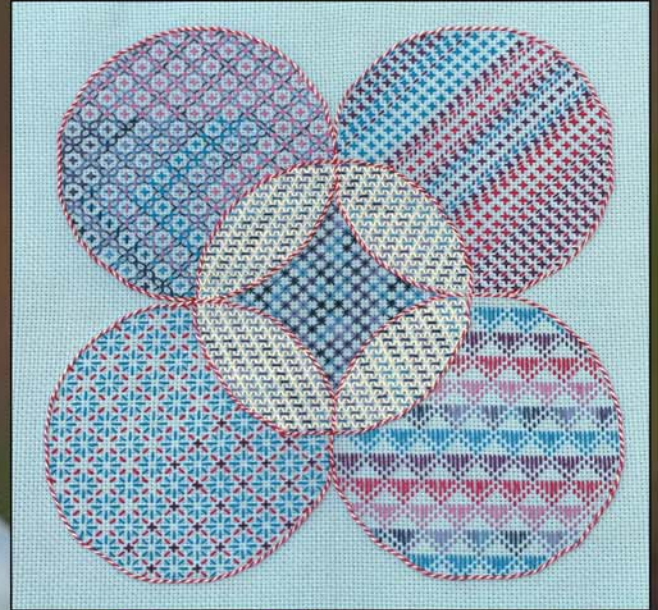




Blackwork Journey Blog

February 2021



Looking forward in 2021 and beyond!

February is a difficult month in the UK, as although Christmas is behind us, Spring still seems a long way away. However, for the first time in a year there are some positive things to report. The vaccines are being rolled out and there is hope that we can start to see a way forward and begin to look, albeit tentatively, to the future.

Sashiko and quilted Phoenix project

This design was my way of saying that there is a way forward out of Covid-19 into a new future, like the mythical bird who rose from the ashes, reborn, stronger and more powerful.

In Japan, as earlier in China, the Phoenix was adopted as a symbol of the imperial household, particularly the Empress. This mythical bird represents fire, the sun, justice, obedience and fidelity. The Asian Phoenix is different from the Phoenix found in Egypt and Greece and is a bird of completely different feathers and traditions.



The ornamental design of the Dragon (Emperor) and Phoenix (Empress) on the doors of the Hall of Heavenly and Terrestrial Union, Beijing, China



A phoenix depicted in a book of legendary creatures by FJ Bertuch (1747-1822)

Presidential standard of Greece





The Phoenix from Greek mythology was a feathered creature of great size with large wings and talons, its plumage vibrant and beautiful. It is still used today as the emblem on the Presidential standard of Greece.

The Phoenix lived for 500 years before it built its own funeral pyre, burst into flames and died, consumed in its own fiery inferno... When it dies, it dies in flames and from the ashes is born the next Phoenix.

This small design was based on a pattern which came from Urban Threads many years ago and was exactly what I had in mind for the Sashiko and quilting technique I wanted to use.

Front



The fabric was pre-washed medium weight calico. A plain backing fabric was tacked to the quilted layer before I added a plain cotton border.

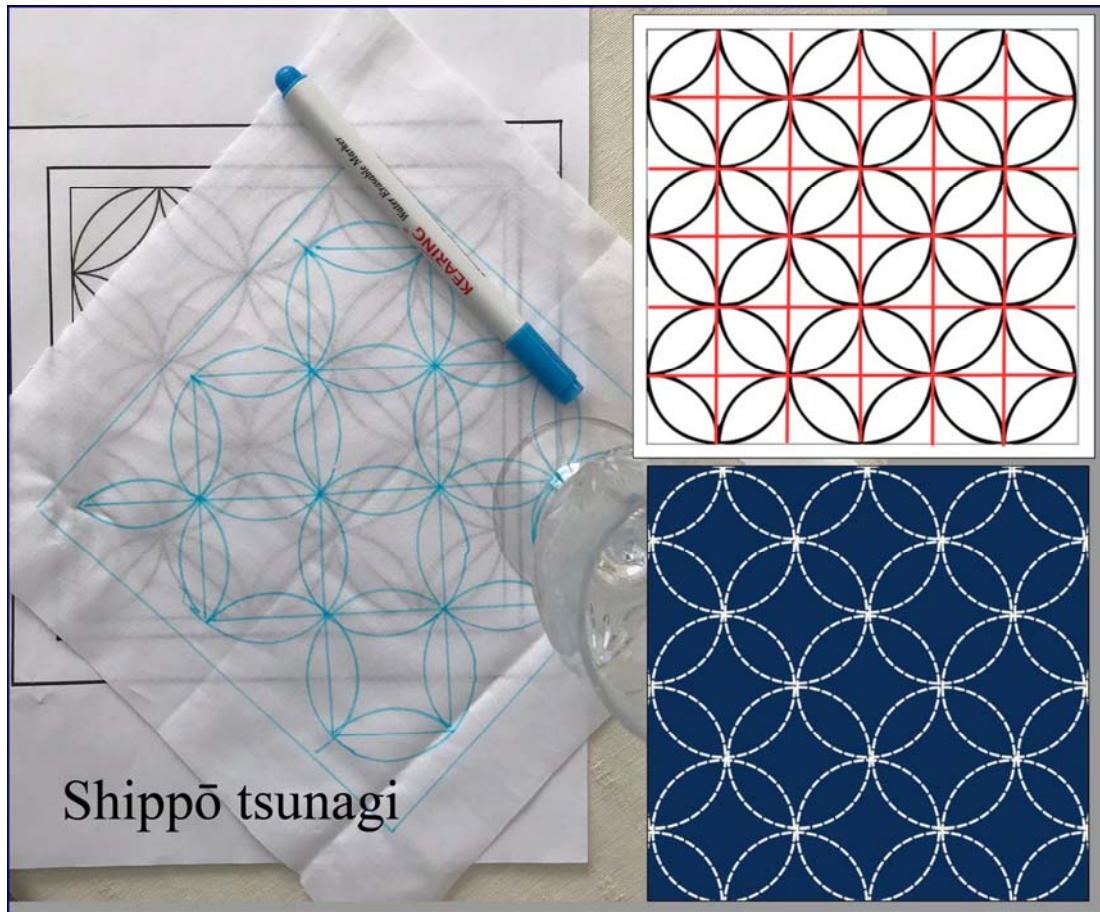
Calico backing - the brass rod was inserted through the top border without adding a separate sleeve.



What is Calico?

It's a 100% cotton light to medium weight natural fabric and is perfect for a variety of projects. Calico comes in a loom state which means it is unbleached, un-dyed & not pre-shrunk, so allow for a small amount of shrinkage or buy pre-shrunk Calico. The fabric is far less fine than muslin, but less coarse and thick than canvas or denim.

Choose a smooth calico and check for flaws which will impact on your stitching



Sashiko pattern -shippō tsunagi

I added my own twist with two shippō tsunagi sashiko bands either side of the Phoenix. This is one of the easiest Japanese sashiko designs and can be drawn in any size using different size circles. I used a wine glass to draw the pattern and a water soluble pen to transfer the drawing onto the calico.

Fabrics: 100% Calico, medium weight, pre-shrunk, cotton, polyester terylene wadding, medium weight

Threads: Sashiko cotton or cotton P erle No 8.

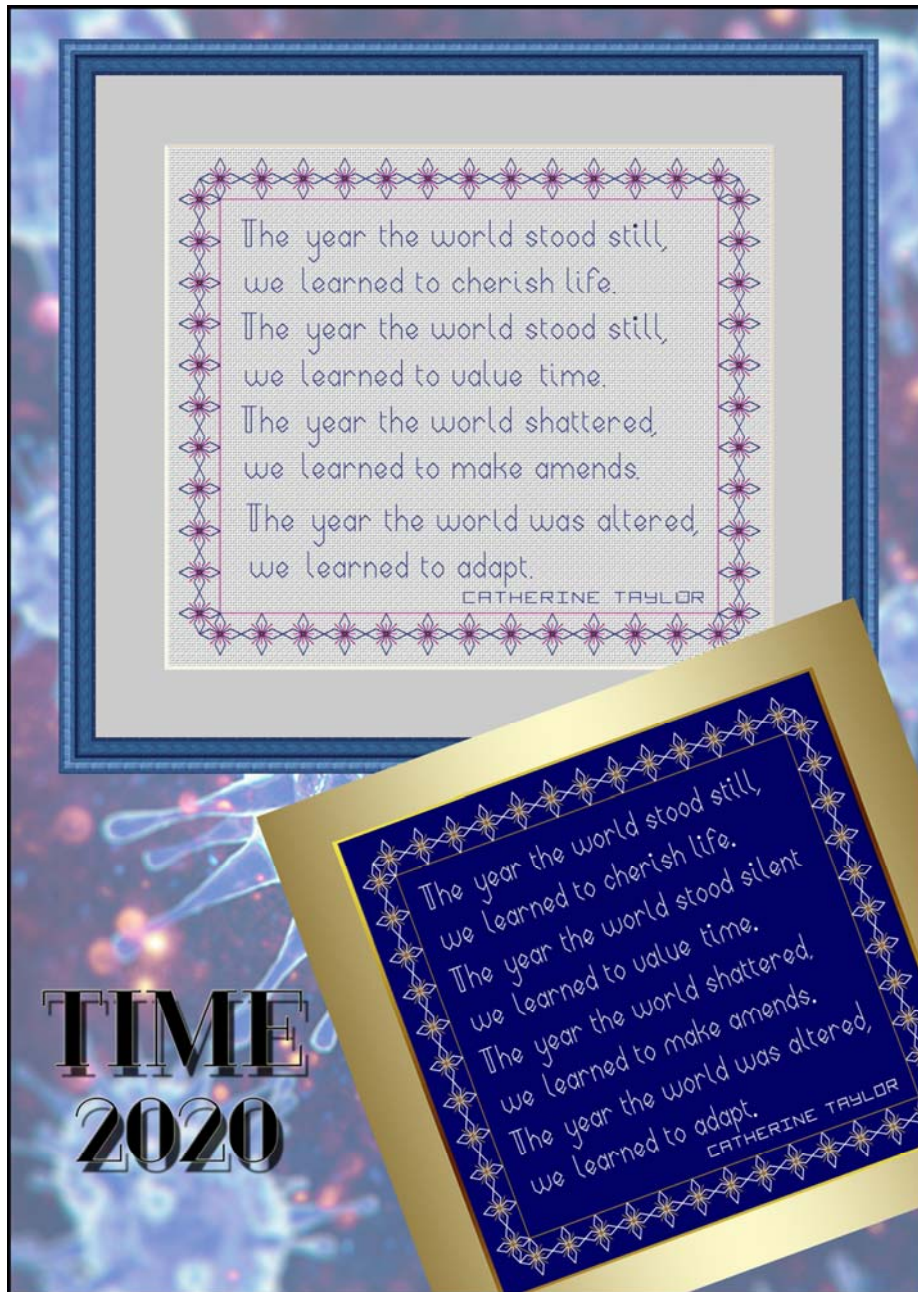
Stitch: Sashiko running stitch

<https://www.urbanthreads.com>

Time 2020

There is a saying:

To *'rise like a phoenix from the ashes'* means to emerge from a catastrophe stronger, smarter and a more powerful transformation from death to life.



Time 2020 - Catherine Taylor

We cannot control every world event or pandemic, but we can take charge of our own lives and how we react to the problems we face as individuals. It has never been more important that we find satisfaction with what we stitch, but that we are also kind to ourselves and less critical. Sometimes we need to ask ourselves why we are doing what we do and then listen to the answer.

For me, designing and stitching is both a lifeline and a way of life. It brings me peace and satisfaction. It is a challenge and at times infuriating! It stretches my abilities and gives me pleasure when I can share my work with others through Blackwork Journey and the Facebook groups.

During the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, readers from the Blackwork Journey Facebook groups came together to support each other through one of the most challenging years that we have ever known in our lifetimes. Catherine wrote a poem that resonated with me and with many readers. With hope on the horizon and through the development of vaccines, we will overcome the difficulties and look to the future!

FR0188 Time 2020 has been added to 'Freebies'
Thank you Catherine for your wonderful poem.



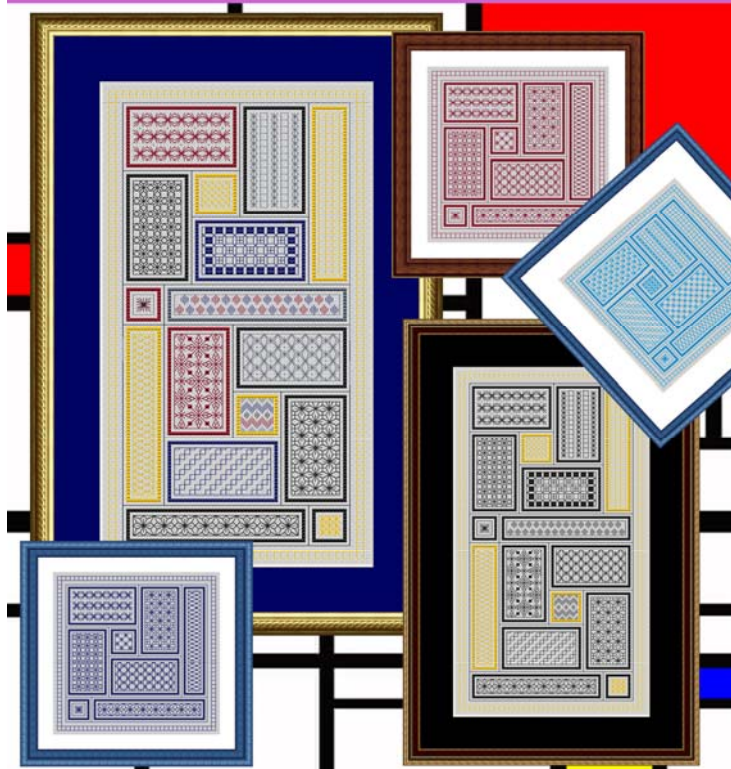
New e- book for February 2021 EB0018 Mondrian Medley

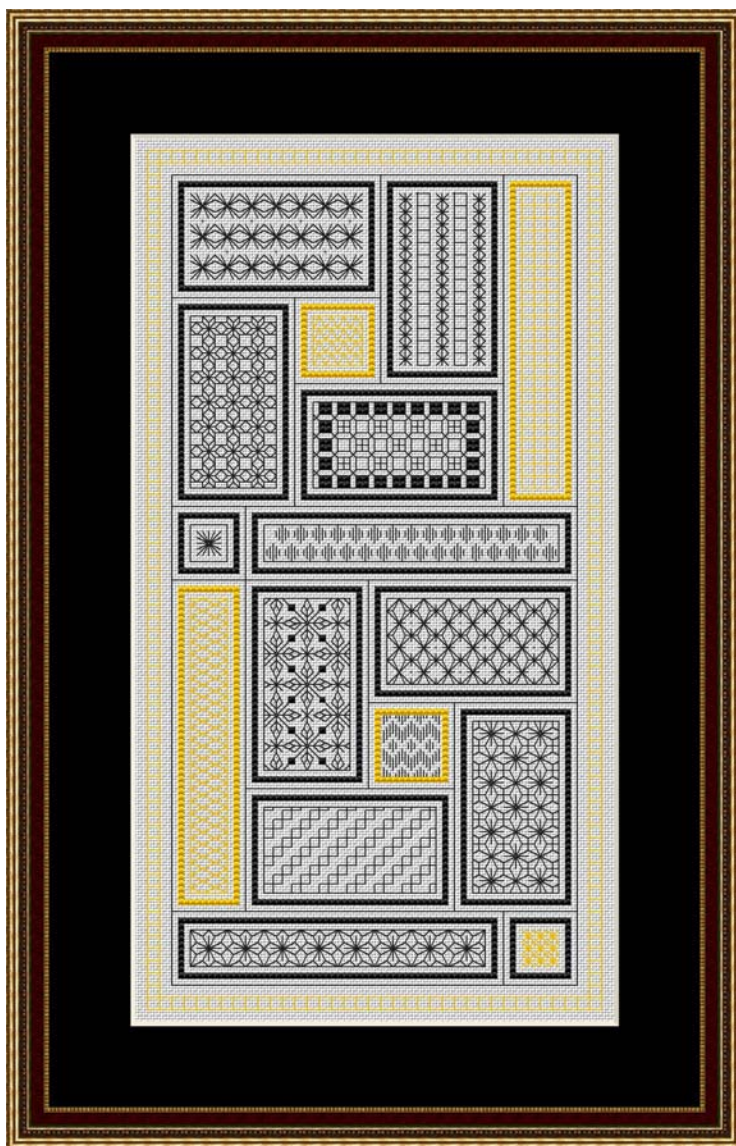
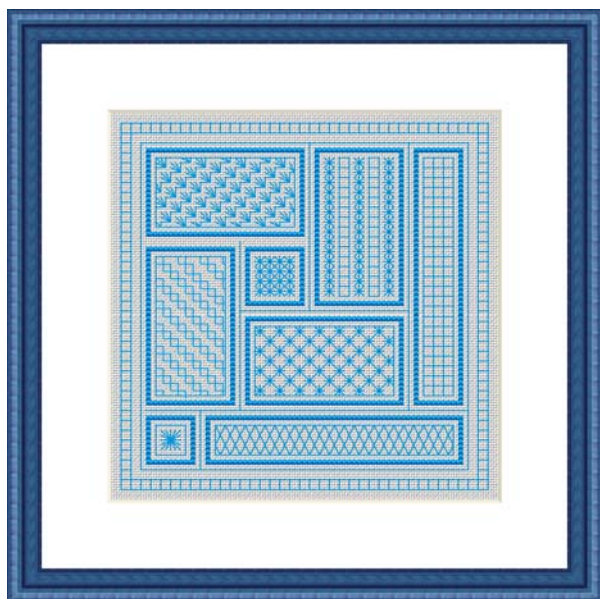
Many years ago I went to an exhibition of Piet Mondrian's work and saw the potential for a series of embroideries in many different techniques. This E-book is the result of that exhibition.



Piet Mondrian 1872 - 1944

It is worked on Zweigart evenweave or Aida fabric with a choice of five charts and different techniques. These designs are suitable for all levels of ability.





Pulled thread work design on Zweigart 28 count evenweave

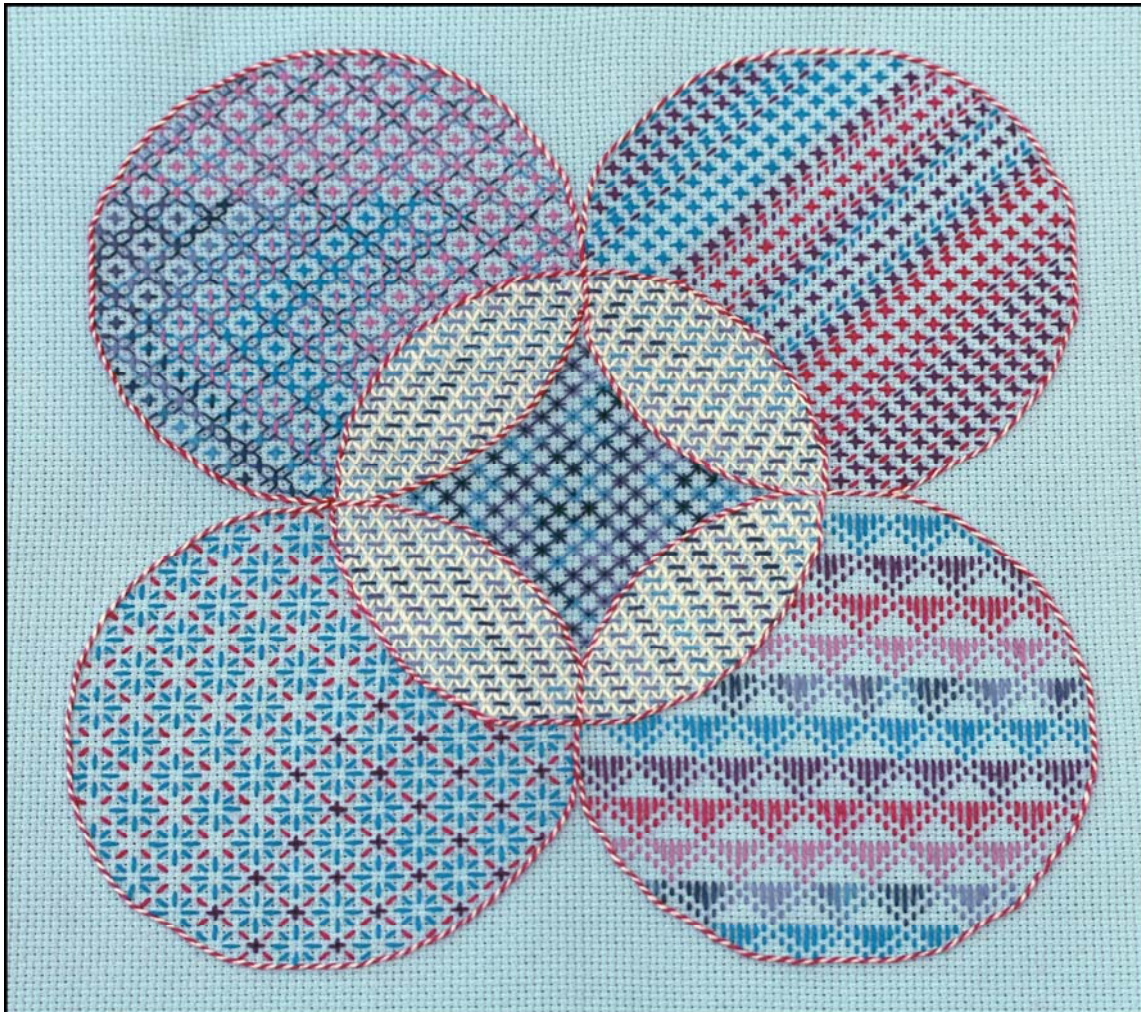
The same design worked on Zweigart 14 count navy Aida where the stitches are not 'pulled' but treated as embroidery stitches. Change the colours to suit your own ideas!

Different colour combinations – blackwork, redwork and a pulled thread work version are included.

Sizes:
Large designs: 5.29 x 10.00 inches, (74 x 140 stitches)
Smaller design: 5.29 x 5.29 inches (74 x 74 stitches)
Full pulled thread stitch instructions are included.

CH0409 Playtime

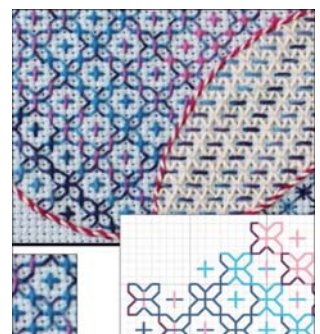
This was designed for Zweigart 14 count Aida fabric for people with eyesight problems who have difficult working on 28 count evenweave. It handles well and the holes are clear. Various thicknesses of threads have been used to create different weights of stitching.



The design was drawn round an old CD, but any size circle could be used. The design would also work on 11 count Ada, but the circle and fabric would need to be larger to include all the stitching.

The cream thread was crochet cotton which contrasted well with the floss which was used for the rest of the design. Follow the diagrams and photographs to place the patterns and colours.

Extract from design



Blackwork Journey Blog, February 2021

Blackwork embroidery has always been the main focus of Blackwork Journey and is still my first love. When I design a new pattern or work a piece of embroidery I think back over the history, the craftsmen who have worked the patterns over the generations and the people who wore the embroideries. Whilst this influences my designs, it also allows me to move forward and take an established technique into the 21st century to make it relevant to the modern embroiderer.

Blackwork is a counted thread embroidery technique in which repetitive patterns are used to fill design areas. It has been popular since 1400 and was mentioned in Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales". It contains Arabic and Spanish elements. These patterns can be found across the Islamic world from Spain to the Middle East and India from architecture to textiles.

Blackwork was used in textiles for shirts, cuffs, ruffs and sleeves and whilst the traditional choice of colour was usually black thread on white linen, modern blackwork often uses a variety of colours and threads from metallic threads to pearl cottons and beads for texture and interest.



Henry VIII, (28 June 1491 – 28 January 1547) was painted by Hans Holbein the younger in 1536 and is one of the most famous and most impressive portraits of a Tudor king.

The doublet has an arabesque and strapwork design which I have seen reproduced on jaili (stonework screens) in India and in mosques in Spain and the Far East

The embroidery would have been black, silk and silver-gilt threads on a white linen background fabric.

(National Portrait Gallery, London)

The strapwork idea found on the doublet and in the Alhambra led to the blackwork bag design.



Alhambra, Spain



CH0333 Inception from 'Charts'

Inception is a freestyle blackwork sampler in two sizes based on plasterwork from the Alhambra in Spain. This is a counted thread sampler worked on evenweave fabric with a freestyle outline. The design can be worked in black with gold beads or black, gold beads and metallic thread. The pattern sheet shows both combinations. Variegated threads may also be used as shown in the embroidered bag.

The pattern was printed onto the fabric by mounting the fabric onto a sticky label, running the material through the printer and printing the photograph onto the fabric!



The same style of strapwork ornamentation on Henry's doublet is reminiscent of the patterns found in the Alhambra. Henry's first wife Catherine of Aragon was Spanish and undoubtable influenced the embroidery at the time.

Catherine of Aragon 1485- 1536



Blackwork Journey Blog, February 2021

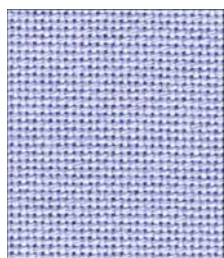
Blackwork embroidery designs tend to fall into two main areas:

- a) Block designs where geometric patterns form the shapes
- b) Free style designs in which geometric patterns fill a drawn outline.

The filling stitches or diaper patterns have three elements within them, namely light, medium and dark which create the balance within the design. The closer the stitches, the heavier the design becomes.

Materials that can be used today:

Traditionally, blackwork is worked on a linen or cotton fabric.



Evenweave - Cotton:

Zweigart 27 count Linda 100% cotton evenweave fabric.

Zweigart 28 count Brittney 52% cotton / 48% modal blended evenweave fabric i.e. 28 threads to the inch.

Zweigart 25 count Lugana 52% cotton / 48% modal blended evenweave fabric. i.e. 25 threads to the inch.

Zweigart 22 count hardanger may also be used.

Evenweave - Linen:

Zweigart 28 count Cashel 100% linen evenweave fabric

Zweigart 25 count Dublin

Zweigart 32 count Belfast

I find linen a much harder fabric to work with and my personal choice would be Zweigart 28 Brittney count evenweave or 25 count Lugana.

Evenweave is worked over two threads



Blockweave – Aida

Unless stated otherwise all Zweigart aida is 100% cotton fabric.

Whilst Zweigart Aida blockweave 14 (i.e. 14 blocks to the inch), or 16 count is often easier to count there may be part stitches in a design which means the blocks would have to be split. The more holes per inch the smaller the design will be.

Aida is worked over a block.

However, as a general rule, a fabric where it is easy to see the holes is best, along with a needle large enough to thread and threads which reflect the weight of the fabric. If working on a white fabric is difficult, antique white, ecru or cream can make suitable alternatives.

There are so many ways in which blackwork embroidery designs can be interpreted and used. Look back through the Blackwork Journey website to find patterns that interest you. Readers have stitched many of the patterns and interpreted them in their own way. Some of their work has won major prizes! I am so proud of all your work and the way you have embraced my thinking. Whilst I may provide ideas, it is up to you to create your own heirlooms for the future.



There are some PDFs in 'Techniques' which have more information on blackwork and suitable fabrics.

TQ0014 Introduction to Blackwork

TQ0019 Guide to fabric, threads and needles



Deep sleeps the Winter,
Cold, wet and grey;
Surely all the world is dead;
Spring is far away.
Wait! the world shall waken;
It is not dead, for lo,
The Fair Maids of February
Stand in the snow!

Cicely Mary Barker 'The Snowdrop Fairy'
(1895-1973) – English Illustrator and
Author

The first snowdrops have appeared in the garden and are peeping through the snow – spring must be on its way

It has never been more important that we find satisfaction and peace of mind in our endeavours. I hope you have enjoyed this month's Blog.

If you have any queries please contact me at:

lizalmond@blackworkjourney.co.uk

Stay safe and happy stitching!

Liz

PR0049 Snowdrops

SNOWDROPS
Blackwork Journey – Designs by Elizabeth Almond



*Celebrate the end of winter and the advent of spring
with this
pulled thread and blackwork design!*



www.blackworkjourney.co.uk