

Embellished Wool Applique by Machine

Part 2 Workbook

This part presents techniques for embellishing wool applique with decorative and utility stitches using specialty threads to achieve a look that is inspired by hand embroidered wool folk art.

This project is folk artsy in character and not intended to be detailed pictorial in nature nor exacting in pattern. It is intended to provide a vehicle for using the appliques to get comfortable with choosing and working with the machine stitches and have fun making it in the process.

The resulting piece of wall art can make a nice decorative present or simply serve as a reference for your future work. Making this sampler is also a wonderful way to explore what you and your machine can really do decoratively and hopefully will inspire you to do more. Once you have learned the techniques, you can apply them to patterns intended for hand folk art wool applique, such as those by Sue Spargo or Laura Wasalowski.

In part one I made a test piece by adding some of the shapes and appliqueing them to practice the techniques. I then arranged and appliqued all the shapes on my prototype wall hanging. If you are joining me, get your project to this point before moving on, but please watch this video so you know where we are headed. Now let's have some fun.

You should have at least three pieces: your main project piece, your test piece or pieces, and your stitch library piece.

So let's start with the test piece and work out the stitches we want to use on the project, practice how to make them look best, and build the stitch-guide library on the longer narrow background piece we cut at the beginning where you will mark the number or name of the stitches using a Sharpie.

Even though it is a necessary step, I always really enjoy the testing part, because I get to do some stitching without any worry of mistakes, and can often enjoy trying those crazy ideas that float by sometimes and I won't mess up anything needed.

Conducting the testing and practice

I have chosen to use Aurifil's 12 weight Lana Wool thread, which is an acrylic/wool blend wound so it can be used easily on a machine. It is the same kind of thread often used by the hand embroiderers for their wool applique. This will work for all the decorative stitching on this piece. This is partly because they have a wide variety of colors wound on a spool that is easy to use on my machine. There are other wool blend 12 weight threads, such as Wonderfil's, but it is wound for the hand stitcher with a smaller amount of thread, though it might also work on a machine. I have not tried any other ones on my machine yet.

For this thread I suggest you use either a 100/16 topstitch needle, or a Schmetz super non-stick 100/16 needle to help manage both the size of the thread and reduce the inherent wool fluff and stickiness of the fusible web from climbing up your needle and making dust bunnies on your machinez.

For the best look of decorative stitching, the top tension should be loosened a little so the top thread pulls ever so slightly to the back side. My Bernina 880 plus sets this tension adjustment automatically per stitch selected, but my little Bernina 350 does not, so check your manual or just make some stitch selections and watch to see if your machine does this too. If not, it is an easy adjustment for any machine by slightly loosening the top tension, but be sure to return your tension to the default setting when you are done with the decorative stitching if it is not automatically taken care of by your machine.

When considering the decorative stitch you want to use to go around the appliques it is important to consider how it will

line up on the edge of your applique, and practice stitching it. This is because you might be surprised to find where it stitches and how it fits when you try it. Also, remember you don't have to limit your stitches to the outside edge of the applique. You can add decorative stitches around the inside also, just as one might do if you are embroidering wool appliques by hand.

Good beginning choices for embellishing and decorating your flower shapes are one-sided designs that are straight on one side and ziggy-zaggy pattern on the other.

Choose one and try it out by running the straightest part of the stitch design along the edge of your applique shape. Try using the decorative ziggy-zaggy part stitching in and then try it with it stitching going out. You could use one on the outside circle and one on the inside circle if you have two circles for the same flower, or just pick what you want.

If you like it, stitch a few repeats of the decorative stitch onto your "stitch library" piece, and, using a Sharpie, mark the number of the stitch next to it along with any changes you made to the design.

Save the stitch in your favorites folder if your machine has that option. You may find it helpful to also have a notebook and write down what you did with all the changes, stitch lengths, and widths. Trust me when you start working directly on your main piece you will be very glad you have these reference aids and you can keep them for future projects.

After that, see if you have a stitch that zig zags the design in both directions, but has a central line. I found several like this that I really like in the utility stitches, so don't forget to look there. Do a test with this stitch, running the central line of the design along the edge of your shape. This requires that you have the needle in the default central location rather than set to the right like you might do for the one-sided designs.

Now, if you stitch around to the point where you began and you still have more to go in the stitch design repeat, just keep going until the repeat is complete on your test piece. Yes, it will overlap your original stitching, but it will usually still look great and will really secure that beginning of the stitching. Alternatively, you can stop the stitch pattern in the middle if that looks right to you. You can determine how you want to deal with this during your test stitching.

If you want to embroider your flower stems like many hand stitchers do, find a stitch that is symmetrical and stitches across most of the full width of your stem or vine, but is not a satin based stitch and spaces the stitches out evenly.

For the stems, using a color thread close to the stem color, center the stem under your open-toed embroidery foot and stitch down the stem, covering as much of it evenly and in the middle as much as possible. Even if it doesn't fully cover the width of the stem or gets a little off center, just keep going. It will look wonderful.

Be sure to cut the threads with a little tail that you can pull to the back rather than try to back up or some such. I find that it is sufficient with this wool thread, which has a matte finish that doesn't easily pull out, to just pull it to the back and cut with a small tail. If you have an automatic cutter function, it may do this for you. You will be hiding the back with batting and backing fabric anyway before you complete the project, so don't worry about leaving knots and tails or having the tension pull the top thread a little to the back.

If you are using another kind of thread, you may need to tie it on the back by hand and cut close to the knot and add a tiny drop of Fray Check for extra security if it looks like it might pull out with use.

Throughout the test, stitch slowly, and try controlling your stitching to the point where you can stitch one repeat and stop without turning the fabric. Then, with the needle stopped, but still down in the fabric, turn the stitching so it fits nicely to the

edge of the shape and stitch another repeat. If you move the stitching while it is creating a pattern, you can cause it to stumble-stitch over itself in an unattractive way.

Some machines will allow you to set your decorative stitch to one repeat, and stop automatically. This is very helpful to use for this stitching, but if your machine does not do this, just practice stopping the stitching at just the right place with your needle down for turning or making sure it will stitch at the right place for the next repeat. It takes a little practice, but you can do it, and you will be really pleased how much it helps get the look you want.

So in summary here is the sequence:

1. Set the machine to tie at the beginning (if it has a button for that). If your machine does not have this, leave a tail of threads to tie after completion.
2. Stitch one repeat placed so the first and last stitch are on the applique
3. Stop with the needle down
4. Turn if needed
5. Stitch the next repeat
6. Continue to completion

Some applique shapes are more complex than would look nice with a flowery or lacey stitch design. For these, many hand stitchers use an outline in a contrasting color. I used a dark color thread and the number 6 utility stitch on my machine. This is a stretch stitch set as a straight stitch that most machines have now. It repeats forward back forward, then forward back forward, which provides a beautiful thicker straight stitch to wind around the complex shapes. This highlights the applique beautifully. I also used this stitch for the veins in the leaves.

Once you have chosen and practiced all the stitches you like, then have a lot of fun decoratively stitching your main piece. Take your time and really enjoy the process.

Remember, this is your piece and you can stitch whatever you want to...maybe even add a bee or butterfly button and stitch a flight path, for instance.

Complete the embellishment of your piece and join me for our next video where I will address sandwiching, quilting and finishing the piece.

See you next time. Have fun in your studio!