

# A Riot of Colour

Paper, Fabric, Stitch and Beads

Isobel Moore

My current work is abstract and spontaneous, colourful and vibrant. To find raw materials and get my imagination flowing, nothing is better than rummaging through the 50p bin of my local charity shop for discarded clothes in bright colours.

I also collect colourful threads and yarns; I'm a magpie for lace, beads and buttons and a hoarder of 'interesting' papers such as maps, sheet music and pages from worn out dictionaries and text books.



I let my materials dictate how my work evolves from a very loose starting point, which could be a simple line or shape.

## Materials

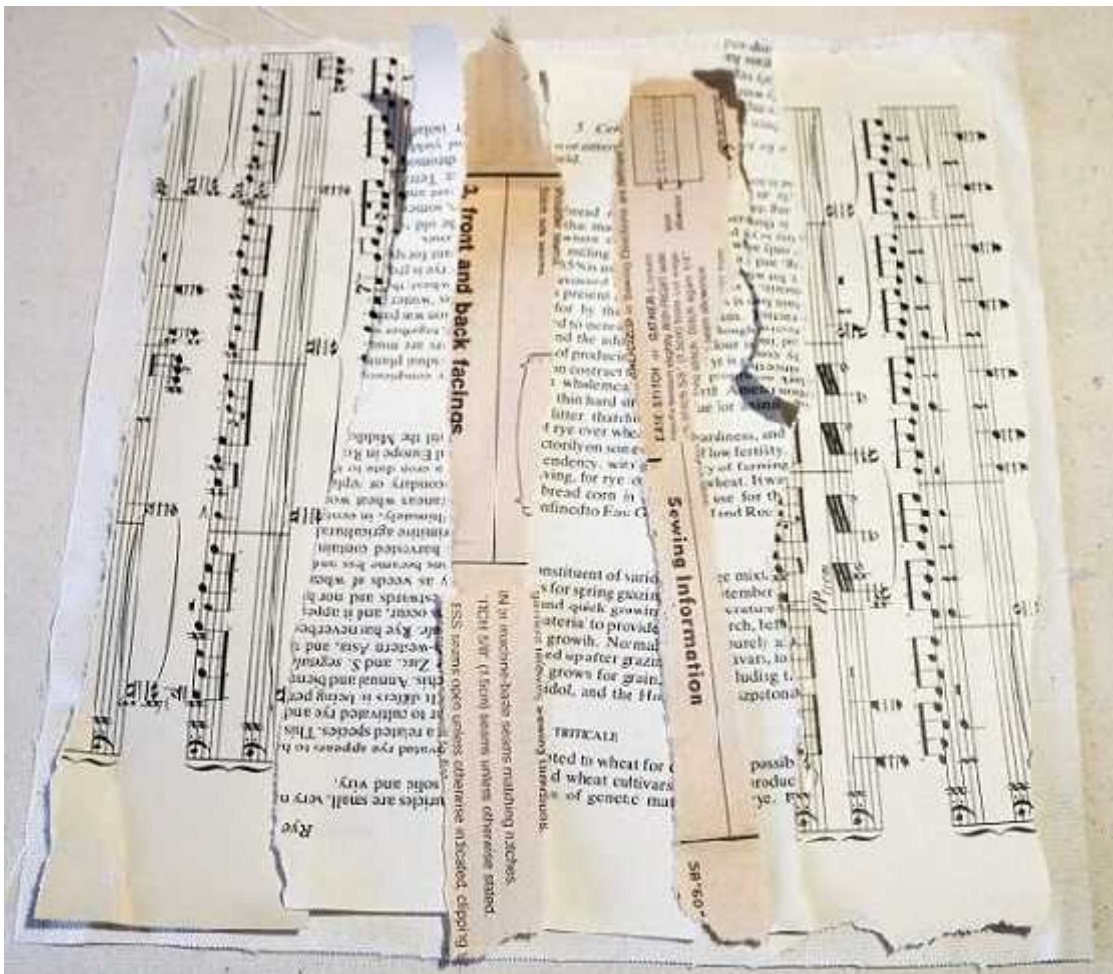
Canvas or firm calico – at least 10 in (25 cm) square.  
Stitch'n'Tear stabiliser – at least 12 in (30 cm) square. (You will only need this if using calico, not canvas).  
Bondaweb or other fusible webbing – 9 in (22 cm) square.  
Papers – sheet music, old book pages, maps etc.  
Watercolours such as Koh-i-noor.  
Acrylic wax, brush.  
Fabric strips and small pieces – not too thick – cotton, silk, lace, ribbons etc.  
Sewing machine.  
Machine embroidery and all-purpose sewing machine threads.  
Thicker hand embroidery threads (perlé, tapestry wools, novelty yarns).  
Beads, buttons, washers, sequins.  
Invisible thread.  
Tacky glue (only a tiny amount may be needed).

When you use fabric from salvaged clothes, cut the fabric from the seams and wash it in the machine (my husband calls it "bizarre wash"). Save all buttons, lace, trims and beads!

## Base

Start by preparing a paper collage base.

Iron a large piece of Bondaweb onto a piece of canvas or firm calico. Remove the backing paper, then cover the Bondaweb completely with ripped papers, making sure they overlap so the Bondaweb doesn't peek through.



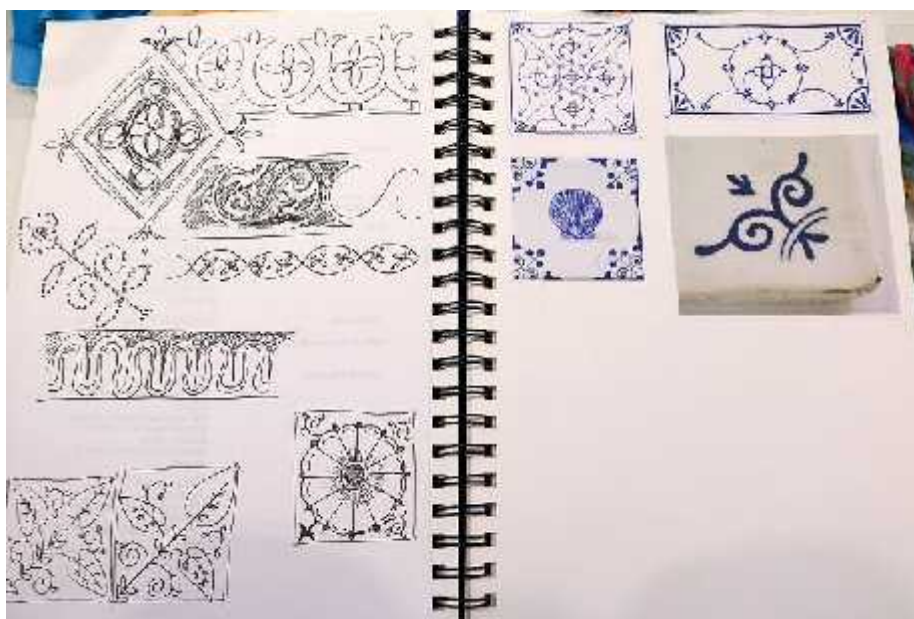
Once the papers are ironed in place, paint them with whatever paint comes to hand and use your favourite colours – don't overthink it and work quickly. Koh-i-noor watercolours are good because they allow the detail on the paper to show through.

When the paint is dry, quickly paint over the whole surface with a thin layer of acrylic wax, using it to stick down any loose edges of overlapping paper.



While you are waiting for the wax to dry, begin to think about the main shape or flow of your embroidery. I like to work in organic shapes - mostly curves, spirals and circles.

For this piece, my sketchbooks and photos were used to find simple organic curves from these tile patterns that caught my eye. The lines branch off, creating spirals which are particularly good from a design point of view:



## Gather your materials

Your painted background will give you a starting point for which colours to use. You might not use half of them but it makes it easier to be spontaneous if you can just reach out and find what you need instantly.



Make sure you also have a rummage through bead boxes for interesting bits and pieces to use as a focal point.

Again, not everything will be used but playing with buttons and beads gets my creativity flowing. It is also a wonderful procrastination exercise and I'm very good at that!



## Beginning to stitch

The paper collage on canvas is usually stiff enough to stitch without any extra backing but if it needs stabilising, use a firm stabiliser like Stitch'n'Tear behind the work.

Cut the stabiliser so it is slightly larger all round than your background. You don't need to pin it in place or bond it – once you start to stitch, it will stay in place.

Begin by stitching down narrow strips of fabric (1 to 1.5 cm wide) roughly where you want the main lines of your design to be, using whichever thread you like. Don't bother cutting the strips on the bias or anything fancy - just use a pair of scissors – but there's nothing to stop you using a rotary cutter, if you prefer. Use the normal presser foot to stitch, with the feed teeth up as normal and a longish stitch length.



You can see that my line of fabric is slightly curved (above left) – I achieve this by guiding and moving the fabric gently as I stitch. Don't pull at it as you might bend the needle.

You don't need to pin anything in place first and the paper collage would make this too difficult to do anyway. Just start stitching!

Depending on which side of a curve you stitch, different effects can be achieved. If you stitch the outside of the curve, the inside edge will pucker up and crease.

If you stitch the inside of the curve, the outside edge will stick upwards away from the surface. You can exploit this by leaving it sticking up for texture, or fold it down, enclosing the stitched line. This gives a very smooth, finished outside edge to your curve rather than a raw edge. It's up to you.

You can see the fabric starting to stick up here, right, on the left side of the foot.

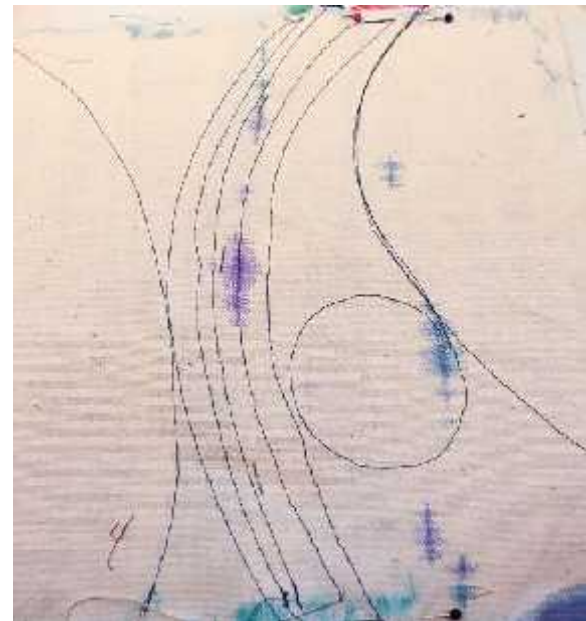


You can “audition” strips as you go along, before you stitch them down (below left).



The photo, above right, shows an interesting curved shape that was experimented with and looks good enough to create in fabric.

To do this, draw the outline of your shape lightly in pencil, then stitch over the pencil line. Pin the fabric you want to use over the top of your shape, completely covering it:



Turn the work over and stitch over the line again from the back. You may want to carefully swap the pins over to the back, so you don't stitch over them.

Remember that your bobbin colour is now the colour that will show on the surface of the work. Flip the work back to the front again and you can see your stitched line, hopefully in the right place on your fabric.

You can now trim away the excess around your shape. Be careful not to snip too close to the edges, as the fabric can fray and pull away from your stitching. Once you have trimmed the edge, you can stitch over it with a narrow satin stitch to secure it further.



When you have stitched a few strips down, you can add some lines of automatic stitches (and fancy patterns, if you have them).

Continue adding fabric strips and larger areas of colour or interesting fabrics to build up the design; use the colours of the stitched fabrics to decide which to add next. Go with your intuition. Keep placing bits and pieces on top and move things around until you are happy with their placement.

### A little bit of Design Theory

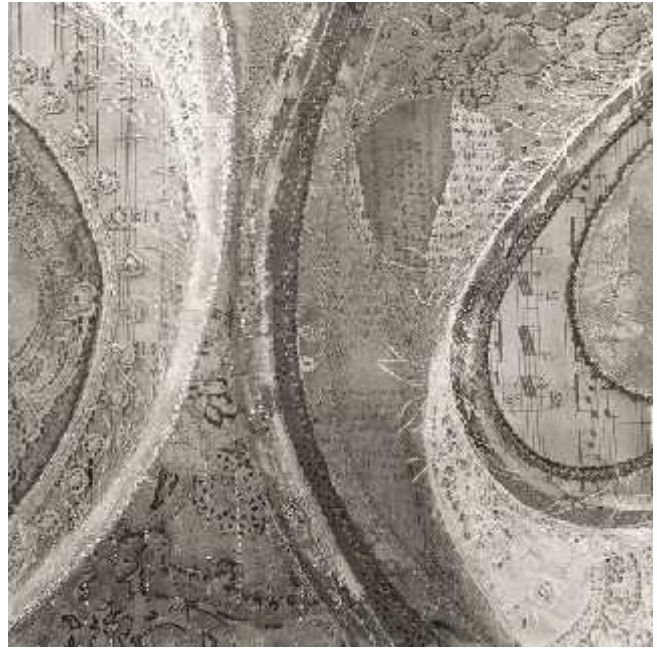
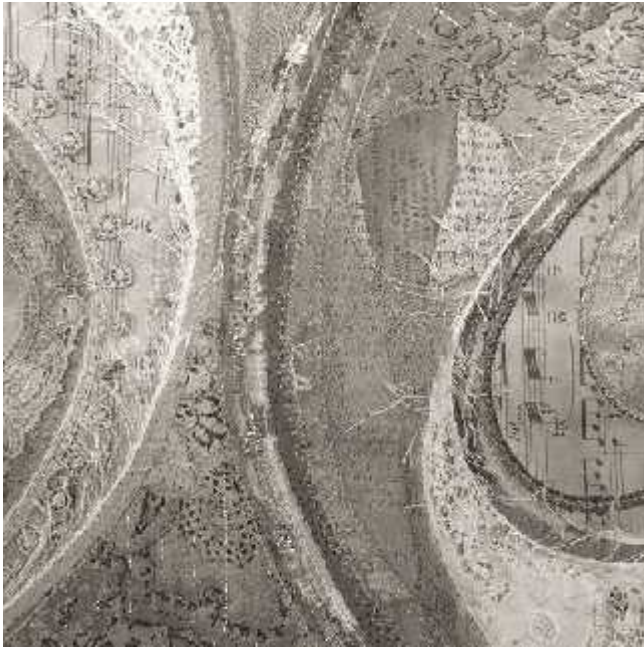
Try and use a core selection of colours that are close together on the colour wheel, for example purple, blue and green. Then add a few complementary colours (colours that are opposite on the colour wheel) as accent colours, such as pink or orange. Complementary colours create contrast or highlight an area of interest but be careful not to use too many different colours as the overall effect can then be a bit of a “dog’s dinner”!



To help you decide what to add next, it can be helpful to take a photo on your phone or tablet, crop the image and then look at the image on the screen.

You can also play with the picture editing settings and convert the image to greyscale or monochrome – this helps to highlight the different values or tones (light or dark). You can then add darker or lighter lines, to make sure you have areas of contrast with the dark and light areas. If your design is too similar in tone all over, the overall effect will be flat and a bit dull. Again, don't overdo the contrast or it will look messy.

You can see the design is looking a bit flat (below left) and how it changes with some darker lines added (below right)



When your main areas of fabric are in place, you can embellish the lines and edges with more stitching, including satin stitch edges and more automatic utility patterns. You can also use free motion machine embroidery patterns, like vermicelli, to fill any larger areas.

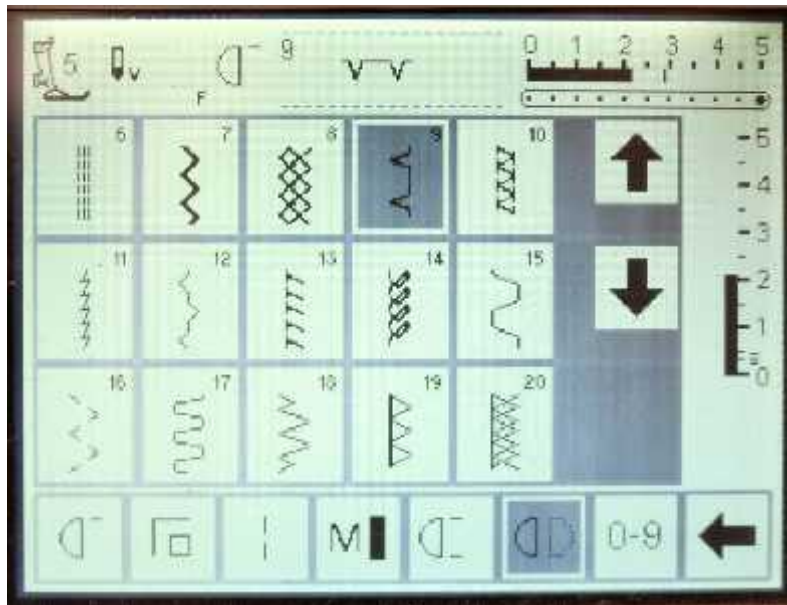




## Building up the texture

It's time to start adding thicker threads to build some texture and depth. There are two ways of doing this: you can couch the thick threads by hand, with a simple holding stitch across the thread at intervals or you can use a machine stitch.

I use the blind hem stitch as it doesn't obscure the thick thread with too much stitch. It is the stitch greyed out in the photo, below.



Stitch slightly to one side of the thread to be couched and every few stitches there'll be a stitch that goes across the thick thread to stitch it down. In the photo, below, you see couching down a fancy yarn.



The second way of adding thick threads is to use cable stitch, a machine embroidery technique. You need to use smooth threads that you can wind onto a machine bobbin – perlé is perfect.

Wind your thick thread onto an empty bobbin, replace it in the bobbin case and then carefully loosen the bobbin tension screw to allow the thread to flow out smoothly. Remember the rule: righty tighty, lefty loosey!



Please don't be afraid to do this – the screw is there for a reason and you can always tighten it again. [You can make a mark on the bobbin with a Sharpie pen of the screw's original position if you are worried about losing your tension after this project.] Hold the bobbin case over a piece of felt while you adjust it, in the unlikely case that you loosen it too much and the screw falls out.

With a drop-in bobbin case, you may not be able to reach the bobbin tension screw, so when you replace the bobbin, you will need to bypass the tension plate. Dip the needle down and up as usual to bring up the bobbin thread and check the thread is flowing smoothly. You will need to listen carefully as you stitch and stop immediately if it gets snarled up. It shouldn't.

Remember, you will now need to stitch from the BACK of your work. Turn your work back yo front and use the previously stitched lines as a guide as you stitch. You can stitch with the normal presser foot or use a free motion embroidery foot and create more swirling lines or patterns.



### Add final embellishments

When you have completed your machine stitching, you can add the beads and sequins. I use stitches like French knots to secure sequins or flat beads with a central hole. For heavier embellishments like washers, a tiny dab of tacky glue will help to hold it in place before you stitch. If you don't want your stitches to show against the washer, use an invisible thread.

You can see my finished piece on page 1.

Isobel Moore is a textile artist who works mainly with recycled materials and machine embroidery. She creates colourful and vibrant work which celebrates the often overlooked beauty that can be found in discarded and unwanted materials.

She teaches classes in East Sussex and offers talks and machine embroidery workshops to small groups.

You can contact Isobel through her website [www.isobelmoore.co.uk](http://www.isobelmoore.co.uk)

### Suppliers

Acrylic Wax, Koh-i-noor paints from Art Van Go

[www.artvango.co.uk](http://www.artvango.co.uk)

Beads from Beads for Beauty

[www.fabbeads.co.uk](http://www.fabbeads.co.uk)

Canvas, Bondaweb, Stitch'n'Tear from

Barnyarns [www.barnyarns.co.uk](http://www.barnyarns.co.uk)

Hand embroidery silk threads from Mulberry

Silks [www.mulberrysilks-patriciawood.com](http://www.mulberrysilks-patriciawood.com)

Hand embroidery threads and fabrics 21<sup>st</sup>

Century Yarns [www.21stcenturyyarns.com](http://www.21stcenturyyarns.com)

Machine and hand embroidery threads from Oliver Twists

[www.etsy.com/uk/shop/OliverTwistsFibres](http://www.etsy.com/uk/shop/OliverTwistsFibres)

For everything else look in charity shops, jumble sales, haberdashers, DIY shop for washers.

#### *USA and Canada*

Calico from Dharma Trading

[www.dharmatrading.com](http://www.dharmatrading.com)

Canvas from Dick Blick [www.dickblick.com](http://www.dickblick.com)

Beads, threads, Bondaweb (Wonder Under) from Joann [www.joann.com](http://www.joann.com)

#### *Australia and New Zealand*

Calico from Lincraft [www.lincraft.com.au](http://www.lincraft.com.au)

Acrylic wax from [www.kraftkolour.net.au](http://www.kraftkolour.net.au)

Vliesofix (Bondaweb) from Punch with Judy

[www.punchwithjudy.com.au](http://www.punchwithjudy.com.au)

