



MIX and stitch

by dorit e lisha



Photos stitched inside the artwork are by Stephen Bay of Bay Images.

my sewing machine has been my favorite art tool for the last 10 years or so. It is always standing on my work table, ready to go. I use it on most of my artwork, whether it's made of fabric or paper. Many times sewing replaces the use of glue, since I attach the layered papers or fabrics by stitching them to the background. Sometimes, as a means of drawing or painting, I create lines and shapes just by stitching. I also like the texture that the stitching adds to the artwork.

Above: "Cacti and Succulents", accordion book • Approximately 8" x 8" (Detail opposite) • Each page has a photograph of a plant as the focal point. Various papers stitched in place complete the collage with free-motion stitching adding texture and detail; different thread colors and tails add further interest. Small pieces of handmade dyed paper from Mexico, randomly placed, accent each page.

I grew up with my mother and grandmother sewing constantly. Buying new clothes wasn't always affordable, so they sewed dresses for themselves and for the girls in the family, many times recycling old dresses or big shirts. For a short while as a stay-at-home mom, I made my living by sewing and selling my designed clothing. Later, when I became more

involved with art, it was a natural step for me to connect stitching with art.

Printmaking is another important part of my art. I make prints usually without using a printing press, and very often I combine my prints, or parts of them, in my mixed-media stitched art.

The process of my creation is very intuitive and spontaneous. I start with a general idea that may have been inspired by a piece of fabric or an image I saw, or a color combination that looked appealing to me.

I select a piece of paper or fabric that will serve as a base, foundation, or substrate. Oftentimes I use an existing, unfinished artwork, like a



tips

- If you want to add a page to an existing book (such as an altered book), start by sewing the piece separately. Glue it into the book as the last step, so it still looks like it was stitched directly into the book.
- Stitching on a large paper is easy if the paper is soft and bendable. You can roll it under the machine's arm, just like you would a large quilt.
- Keep your needles for stitching paper separate from those for fabric sewing.
- Combining paper and fabric in the same artwork adds some very interesting texture.

monoprint I did in the past that didn't feel like a finished piece. It serves as a great colorful and textured background. I also tend to add sections of prints I have lying around my studio into this mix. These were made using different printmaking techniques (like collagraph and screen printing). I treat my fabric and paper the same way when collage stitching and often mix the two in one artwork.

Here's how to create your own stitched collage.

directions

1. Sketch a draft of your desired composition.
2. Place the focal piece on the foundation and start adding the smaller pieces around it, moving them from one place to another until you are satisfied with your composition.
3. Pin the pieces down or use a touch of a glue stick to keep them in place while you start stitching. If you have a free-motion stitching foot for your machine it would make the stitching easier.
4. Start by stitching the focal piece into place, then move to the surrounding pieces with or without lifting the needle. You can vary the look of the stitch by going from a regular running stitch to a zigzag in different widths. You can also alternate the color of the thread you are using.
5. When all the pieces are stitched into place you may add some more "lines" in other parts of your collage to emphasize or add texture to certain areas.
6. If you want a clean and finished look on the back side, add one more backing piece of fabric or paper by stitching it only to the surrounding edges of the artwork. ●

Opposite: The focal point of this stitched collage (12¾" × 17½") is a screen print of a vintage photo. A variety of papers, fabrics, feathers, and some smaller images complete the background. (Detail right). Further stitching was added to enhance specific areas.

materials

- A foundation: This could be a blank piece of heavy paper such as Strathmore 65-lb. or a piece of upholstery fabric in a comfortable size for you. It could also be a collage or a print that you have started and didn't quite know how to finish.
- A focal point piece of fabric or paper with an image
- Several smaller pieces of fabric, paper, and fibers in colors that will complement the main image
- Sewing machine and thread

