

# Ink & Thread Portraits

by Laurie Russman

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do you use your smartphone as a virtual sketchbook? Fiber artists now have a multitude of inexpensive apps that can transform photos into interesting and usable images. There is one app, though, that does marvelous things with value and contrast: Popsicolor. It offers many options for manipulating color and adding special effects. My preferred option uses one dark tone for the entire image.



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## Materials

- Digital photo from your smartphone photo gallery
- Popsicolor smartphone application from the App Store (tinrocket.com)
- Copy paper
- White batik or similar tightly woven fabric, 10" square
- Small pieces of batting and backing, 10" square
- Fabric ink pen (I used Fabrico® by Tsukineko® in the color of the piece you are making.)
- Thread to match the color of the fabric ink pen

## Optional

- 2 (10") squares of fusible web (I used Mistyfuse®.)
- Lightbox

The application changes a photo into a dramatic and easily traceable image which can be stitched with one color of thread against a white background. You can use this technique with any subject, but I prefer to use it to create striking pet portraits.

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Choose a clear photo with sufficient contrast. Make sure there is a balance of light and dark in the face of the subject. For pet portraits, the more striking the markings, the easier this will be.
2. Open the Popsicolor app on your device, and tap the camera icon on the bottom left. Choose Import>Photo Library, and select the photo from your album. The app will immediately go to work creating its own version of the image, and you will see a range of color choices on the top and the



bottom of the screen. For this project, select the black (licorice) Popsicle at the top and bottom of the screen. The image will immediately switch to black on white.

**NOTE:** As you get to know this app, you will learn techniques for making further adjustments to your image. This is a perfect activity for those moments on the subway, bus, and supermarket line.

## Tips on materials

- Wool batting provides tremendous loft creating something close to a 3-D effect.
- The tight weave of batik and similar fabrics is essential for this project; looser-weave fabrics will not hold as sharp an image. This technique depends on the contrast between white and color.
- I recommend 50wt thread for machine quilting these images, as some of the details might be very small.



## Printing 101

If you are not able to print directly from your phone, email or use a filesharing service (such as Dropbox) to send the image to your email account. You can then print the image from your home computer.

**NOTE:** I use lightweight fusible between each layer to stabilize the sandwich for quilting. Basting spray and pins are other alternatives.

3. For now, tap the heart icon in the bottom right of the screen and choose Save to Photos.
4. Open your photo album and you will see this new image. Print on copy paper. (figure 1)
5. Tape the printed image to the surface of a lightbox, window, or other light source. Tape the fabric on top of the picture and trace the image onto the fabric with the fabric ink pen.

**TIP:** If working with an animal picture, make your pen strokes in the same direction the fur grows. This creates a helpful guide for your stitching.

6. After the photo is traced, heat set the ink following the manufacturer's instructions. (figure 2)
7. Make a quilt sandwich with the traced fabric, batting, and backing. Baste.

8. Select a thread to match the ink color. Free-motion quilt the inked area. (figure 3)
9. Switch to white thread and quilt the background around the image.
10. Trim the piece and finish the edge with a zigzag stitch. ■

neonkittyquilts.com



figure 1



figure 2



figure 3

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