

Thread-Painted Appliqué

by Nanette S. Zeller

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Host Susan Brubaker Knapp and quilt artist Nanette S. Zeller

Materials

- Pre-printed image on cotton fabric
- Firm, nonwoven, fusible fabric stabilizer (I use Pellon® Décor Bond®.)
- Press sheet or parchment paper
- Monofilament (invisible) thread or coordinating-colored threads for thread painting (I like 50wt cotton.)
- Neutral color bobbin thread
- Closed-toe darning foot with wide opening
- Sewing machine with free-motion capability
- Liquid seam sealant (I use Dritz® Fray Check™.)
- Background fabric
- Washable school glue stick (I use the purple kind which turns clear when dry.)
- Batting
- Backing fabric

I enjoy creating free-motion embroidery—aka thread painting—but it always bothers me when the background fabric ruffles up around the stitched design. I've tried hoops, gloves, different threads and stabilizers, but I still get ruffled edges around the threadwork. So, I made the decision to cut out the design after stitching and then appliqué it to my quilt background.

I do my thread work on pre-printed designs. This helps me achieve a painterly look, which often makes people wonder how I created the piece. Cutting out the design and appliquéing it on a background gives me more design options and less frustration with bunched-up fabric.

INSTRUCTIONS

Thread painting

1. Cut out the design leaving enough extra fabric to hold onto while stitching. About 1" is workable.

2. Cut a piece of stabilizer larger than the pre-printed design. Fuse the stabilizer to the back of the fabric using a press sheet and following the manufacturer's directions.
3. Add free-motion thread-painting embroidery to the design.

Tip: Because there's a pre-printed design to 'draw on,' the thread does not have to densely cover the image. Thin layers of thread are acceptable, which allows the printed colors to show through. If desired, completely skip stitching over complicated or smaller areas, like facial features and other tiny details.


Appliqué to background

1. Cut out the thread-painted appliqué design as close to the stitching as possible. Be careful but don't worry too much about clipping threads.
2. Following the manufacturer's directions, apply liquid seam sealant around the fabric edges of the appliqué. If the fabric frays after

stitching, clip stray fibers and apply more seam sealant.

3. Cut batting slightly larger than the background fabric. Center the background fabric onto the batting.
4. Apply a thin layer of glue stick on the reverse of the thread-painted appliqué. Apply the glue close to the cut edges and some in the center.
5. Placed the glue-backed appliqué piece onto the background fabric. Allow the glue to dry.
6. Use monofilament or coordinating thread to stitch around the appliqué shape to secure it to the background fabric and batting and create the quilt top.
7. Soften the look of the appliqué edges by adding more free-motion thread painting around the cut edges of the design.

Note: *I use a free-motion zigzag around the edges using either the same color thread to blend the design or a darker color thread to add more shading around the appliqué shape.*

8. Layer the quilt top with a backing, baste, quilt, and finish the piece as desired. 

nanettesews.com

Make It, Buy It

There are many options to obtain pre-printed designs on fabric.

I work with my own drawings or photographs and transfer the images to fabric using inkjet printer fabric sheets, iron-on transfers, or commercial fabric printing services.

If you don't want to create your own design, lovely designs are also available on commercial fabrics.