

That Darn Weave

Using darning techniques

Hilary Hollingworth

The simple stitches used in this article are borrowed from plain sewing and mending techniques. The way these stitches are used to create the image incorporates methods found in weaving, darning and composite stitches such as raised chain band.

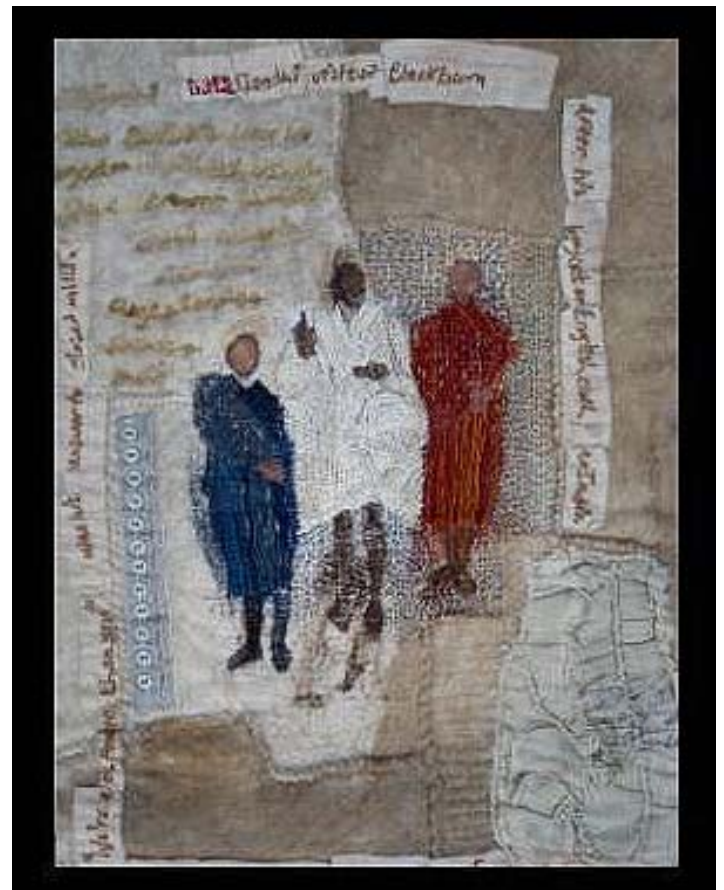
The technique uses fabric as a support for long stitches worked in different directions to form the design. These stitches create a 'warp' that is then woven across, using a needle as a shuttle.



You can see from the photo on the right how effective these darning methods can be. In 'Gandhi', the figures are formed using the darning stitches.

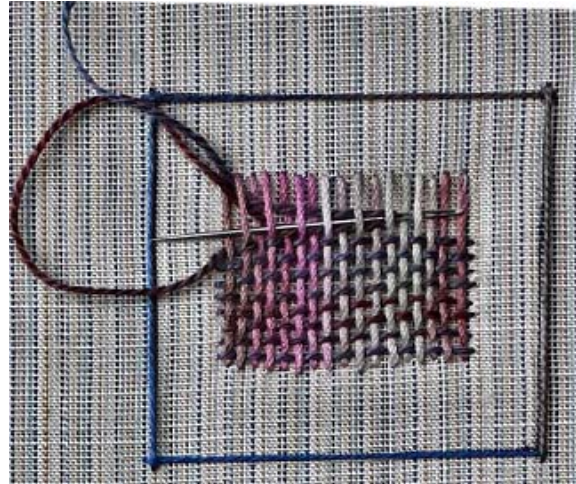
Here, the darning/weaving technique is worked in many different directions to create the cloth for the robe and, in a more open way, for the weaver figures. This piece was worked on a needle punch machined background.

We will begin, overleaf, with the basic stitch technique and then move on to examine ways of using the method.



Technique Method 1A

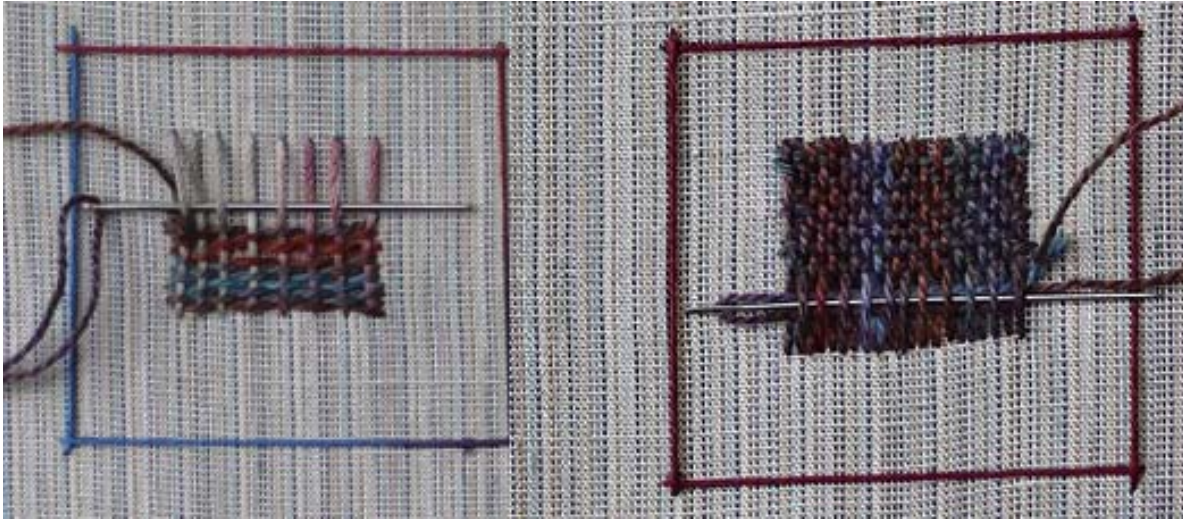
To work the basic stitches, first lay down straight stitches, below left, and then weave (darn) across the straight stitches (warp), below right.



Slightly different effects can be achieved according to whether you take the thread through the fabric at the edges, as shown below left, or take the thread around the last thread at the edge, below right.



In the same way, try stitching with the foundation (warp) stitches wide apart, as shown bottom left or close together, see bottom right.



Making a Darned Landscape

When you've tried out the stitches, why not use them to make a small embroidery. Your landscape can be a personal one based on an actual landscape or a fantasy - it is for you to decide. To create this landscape, choose a background fabric that is soft in a colour that pleases as small amounts of it can be allowed to show. Select a variety of threads in small quantities: matt and shiny, textured and smooth, fine and thick. Include torn fabric strips or ribbon if you wish and in a colour scheme to fit with your image.

The technique can be slow, particularly if you use very fine threads, so start with a small piece to begin with.

Requirements

22 cm (9 in) square of lightweight cotton fabric to use as backing.

22 cm (9 in) square of silk fabric.

An assortment of small quantities of thread including cotton perle, cotton a broder, silk twist, stranded thread and textured threads.

Firm card 6.5 cm (2½ square).

Backing fabric 8 cm (3 in) square.

Small brass ring.

15 cm (6 in) ring-frame.

Crewel needle.

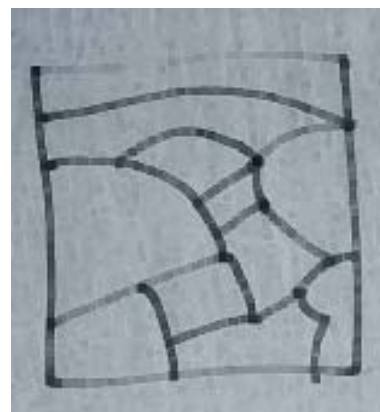
Tapestry needle.

Preparation

Mark out a 6.5 cm (2½ in) square on the fabric using a well-sharpened pencil and, within this square, mark the shapes to create the landscape (see right).

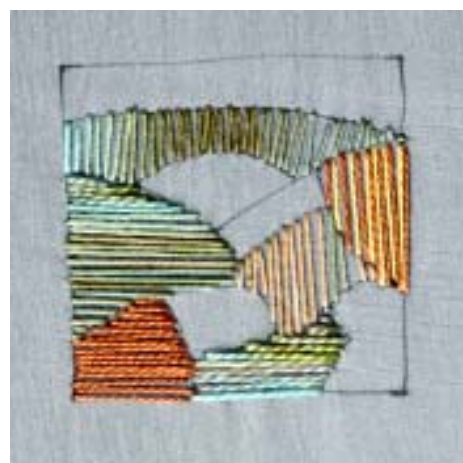
Build up the image using curved shapes for approximately 2/3rds of the marked square.

Stretch the fabric onto the ring-frame, silk on top and cotton underneath until it is tight.

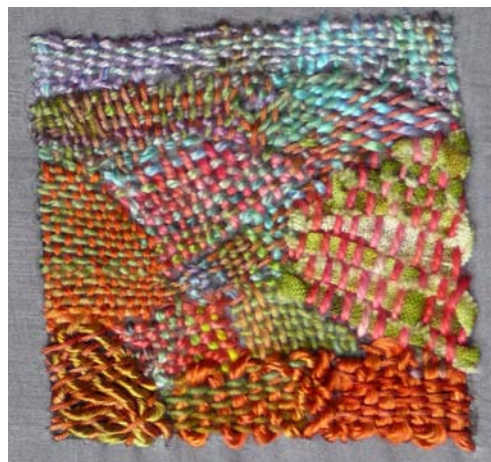


What you do

Thread the crewel needle with a smooth thread and work straight stitches to fill in the shapes you have drawn. Cover the pencil lines with the stitches and leave a small gap of fabric showing between the shapes. The stitches can change direction, be irregularly spaced, be of different length and the weight of the threads and the colour can change within each shape. Think of these stitches as the warp.



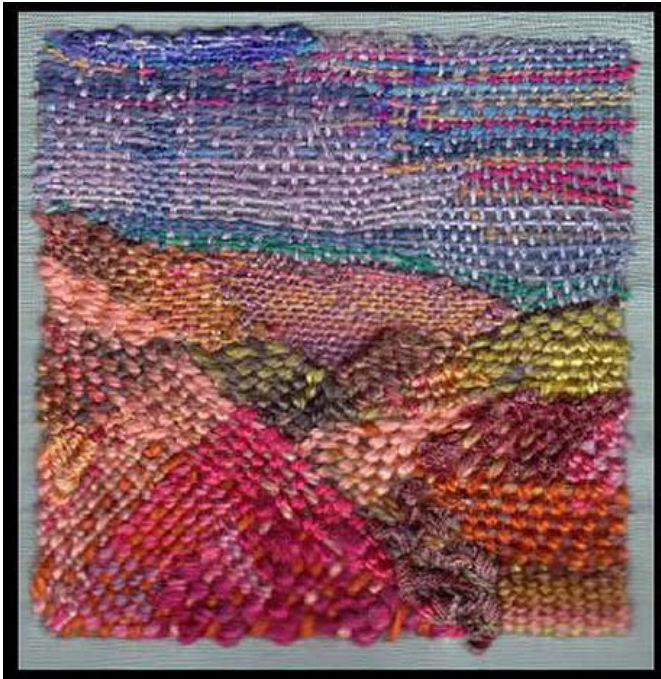
When all the shapes are filled in, thread the tapestry needle and begin to weave into the straight stitch warp without going through the fabric. From the wrong side of the fabric, bring the needle up through the fabric at the edge of a shape. Weave, by-passing the needle under and over the stitches to the edge of the shape. Turn and repeat the action passing the needle under and over the stitches so that they alternate with the previous row. Don't pull the thread too tightly or the shape will distort. It is for you to choose to take the thread back through the fabric at the edge of the shape or to turn under the thread.



Threads of different textures, weights and colours can be used to weave across the warp stitches. Variegated threads work particularly well.

To finish

Stretch the finished piece over the card. Press the edges of the backing fabric to the wrong side and cover the back of the stretched piece of work. Stitch around the outer edges. Sew the brass ring onto the back of the piece.



Here are two pieces that use this technique: 'Silk landscape', above right (now in a private collection) and 'Sunset 3'.

Even if I am working from an existing image or one of my own photographs, I create a drawing or collage to work from.

On the right you can see how my work starts with a drawing or design.

This drawing of a weaver shows how texture can represent areas of stitching.



'At the end of the day' (below left) was worked from the weaver drawing and is one of three similar designs. Each piece is different as the drawing is interpreted rather than copied.

The technique was developed with 'Weaver of Life' (below right). The image is of a weaver standing at her loom producing cloth. Here, the weaver and her work are needle woven. This piece is worked on a hand made felt background.



'Washday' (right) followed the weaver and uses the technique again in the figure and the washing. It is worked on a hand-made felted background.



Developing the Technique

The technique can be used in conjunction with other techniques and different materials. It can be successfully incorporated in with knitting, weaving and patchwork. Weave patterns and basketry techniques can be explored to develop the technique into other forms and a variety of different materials can be used to create new textures.

In 'Tower Ballroom', below, the technique is used to create an impression of movement. Gold kid has been used reflect the glamour of the Tower Ballroom, Blackpool. (In a private collection).



'Coffee Pot Rock' (right) was worked from a photograph of a landscape showing how the technique can be used to interpret a more complex scene.



'Wire' (right) is an experiment with wire and explores the mark made by the crossing of the threads in the weave structure.



Hilary Hollingworth was born in Lancashire in the North of England where she still lives and works. She is currently a senior lecturer in fashion, media and promotion and fashion textiles at the University of Huddersfield. Her work is in private collections and has been exhibited in Britain, Europe and America. Her many exhibitions include:

- Spinning a Yarn, The Knitting and Stitching Show, Birmingham, London, Dublin, Harrogate in 2006
- Miniartextil 2003, Ex Chiesa di San Francesco, Como, Italy
- Miniartextil 2003, Musée de l'Impression sur Etoffes, Mulhouse, France
- Women in Textile Art 2000, the Florida Museum of Hispanic and Latin American Art, Miami, USA.