

Icing on The Stitch: Hand stitching adds so much

by Jill Kerttula

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Host Susan Brubaker Knapp with Jill Kerttula

The majority of the work on my art quilts is done with machine stitching, however I also use hand stitching to add texture or detail that is must not possible with machine stitching. I use it to add highlights, contrasting texture, and stitched elements to my work.

I am not a technical expert on either embroidery or the correct supplies to use, so I am not going to go into individual stitches or materials here. I will leave that to others for whom that is their focus. I will give examples of when and why I use hand stitches within my work.

You can see how different a similar piece of artwork looks with machine stitching only (left) and with hand stitching (right). (figure 1)

Stitch as a painterly stroke

I have a background in painting. One of my favorite parts of painting is when I go in and add the small highlights that often give life to the painting. Hand stitches can do the same for stitched work. One or two stitches with embroidery floss or other threads can add that same accent to a machine stitched areas of your art quilt. This example shows how I used them to bring out the highlights details in the face. (figure 2)

Use hand stitching to:

- Highlight areas for emphasis
- Add details

Stitch as texture

Machine stitches can only go so far in creating texture. Usually the stitches, as I use them, are fine and flat. When I want a coarser texture, or a texture to contrast with the machine stitches, I will use hand stitches. Notice that most of my hand stitches are running stitches or seed stitches. I also use French knots. I will use those to create an even more

course or dimensional texture. In this example, I am not using the stitches for a design or for their specific beauty but for texture. (figure 3)

Use stitching to:

- Create a contrasting texture to the machine stitching
- To add a color to the design in a bolder way than machine stitching would

Stitch as shape

Sometimes I want to create shapes that are not made by the photo I am working with or with piecing of fabric. For that I may use machine stitching or hand stitching or a combination of both. This example shows how the stitching adds a new shape. (figure 4)

Use stitching to:

- To add additional outline shapes or images to the design
- To add shapes of stitch to the design

Stitch with beads

Sometimes hand stitching is not enough of a highlight or contrast. In that case, I may add some beadwork. Again, I only add beads to highlight areas and use the simplest of beadwork, so please see this example as an idea of what beading can bring to your work not a tutorial on beading! (figure 5) ■

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figure 1



figure 2



figure 3

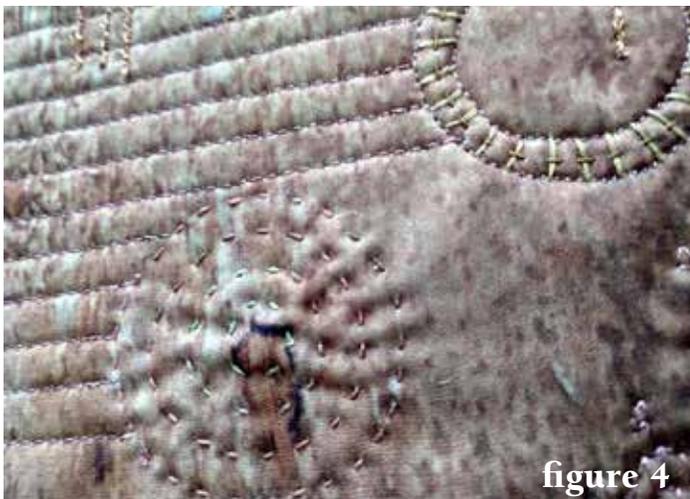


figure 4



figure 5

Process photos courtesy of the artist