

Padded Work Box Lid

By Rainillt de Bello Marisco

Materials

Splendor Silk Floss, Silver Wire, Au Ver A Soie Thread, Silk taffeta, Wool Felt, Silk Bunting

Background and History

Stump work or Padded work was an embroidery technique used extensively towards the end of the 16th century and well into the 17th century. It began showing up during the 15th century when it was used in ecclesiastical works such as alms bags and alter hangings.

A burse with an image of St Bartholomew from the 1500's features an appliquéd figure done with split stitch on linen, padded then laid over a silk ground. As the works evolved it, padded work was used to give dimension to the elaborate gold worked alter hangings and church vestments.



Burse, German 15th century. Appliquéd padded work

During the Elizabethan times, detached buttonhole stitch was used to decorate many articles of clothing, from coifs to jackets. In the early 17th century this became fashionable to create elaborate scenes on boxes and other accessories.



Elizabethan Bookbinding and Sweet Bag with raised embroidery

Embroidery

The rabbits were embroidered with split stitch with 2 strands of silk floss onto linen ground. The stitching was done following the contours of the rabbits body to give shape and shading to the embroidery. The slips were then cut out and the linen trimmed to 1/8 all the way around to make them easier to appliqué to the silk. The slips were then whip stitched down around the edge of the embroidery, turning the linen in as it was stitched.



Rabbits in progress

Some of the smaller parts of the rabbits were stuffed as they were appliquéd to make it easier to stuff them. Once they were all stitched with the exception of a small opening, they were stuffed with silk bunting. It is more likely they used cotton bunting to pad them with but the silk was available and gave the right softness to the project as opposed to a synthetic modern stuffing. The final hole was stitched closed and the rabbits were then contoured by drawing a modified running or stab stitch through the appliqué and the padding along the contour lines.

The flowers and grass blades were done with detached buttonhole stitch, a common stitch in the Elizabethan times as shows up on clothing and accessories. The grass was done with French knots to add texture to the piece.



Detached buttonhole stitch on an Elizabethan Coat

The wings of the butterfly were done by working buttonhole stitch over a small piece of silver wire, and then formed, set into the silk background fabric and loose detached buttonhole stitch was used to fill in the center of the wings.

The entire piece was then mounted over wool felting and set into the box. In period the entire box would have been done with the padded embroidery, usually creating elaborate scenes, but since this was originally a project that was to be used as a prize therefore just the lid was made.

Conclusions

The work was fascinating to do, and actually very fun. The raised and detached work added another dimension to the project it became a challenge to think of filling the space not just on the surface but how to combine different heights. The hardest part was to create a "scene" or vignette using the rabbits which was one of the designs for the pentathlon prizes. The animals were a common theme in the 17th century stump work but not common in the Elizabethan and earlier examples.

Images

1. Wienhausen, Kloster, Träger. Image accessed 11/10/2004. Bildarchiv zur Kunst und Architektur. <http://www.bildindex.de/bilder/mi13621d07a.jpg>
2. Epstein, Kathleen. *British Embroidery: Curious Works from the Seventeenth Century*. Curious Works Press. 1999. ISBN-0-87935-186-1 pg 43
3. Metropolitan Museum of Art. NY, NY. Elizabethan Bag. Accessed 10/18/2003. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ho/08/euwb/ho_1986.300.1.htm
4. Picture of the embroidery in progress. Taken 10/25/2004 by author.
5. VA Museum Accession No T 259-1926, Shown in "A treatise on the plaited braid stitch" by Leon Conrad Feature in Fine Lines Magazine ,Summer 2003

Further References

Fabulous pictures of various types of couched work, including various opus anglicanum copes, the Golden Fleece vestments (back cover) and a wonderful or nué dragon badge on p. 31

Historic Needlework Resources. Accessed 7/18/2004. <http://medieval.webcon.net.au/index.html>

King, Donald, and Santana Levey. *The Victoria & Albert Museum's Textile Collection: Embroidery in Britain from 1200 to 1750*. New York: Canopy Books, 1993 reprinted in 2001.

Schuetz, Marie, and Signid Muller-Christensen. Text translated by Donald King. *A Pictorial History of Embroidery*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964.

Staniland, Kay. *Medieval Craftsmen: Embroiderers*. British Museum Press, London, 1991.