

Permin Needlepoint

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I am always on the look out in order to add to my collection of embroidery and was recently delighted to find an item of needlepoint produced by the Permin Company of Copenhagen and dated 1938. I understand that this particular needlepoint, which has a Celtic theme, may have been one of Permin's samples.



Fig 1. Finished Frame.

The needlepoint is stitched on duo or Penelope canvas in both wool and silk thread, the white stitches being silk, there is no fading to the threads which are as true and vibrant as the day they were stitched; obviously the needlepoint had been kept away from the sun and stored correctly.

In the UK needlepoint is sometimes incorrectly referred to as tapestry which does, on occasions, cause some confusion. Needlepoint is worked on a canvas substratum that is made with horizontal and vertical woven threads from materials such as linen or cotton. This weave is coarse and loose and requires stiffening, with gum Arabic, to

keep the weave in place. There are three types of canvas weave; single or mono, duo or Penelope and interlocking weaves.

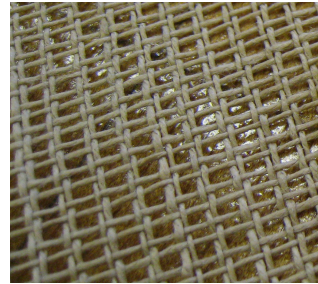


Fig 2. Duo or Penelope Canvas.

The size of the work is determined by the canvas count or threads/holes per inch and these can vary from very fine petit point single thread to coarse double-thread rug canvas. Canvas sizes vary from a count of four up to 40 but the more common mesh size are between 10 and 16 count which is termed 'Gros Point' and termed 'Petit Point' above 16 count. A blunt-ended needle is used to avoid piercing the yarn thereby preventing the tearing or fraying of the substrata when working the stitch.

My needlepoint design is around 12 inches square and features two both trammed and tent stitches.

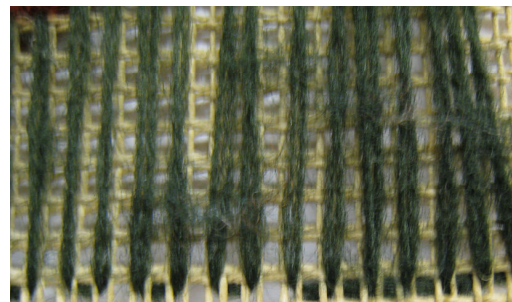


Fig 3. Trammed Stitch.

Tramming is a technique whereby a thin thread is stitched onto the fabric, in some cases before printing, and is commonly used on duo or penelope canvas to accurately define the design.

The embroiderer then overstitches the tramming threads to produce the finished work giving it a raised appearance. In this case some of the tramming stitches were left which gives an interesting finish to the piece and it is a good teaching aid when giving workshops or seminars. The tent or half cross stitch is the most common stitch used in needlepoint

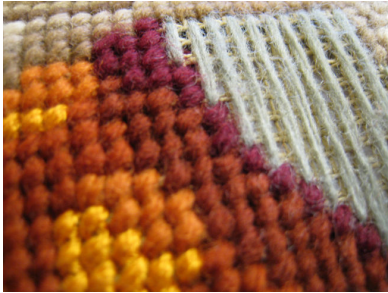


Fig 4. Tent or Half Cross Stitch.

and can either be a diagonal from left to right or right to left depending on whether the embroiderer is right or left handed; this will also determine the direction of the parallelogram if the needlepoint is not square.

Fortunately this needlepoint was square but on many occasions needlepoint will lose its shape due to the size used to stiffen the canvas becoming pliable and resetting out of square due to the heat and moisture from the embroiderer's hands.



Fig 5. Checking for Squareness. Squaring usually involves wetting or steaming the needlepoint to soften the size and then securing it in the desired square shape until dry. This process can be beneficial as dampening the threads can restore their fullness and give them a consistent, even appearance. However, one has to be extremely careful to avoid any process whereby the fabric, canvas or threads are dampened if there is any risk of the dyes bleeding if not colourfast. If unsure of colourfastness test a corner with a wet cotton bud. Before squaring check that the edges are of an equal length; if they are not then this could cause problems.

When squaring I use a blocking board I made myself from seven ply plywood, 2ft square, with a one inch grid covering the surface which was then coated with five coats of yacht varnish. I then use my wife's steam cleaner, held well away from the needlepoint and sufficient steam to only slightly dampen the surface and soften the size. I normally steam the front laying the back to the board but if there are knots on the back of the work I lay the front to the board as when squared the knots will show through to the front.

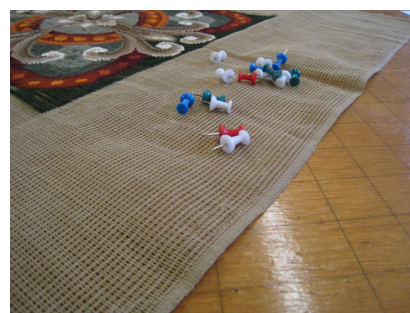


Fig 6. Blocking Board and pins.

I start and pin, using mapping pins, the top edge along a horizontal grid line then lightly re-steam the edge to be squared aligning the edge with a vertical

grid line then repeat the process for the other two sides. Finally, re-steam the whole and then leave the needlepoint to dry; once dry remove it from the board and then immediately secure it to the support board. One can always repeat the process if the work is still not square after the first attempt.

Squaring may not be successful for any one or more of the following reasons:

- Stitches of different types, of various sizes and direction of stitch and the use of different threads can result in different tension across the work and make it difficult to square.
- Stitching does not run parallel to the weave of the base fabric or incomplete rows of stitches.
- Any borders or different textiles/materials used in work will make squaring very difficult.

Whilst on the subject of knots, the use of padding when securing the needlepoint to its support will hide the knots otherwise, in time, they will show through the finished work.

Turning to the frame design; traditionally needlepoint goes straight into a frame without a mount but as it is imperative that the work does not touch the glass; this would crush the threads and should condensation form on the inside of the glass it would lead to deterioration and the possibility of mould forming on the work. I decided to use Arqadia moulding 6151LI as a slip and intend to place the glass between the slip and the outer moulding, this would leave a gap of around 8mm between glass and the surface of the needlepoint.



Fig 7. Slip and Sealing Tape.

This slip was to be lined with Archival Frame Sealing tape (Lion Ref 1588) to prevent acid leaching from the wood and damaging the canvas of the needlepoint. The outer moulding used was Arqadia Ferrosa iron 395254, the depth of the rebate was just sufficient to include glass, slip, supported work, undermount and backboard without reverting to box framing.

There are several ways one can secure needlepoint to its support but in this case I decided to lace it to 2mm off white pH neutral mountboard. By using various colours of mountboard one is able to achieve a differing effect to the finished needlepoint. First, it is essential that the mountboard is cut square, the size of which is determined by the rebate on the slip this was measured to be 7mm allow approx 2mm on each side for the thickness of the canvas and tape and this added to the size of the needlepoint gives the dimensions of the support board; 315mm x 325mm.

The mountboard was cut and the sharp edges removed using an artist's bone. The centres both on the needlepoint and mountboard were marked off in pencil, these were then aligned and then the work was pinned using 'T' pins starting at the centres moving outwards inserting pins at an interval of around 15mm. When stretching the canvas over the support it is easy to align the warp

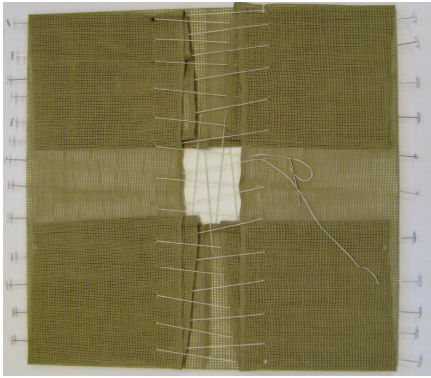


Fig 8. Finished Lacing.

and the weft, whilst pinning, to the mountboard as long as previously stated the mountboard is square.

Only the sides that were to be laced were pinned. A ballpoint tapestry needle and mercerised cotton was used for the lacing starting at one edge continuing at a distance of around 20mm between the lacing to the far edge. The thread was then tied off and then slightly tensioned back along to the starting point and finally tied off. This process was repeated for the shorter side ensuring that the corners were neatly folded.

The moulding to be used as the slip was lined with the sealing tape, then mitred and joined ensuring that no wood was visible at the join.



Fig 9. Needlepoint in Slip.

I then checked that the needlepoint fitted snugly in this inner frame and cut an undermount from 1650 micron

backing board. This was to protect the underside of the stretched needlepoint from any acid leaching from the MDF backboard. The Ferrosa moulding was then mitred and joined. Tru-View, conservation-clear glass was used for the reasons mentioned in previous articles. On assembly, the glass, slip including the needlepoint and backing board stood proud of the rebate of the Ferrosa moulding by approx 1/2mm, consequently I cut the MDF backboard to fit onto the moulding and using framer's pins tacked it to the moulding. The back was then taped with licky sticky tape and to finish off the hangers and felt bumpers attached.

An interesting item of needlepoint for my collection.