

Louise Gardiner - SUPERSTITCHER WORKSHOPS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

What standard do I need to be to come on a workshop ?

The Superstitchers workshops are for all levels including beginners. Its a great chance to get away for a few days, have some concentrated creative time for yourself, have fun and meet like minded people.

Do I need previous experience ?

It would be good if you have had experience using a freehand machine foot on your sewing machine but as long as your machine is up for it then you can arrive with no experience at all. Everybody works at their own pace.

Do I need to be able to draw ?

No! But what is drawing anyway? I would like to challenge your idea of what drawing is!

How much black thread do I need ?

One reel of thread (1000 metres) should easily last the 3 day workshop.

Why do you use black thread ?

I like the comparison between ink and black thread.

What will I achieve at the end of the workshop ?

A piece of unique art made by your good self! Hopefully you will feel happy and inspired and you will have made some new friends and have a warm and cosy feeling about humanity! A new penchant for sherry too ?

What machine do you recommend ?

I use a Bernina 1008, as far as I am concerned you do not need a fancy machine with buttons to be creative. Often it just complicates the process. The 1008 is a strong domestic sewing machine which has a fantastic engine. Other than that I do not know much about sewing machines.

What needles do you use ?

Size 80's and 90's. No, I do not use any fancy needles for metallic thread! I find a normal needle does the trick as long as you don't jerk about!

What threads do you use ?

I use all different makes and varieties but I have my favourites. Really it is a trial and error thing and I have a huge variety but I never scrimp on cost because there's nothing worse than cheap thread that snaps.

What Stitches do you use?

Straight Stitch and Zig Zag. That's it.

Do you use pre programmed 'fancy' stitches ?

I don't, but feel free to experiment with the ones on your machine. I don't like anything prescribed but maybe I should try them too!

How do you cope with metallic thread? Does it SNAP all the time?

Yes. It snaps all the time but I am very persistent and sometimes I use it in the bobbin and work upside down. Persistence is the key.

What do I do if my machine is playing up?

Make sure the machine is clean from fluff and threads see your manual on how to oil it ... its easy once you know how. You can use a vacuum nozzle to Hoover it. ALWAYS Rethread your machine top and bottom, change the needle and make sure the bobbin is going the right way round according to your manual.

How do I set my tensions correctly ?

Again you need to experiment with your own machine, sometimes 'mistakes' can provide interesting effects ! Experiment. There is no right answer... its all trial and error. A new needle can work wonders! And a little wiggle of the tension control thingy try stitching in regular intervals through the numbers and see what feels / looks best. Remember that the speed with which you sew/ move the fabric can also intervene.

When did you start machine embroidery?

When I was an apprentice at Quarry Bank Mill aged 7.

Do you draw your designs first on paper or directly onto the fabric ?

- Sometimes, I draw them onto tracing paper and stitch through from the reverse.
- Sometimes, I draw onto the canvas and stitch over the top.
- Sometimes, I go for it without any drawing at all... either stitched drawings from my imagination, stitched drawings from still life in front of me or spontaneous mark making with no planning. I

have spent so many hours on the sewing machine that I can use it better than I use a pen and my handwriting these days leaves not much to be desired!

Where do you get your inspiration / ideas?

Everywhere, all the time.... I am very observant. Some days I am buzzing with ideas. It's important to feed your creative brain.

Do you plan the pieces before you start ?

Generally yes, I will sketch out the design, but a lot of it develops as I work on the piece. I only plan a small percentage of the design. Again it depends on what I am working on and how much time I have.

How long do your embroideries take ?

This varies greatly depending on the size and detail of the piece. The five pieces I worked on for the Collect exhibition for example took 6 months, about 250 hours each. Basically I work a 40- 60 hour week. I spend over half my time on administration, marketing and answering enquiries. The other half stitching and painting.

What kind of paint do you use ?

Acrylic, fabric and silk paints. Depending on the end product, just consider if its going to be washed or if it needs to be permanent. If its a framed piece then acrylic paints are fine. Avoid Gouache.

What can we do with the pieces we have finished ?

They look great hung on a wall as they are you can back them with other fabric or get them framed.

How do you frame them ?

Either get the piece stretched (you could do this yourself) or have the piece float mounted on a piece of foam core then put into a box like frame. Or make it into a fantastic cushion!

Where do you buy the canvas from ?

Whaleys of Bradford - Medium weight artists canvas. But please experiment .. its good to find your own favourite materials.

Could you provide materials to buy at the workshop?

Unfortunately I don't have the time to organise this or cut the canvas. I will give you suggestions of where to get materials and equipment but as I use very little specialist stuff ... its best to be intuitive.

Can you just cut the loose threads or do you need to finish them off ?

I tend to just cut them as the pieces are not going to be laundered there isn't the need to sew ends through. They do not come undone unless they are big loose and blousey stitches. On signatures and titles it is important to have some small stitches at the beginning and end.

What fabrics work best for applique?

Its best to use a variety of fabrics to create interesting textures and looks. I experiment all the time with new fabrics, such as felt, linen and printed fabrics. Some fabrics fray more than others, but use this effect to your advantage. Be adventurous.

Does the canvas need to be washed before using ?

No, this is not necessary.

Whats the biggest work you have done ?

The 'Licky Lips Liberty Genie ' piece I did for Liberty window display

and the 5x 110cm square pieces I did for COLLECT at the Saatchi Gallery.

Can I use images and photos of your work or from your workshop ?

Please reference my work and website when exhibiting any photos or workshop images in exhibition or on the web. Sadly, I have had incidences of people directly copying my work.

Plagiarism is a very serious issue. Remember to respect the property of any Artist's work and ideas. It would be really appreciated if you could credit me when exhibiting workshop work and mention my website. If in doubt please contact me.

Any words of advice?

Enjoy your work and be experimental!

Use music sometimes, listen to the radio ... have a peaceful working environment away from hassle if possible ... somewhere you don't have to clear away....its important to have some space of your own.

The only thing I was taught to do on a sewing machine was to make a three dimensional free machined bowl by going around and around in circles. The rest I learnt myself on my own in a studio over 18 years of experimentation and sometimes disaster!

Theres nothing like getting on with it and trying new things to develop your skills and your own style. Mistakes happen and a lot can be learnt from them.

Remember - If you nurture your creativity, it will grow ... it takes time and patience. Learning anything is a journey which does not happen over night.

Be kind to yourself and don't compare yourself to others its the enjoyment that counts. Creative time is very therapeutic and a great way of spending time with other people across the generations.

Are you having any more workshops ?

Yes, please see my web page for the latest information. I only teach a few per year as I have a busy studio practice and a list of ongoing commissions and exhibitions. I will only teach as long as I

can remain inspiring and fresh!
www.lougardiner.co.uk

Have fun!

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