



Stitch a Portrait information

Tools, equipment and materials needed

- Domestic sewing machine (must be able to disengage the feed-dogs).
- Extension table (at least A4 size).
- Darning/embroidery foot + universal foot.
- A pack of jeans/denim needles (or your own preference for heavy duty sewing).
- Usual sewing paraphernalia: sharp scissors, pins, tape-measure, sewing machine oil etc .
- Image (colour photograph or drawing scaled to size of intended finished work + tracing paper + canvas (try to keep size of either image or canvas no larger than 50cm on any one side – we have a limited time together)
- Fine-liner, fibre-tipped pen (to draw image onto tracing paper before stitching).
- A collection of sewing threads (not embroidery) and scraps of fabric (patterned and plain) relevant to chosen image.
- A collection of see-through fabrics like tulle and silk and organza in as many colours and tones as possible – only small pieces are needed so go for variety rather than length. These fabrics are incredibly useful.
- Extra bobbins

I prefer drawing portraits directly onto my canvas (and therefore not using tracing paper). I have been drawing for my whole life and am therefore confident of achieving a likeness. Please don't feel that you have to go this route. I have developed a technique of transferring the image onto the canvas using tracing paper which I shall share with you during our workshop.

If you wish to draw your own image directly onto the canvas, these are the materials and tools you will need.

- A set of *Derwent Inktense* coloured medium (like pencils, blocks or sticks)
- Some suitable paintbrushes (I use the cheap bristle brushes when painting onto fabric)

Please note that although I have taught many beginners that there is no difference between drawing/stitching a portrait or say, a bird or a shaped pattern, there is an added tension in portraits; to achieve a likeness. This can become quite disabling to even experienced stitchers and artists.

I advise students to bare this in mind when choosing their image from which to stitch. Keep it as simple and clear as possible. Look at how the light falls onto the face – shadows and angles are important and lend interest to the image. If possible, manipulate the image on a program like Photoshop or Picassa to heighten the colour, contrast, outline etc before printing it to the correct size.

Students do need to have an eye for tone and shape (two aspects that most quilters are already extremely comfortable with and adept at). The importance of recognizing negative space as an actual shape (like a nose, eye or mouth) cannot be underestimated in portraits as we tend to focus on the eyes and then skip over the space between them.

I have included images from some of the many portraits that I have done over the past couple of decades:

The first image shows, the original photograph, the sketch and then the stitched piece with details (using only tulle/netting on canvas).

The second is an image of my son entitled “**The Tattoo Artist**” and this is created from a variety of fabrics, threads on canvas that has been stretched over a wooden frame.

The third is a portrait of my daughter created using similar materials to that of my son and is entitled “**Songbird**”.

Below these is “**She May be Little but She is Fierce**” showing the work in 3 different stages.

Next to this is a portrait of my mother-in-law called “**Looking Forward into the Past**” in which I have added used teabags and a heavily threaded outline, from the *Inktense* coloured drawing to the finished fibre piece.