

Introduction to Thread Painting

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Thread Painting is a technique where the artist prints a photograph onto a piece of fabric, and stitches by machine using free motion (feed dogs dropped, and a darning foot on the machine) over the image so that the image is—usually—completely covered in thread.



How To Prepare for this Workshop:

First start with the image! To keep this workshop easy, I am recommending you find a photo of a flower, with leaves. These are easier to do than animals and people. If you use your own photograph, that is great. If you choose an image by someone else, ask permission. If they decline, choose another. I want to respect the ownership rights of the person who took the photo. I always give the photographer credit if I thread paint their picture and post it publicly. The photo has to be in focus, with great detail visible (high resolution).

Next print the image. I recommend that you print it on a good quality cotton inkjet printable fabric, or have the image printed for you. I have used a variety of commercially available products successfully. You can even print them on your own fabric using a product called Bubble Jet set. It is best if the photo on your fabric has the same colors and values as close to the original photograph as possible, so read the instructions on the package.

You are limited to an 8 1/2" x 11" sheet for most home printers, although I recently purchased a wider format printer which gives me 13" x 19" prints. If you choose to have your image printed for you, you have several options. Spoonflower.com works well, and gives you greater size choices. If you are new to the technique, I recommend starting with a smaller project (not bigger than 8" x 10").

Next, print out another copy of the picture you want to use on photo paper. Bring it along. You will need to use it as a visual reference as you work.

Your Machine:

Having a machine in good working order, with the right foot, needles, and thread will make or break your experience. I have found different machines do make a difference. I love my old Bernina, but have more trouble doing this on my newer Pfaff, although I love that machine for basic sewing. If you have ever used your machine for free-motion quilting, and it worked well, it will be fine for thread painting.

If you are purchasing a machine, and do not want to spend a lot of money, look for a good used machine rather than buying a new machine. Believe it or not, my 14 year old Bernina is still running like a champ. I have it serviced yearly at a reputable dealer.

Here is what to pack:

Extra Bobbins. You may want to pre-wind several in the colors you are mostly using for the thread painting, in the same thread as listed below, or bottom line threads.

Needles: Size 70 and 80 Sharp (I like Microtex Sharp Needles by Schmetz). I also like size 60 needles for machine quilting with silk thread(optional) on the fabric around the photo.

Thread: I recommend trying to match the colors in the photograph. I have used everything type of thread in my thread box, but I prefer a good quality thread like Aurifil or Superior Threads 50 weight. I also own a large amount of commercial embroidery thread, which I have also used. I will bring those for your use, as sometimes you will need small amounts of a color you did not pack. It tends to be shiny in the picture, whereas the cotton thread is more matte. Avoid using very cheap thread.

Darning Foot for your machine.

Extras: You should consider bringing a portable light to enhance the normal lighting on the machine, small scissors to clip threads. You may consider reading glasses or Mag Eyes. You need to see what you are doing. Also an extension table for your machine is very helpful to keep your work flat while sewing.

Fabric:

I mount the picture onto another piece of fabric using Misty Fuse adhesive. (NOTE: I bring a large roll of 20" wide Misty Fuse to the workshop, it is \$3.20/yd). Avoid thicker fusible webbing, as they can gum up the needle. I choose a fabric to enhance the picture. If you need help with this step, please pack coordinating fabrics, perhaps in fat quarter or 1/2 yard amounts, and wait until you get there for more instruction.

Bring cotton batting, and backing fabric in the same amounts as above. Alternatively, I have fused a fabric printed photograph onto white muslin, and backed it with two layers of a sturdy tear away or fusible embroidery stabilizer for pieces I plan to frame.

