

## Thread Painting- Presented by Brenda Dagg, Feb. 2016

### **How do you begin?**

- Lower the feed dogs on your machine. Set your stitch length to 0 if it doesn't automatically go there. Use the same foot you would use for free motion quilting.
- Choose a piece of practice fabric.
- You need a stabilizer on the back: leave in, wash away, tear away, peltex
- A hoop is really helpful unless you are using a heavy weight stabilizer like Peltex. Hoop has to fit under presser foot. Bigger might seem better, but keep in mind that it's going to be hitting your machine.
- Thread: I use whatever I have in the colour I need. Generally, thinner thread (50 or 60) is better, but if you want to fill in the area quickly and create lots of texture, go for a heavier thread like a 40.
- The more shades of thread you use, the more depth you get. That's why it's usually better to go with lighter weight.
- Use a lightweight thread like Bottom Line in the bobbin. If you don't want any loops to show, the safest thing is to match bobbin thread to upper thread. (Sometimes, loops can actually add texture).

### **First Stitches**

- You will use only a straight stitch or a zigzag stitch for thread painting. Start with a straight stitch.
- Practise getting smooth controlled movements of the hoop, and keeping your machine speed as constant as you can.
- Just scribble at first to get the feel of it. Try moving your hoop in little circles. Try a number of straight lines in different directions to look like grass.
- Then try drawing a line and tracing back over it: this is probably the hardest part of thread painting.
- Turn your line into a tree branch and practise making twigs off the main branch.

### **Using the Zigzag**

- Set your machine to zigzag, then set the stitch width at about a 2. Use your flywheel to carefully raise and lower the needle to make sure you're not going to hit your pressure foot, then adjust as needed.

- If you move the fabric toward or away from you (north, south) as you zigzag, you will get a zigzag very similar to the one you get with your feed dogs up. The variable will be how quickly you pull the fabric.
- If you move the fabric from side to side, (east, west) you will see how your zigzag can be used as a filler stitch.
- Try meandering with your zigzag. Work on making this look random and not like a zigzag.

## Creating a picture

- You can sketch with your needle freehand, or draw a picture using a fabric marker.
- If you are doing something more complex, you can trace it onto a washaway clear stabilizer and stitch right through that.
- Underlay stitch: for designs wider than about 3/8 “, you can prevent distortion by doing an underlay stitch. Go back and forth, at right angles to your eventual stitching, about 1/8” between lines.
- Then go back and “colour in” your shape using the straight stitch or the zigzag stitch. This stitching will cover over your underlay stitches.
- It’s possible to create the main features of your scene separately, using layers of stabilizer and tulle, then appliqué them onto your quilt.
- As you practise, you’ll learn how to create a more satiny stitch, a scribbling stitch, and how to blend thread colours by running the colours into each other randomly and avoiding a line of demarcation.

## Resources

- [Thread Painting with Style](#) by Nancy Prince ( a good “how to” book)
- [Thread Work Unraveled](#) by Sarah Ann Smith (good discussion of stabilizers, needles, tension)
- [Thread Painted Portraits](#) by Lea McComas
- Any of Alison Holt’s books are great for eye candy and ideas about how to create shapes in the natural world: [Machine Embroidered Woodlands](#), [Machine Embroidered Flowers](#), [Woodlands and Landscapes](#), [Machine Embroidered Landscapes](#), [Machine Embroidered Seascapes](#).
- Online: Nancy Prince has done a series of classes on thread painting. You can access these through youtube.