart. The purple lily is mystic power, while the white lily is mental purity. The highest deity is represented with a pink lily, and blue lilies are associated with knowledge

New fabric for embroidery and the future!

Whilst the lotus flower is very beautiful, what I did not realise until I went to Cambodia was that it could also be used to make fabric which has certain rather special properties. In a government sponsored craft store I found some scarves made of a fabric I did not recognise. It felt rather like linen, but was semi-transparent rather like a stiff muslin.



Samatoa Lotus Textiles - An eco-textile company, Siem Reap, Cambodia

Samatoa is a social enterprise of textile (manufacturer of clothing in silk and other natural fibers) founded in Cambodia in 2003 on the three pillars of sustainable development: economic efficiency, social equity and protection of the environment.

This is their story of a unique fabric.

“Since the beginning in 2003, the Samatoa's founder values have remained the same: customer satisfaction, the impeccable quality of the products, combined with a sustainable, environmental and social respect. The heart of the Samatoa's expertise relies on its workshops in which the farmers, the spinners, the weavers, the tailors and the partners share daily the same ambitions.

One of the Samatoa's objective is to connect the luxury market to the poorest person by buying one luxury jacket, a consumer provides 2 months of working.

The main Lotus Farm is located in Battambang, around an amazing giant lake. Given the needs to produce lotus garments in quantity for high end clients, the company has created a second one in Siem Reap, near Phnom Krom. In this place, Samatoa now harvests 20 hectares of the Lotus Lake, employs 30 farmers, spinners and weavers.

The Lotus Farm aims to create 500 jobs in 5 years. In order to share its expertise, you can visit their workshop and learn about their unique handmade process to create the most ecological textile, the lotus fabric. The Lotus flower is the symbol of divine purity in many Asian cultures, appearing in the hands of the sacred Buddha. It was historically used to make robes for high-ranking Buddhist monks and has played a major part in Asian folklore and is a particularly important icon in the homes of many of the weavers.

The Harvest of Lotus Flowers Stems

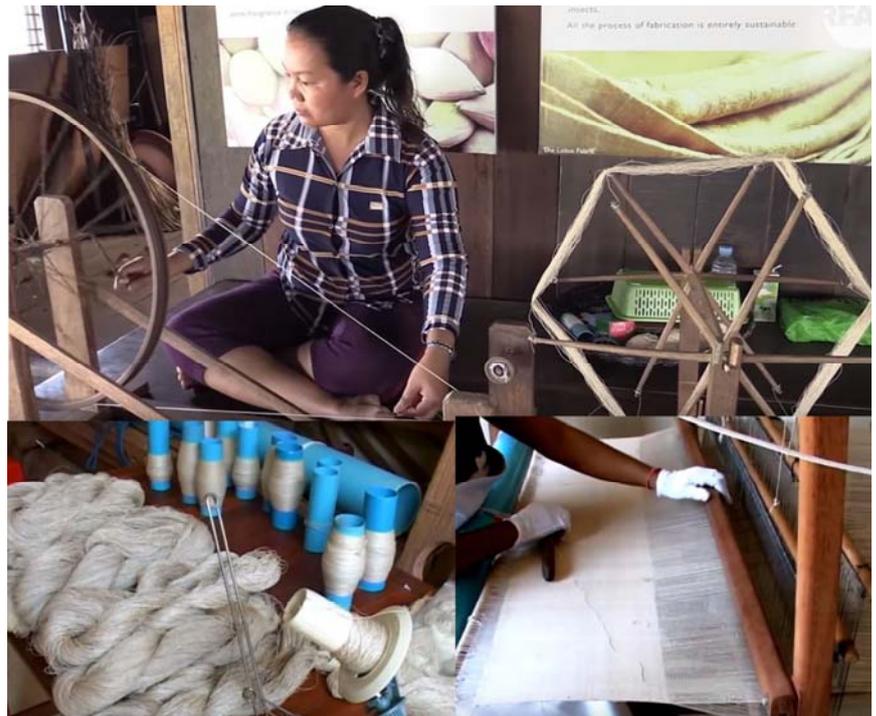


The lotus fibre exclusively comes from the Sacred Lotus which provides the most soft, breathable and bright fibre. The farmers select the stems according to their level of maturity. They are picked by boat, 4 times per day, 1 ton per week. The lotus fields are entirely transplanted every three years to preserve the best quality. The first trade secret of the lotus fabric is to transform the fibres into threads and conserve their full properties as an aquatic plant, the lotus fibres have to be extracted and transformed in an aquatic middle. After the harvest, the stems are brought to the factory where there are cleaned to remove the prickles and the impurities before the spinning process begins.



The Spinning is a crucial step of the process which consists of transforming the lotus fibre to a thread. After cleaning, spinners carefully cut around the stems and pull their extremities to extract the lotus fibres. Twelve layers of fibre must be superimposed and rolled with care and precision to produce a high quality thread. The second trade secret is in line with what is probably the most meticulous part of the process, to put the different pieces of thread together without visible joins and any weakness. The thread has to be very regular. Without this attention, it will break during the weaving and decrease the quality of the fabric. One meter of lotus fabric needs 3000 meters of lotus fibers.

When the thread is finished, it is wound on to a skein winder and dried. One spinner produces 250 meters of thread per day. To produce one jacket, it needs 4 meters of fabric or 12000 meters of fibre, which means 2 months' work for



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a spinner. Because of its complexity, this process must be undertaken exclusively by hand. Before weaving, the yarn is twisted to increase its strength and then wound around a skein a few times. Then, the preparation of the loom takes 15 days. A 50 meter fabric roll is weaved in 2 months. This twisted thread is wound around reels placed on quills into a wooden shuttle which is sent through the space formed by the yarns. The weaver switches the position of the pedals and repeats the same movement. One weaver produces one meter of lotus fabric per day.

Lotus fabric has unique properties. It is an amazing soft, light and breathable fabric.



It is the most ecological fabric as it doesn't contain any chemical or toxic products, the manufacturing process doesn't require any petrol, gas or electricity power and it doesn't use any added water, so the lotus flower is an efficient plant which cleans the water and protects the ecosystem thereby preserving fishes and insects and making the process completely sustainable.

Awen Delaval



**SO FAR, SALES ARE LOW.
BUT THESE WOMEN HOPE A FONDNESS
WILL GROW AROUND THE WORLD
FOR THIS SACRED FABRIC.**

If you want to watch the videos on the production of this unique fabric, I have

included some links below which look at different approaches to the subject.

You tube Videos

<http://samatoa.lotus-flower-fabric.com>

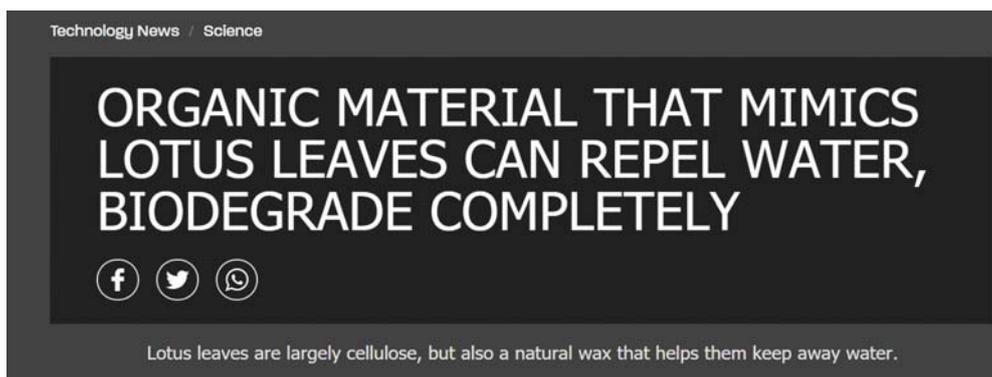
<https://samatoa.lotus-flower-fabric.com/buy/sustainable/textile/pure-lotus-fabric/>

Samatoa Lotus Fabric featured on ARTE, Futuremag, 24/04/2016

<https://youtu.be/DdDuDKihWh4>

When I returned home to the UK I did some research into the properties of the fabric and its potential for the future and came across an interesting article:

<https://www.firstpost.com/tech/science/organic-material-that-mimics-lotus-leaves-can-repel-water-biodegrade-completely-5939101.html>



[UMASHANKAR MISHRA](#) JAN 22, 2019 13:07:00 IST



A water-repelling, biodegradable material inspired by lotus leaves has been developed by a joint team of researchers from India, Switzerland and Italy. Super-hydrophobic or water repellent materials are used in various industrial and other applications, such as healthcare, self-cleaning textiles, oil spill management, corrosion resistance, sensor manufacturing, robotics and 3D printing.

However, most of these materials are made using petroleum derivatives, fluorinated compounds and textured inorganic materials. The newly developed material is fully organic and biodegradable. It is inspired by lotus leaves that are composed of cellulose as base substance and utilize naturally formed wax to achieve water repelling property.

<https://www.firstpost.com/tech/science/organic-material-that-mimics-lotus-leaves-can-repel-water-biodegrade-completely-5939101.html>

Street life

In Vietnam and Cambodia, markets play an important part in daily life and for an embroiderer can be a source of fabric and threads and amongst the 'designer' goods some treasures can be found. Amongst this mountain of threads I discovered cones of metallic copper and gold threads which just had to find a place in my suitcase!

Much of our high street clothing comes from Vietnam and Cambodia and I recognised many of the cottons and trimmings that are in UK high street stores.





Want fabric or buttons? No problem, somewhere to sit is a different matter!

Colour and design is everywhere and the standard of embroidery ranges from cheap and cheerful to exquisite tambour work on fine pashmina shawls.

If you want hand-made shirts or suits in 24 hours then it can be done and we went to visit one of the many small businesses who create garments for the tourists. They were very proud to show their workshops to the visitor and allowed me to take photographs of their workers.

Whether it is making brooms or clothes, a vendor selling food on the street or working in the markets, without fail the people were welcoming and happy to show their wares and I left both countries with great respect for their hard work and dedication to support their families and communities!



Instant clothing for the tourist!

Texture in Embroidery - PR0056 Take a Tree

I have been asked how I go about creating a piece of embroidery and the thinking that goes behind the initial drawing before I start the actual embroidery and how I choose the stitches and threads. It occurred to me that a simple guide to textured embroidery might help to answer some of the questions.

I drew a tree design and decided to make it into three different items:

- a. A small calico zipped bag
- b. A clutch bag with strap, and
- c. A mountmellick textured tree on a shopping bag.



The instructions for making the bags are not included. Either make your own bags, buy small bags or use the textured trees on the bag to decorate household linen, box tops, cards or even clothing!

Draw a simple flower and follow the rules to see what you can create. The secret is to keep the drawing simple and add into it by experimenting with different stitches and threads.

The process can be applied to most free style designs where texture is required just by following a few simple rules! Take your time and enjoy playing!



Any line drawing can be adapted to textured embroidery!

Readers Contributions for December

Many pictures have been added to the Facebook groups over the past few weeks and many new members have joined the groups from all parts of the world. I am delighted to welcome you all and to say how much I appreciate your contributions.



Vicky and her ladies from Columbo, Shri Lanka have been making ornaments.

I had the pleasure of working with Vicky last year and the Nairobi Embroiderers Guild.

Happy Christmas to both groups and to the ladies in Harare, Zimbabwe and Port Elizabeth, South Africa.



Jacque B's and Nancy M's interpretation of 'Tiny Treasures'





Rachel L has worked her design as a tablecloth breaking it up into blocks. This beautiful cloth would grace any table!



Liz A's 'Box of Delights'



Martha W's 'Tiny Treasures'



Amy C's 'Tiny Treasures'

I hope you have enjoyed this month's Blog.
Happy stitching!

Liz