

A free project, compliments of...

Terri Stegmiller

All information provided herein is done so in good faith. Terri Stegmiller takes no responsibility for problems or issues encountered by the reader when using any of this information. Always make sure you take appropriate health and safety precautions when working with your supplies and equipment.

Thread Sketching

Sketch on your quilts just as you would in your sketchbook

Materials

- A quilt sandwich (three layers=top fabric/batting/backing fabric)
- Thread - usually black
- Pins
- Black & white copy of your artwork or a drawing on paper
- Sewing machine capable of free-motion stitching
- Tweezers or seam ripper

There is a saying that I have heard and believe in. ***“If you can draw it, you can stitch it!”***

I also believe in the saying “practice makes perfect”. Although I usually don’t strive for perfection. I prefer to have fun and embrace the imperfections.

When I approach thread sketching I prefer my sketches to have the appearance that it might have if you saw the image in a sketchbook—a rough sort of pencil or ink line, or several lines that are meant to portray one single line or shape. Therefore, I don’t strive for a single, perfect line.



I have three methods I use to create thread sketches. One of those is to simply go at it with no guides or patterns. I have an image in my head and I visually map where I am putting it on my quilt. I don’t use this method a lot, but the spontaneous and carefree feeling this gives can be very fun.

Another method I use to create thread sketches is to draw my design or shape directly onto the quilt with a water-erasable marker. They usually are a blue ink that once wet with water will disappear. When I use this method, I usually just mark some basic guidelines and don’t draw out all the details. After I have stitched over the guidelines, I will spritz some water on any blue lines that I can still see. I use a towel to soak up excess water on the spritzed areas. Sometimes the blue lines can be stubborn and don’t go away with one water spritzing. I just repeat the process until no blue lines are there anymore.

The third method I use for thread sketching is the one I am focusing on in this tutorial. While I don't have an official name for this method, I think of it as a pattern guided method.

Many times I like to thread sketch a design I've drawn in my sketchbook or a design I've previously created in another piece of art. I will scan or photograph my art work or sketch and open it in my photo editing software (Photoshop Elements). From there I will adjust the contrast so the lines are nice and dark. If I am working from a piece of art with color, I start by removing the color from the image and then adjusting the contrast.

Next I resize the image to the size I want and print it out on basic printer paper.

Alternatively, if your sketch or image is already the correct size for your thread sketching project, you can use tracing paper and a black permanent marker to trace the image. Or simply just draw an image onto paper.

The papers I like thread sketching with the most are basic 20 lb. printer/copy paper, tracing paper, or blank newsprint paper. A heavy paper is harder to stitch through and harder to remove or pick out when you are done.



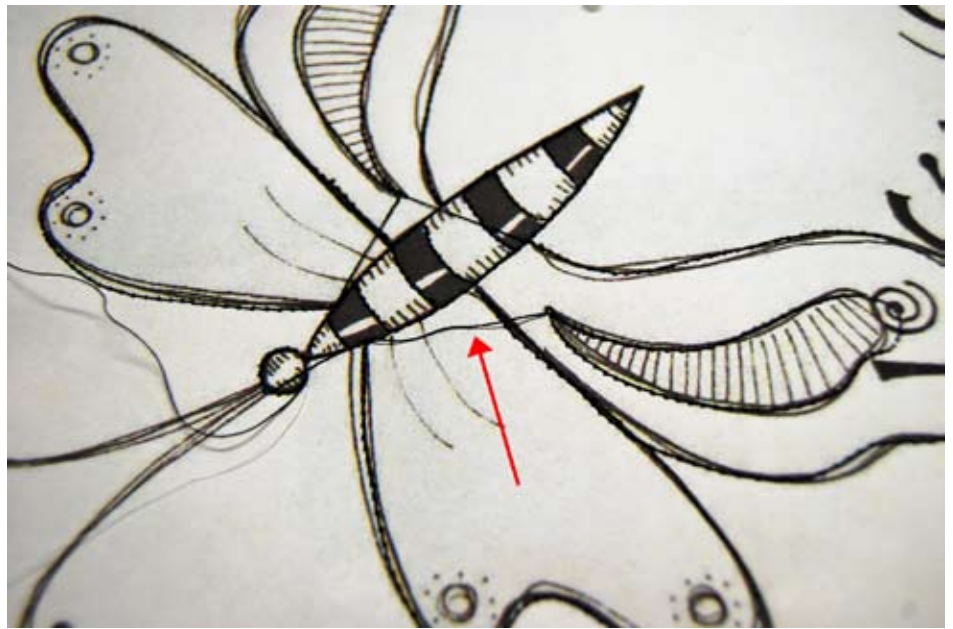
Once I have my image printed out or traced, I pin it in place on my quilt. I always thread sketch on a quilt that has already been background quilted. I dislike trying to add background quilting after my main focal design is in place. And besides, I like the background quilting textures to show through my focal design.

At left you see the paper pattern is pinned to my quilt. I try to place the pins where they aren't in my way for stitching, but I know this isn't always possible. The image I am using for my pattern is what the image looked like in my sketchbook. I am only going to thread sketch the butterfly at this time.

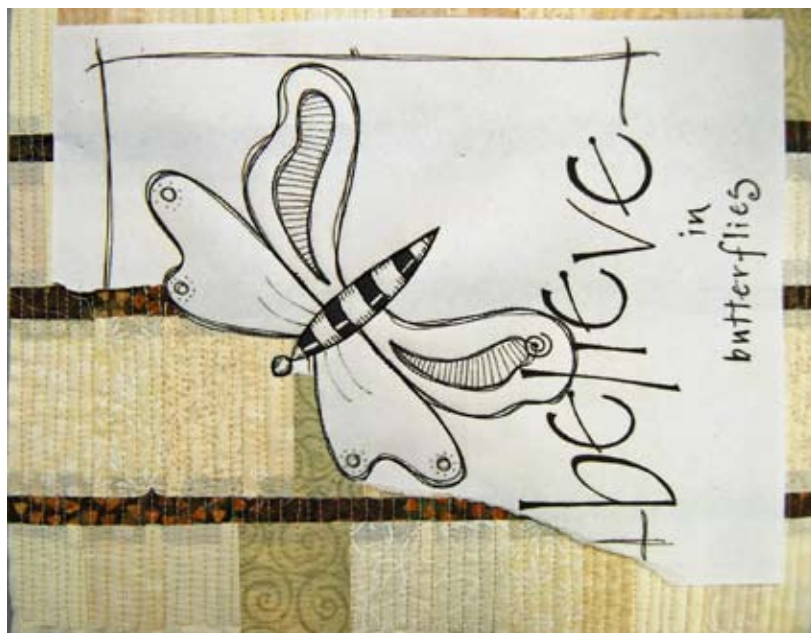
Set your sewing machine up for free-motion stitching and choose your thread color. I like using black thread, but remember you can use whatever color you like.

Choose an area on your design to start stitching. I don't worry about having to start and stop when I stitch. If I complete an area and need to move to another area, I don't remove the work from the machine and snip the threads. I prefer to simply raise the presser foot, move the quilt to the next area for stitching, and lower the presser foot and needle. I always stitch several tiny stitches at the beginning and ends of my stitching lines.

In the photo at right you can see the red arrow pointing to a thread. This is a thread that connects a stopping point from one section to a starting point to another section. When I am done with all my stitching on a particular design I then remove the entire quilt from under the sewing machine and snip all the threads carefully on the front and back of the quilt.



When I stitch the design through the paper I try to only stitch each design line once. Sometimes I will stitch over a small area a second time to get to a new area. But I try to do this very little because the more stitching lines there are in one area will cause the paper removal to be a bit more challenging.



When I do this paper pattern stitching, I don't stitch any of the small details. Again, that would create a very challenging time of removing the paper.

Once I have one stitching line over all the major design lines, I remove the paper. I do this as carefully as I can to help prevent the stitches from pulling up, but know that some stitches will pull somewhat and look loose. Don't worry about that right now.

Note in the image at left that I didn't stitch the antennae on my butterfly. I chose to add that after I removed the paper.

Here is my butterfly with all the paper removed. I like to use my seam ripper to help pick paper out of the smaller areas of my design, but a tweezer will work also.

After the paper is removed I then proceed to stitch over the same lines I've already stitched. I usually go over the same lines two to three times. I think this gives it the sketchy look. I don't worry about the stitched lines being right on top of each other either, I like the look of a loosely stitched design. Going over the first stitching lines will also secure any stitches that may have pulled loose when removing the paper.



After I've restitched the original design lines, I then thread sketch the details on my design. For this design I added the circular shapes in the upper wings, the antennae, the zigzag lines in the lower wing area and in the body of the butterfly. After I have finished my detail stitching I then snip all the loose, connecting threads as before.

That's how I do it! In the quilt example shown here, I added the word "believe" and a border around the design. To do that I used my water-erasable marker and wrote the word and drew the border line. Then I stitched over them.

You can also add color to your thread sketches. In the example, I've colored in with water-soluble crayons and then brushed over that with textile medium. You can also use textile paints or inks.

