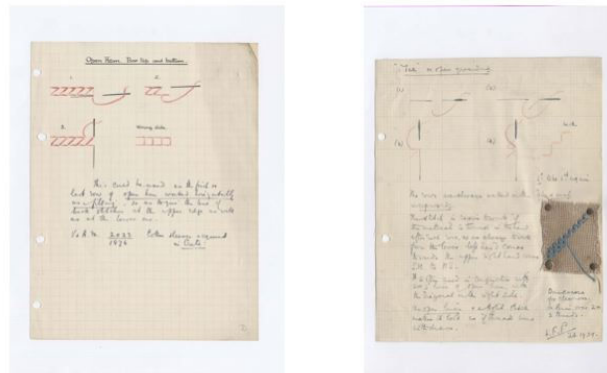


The Practice of Stitch by Movement

Anne Morrell

What I'm presenting here is a piece of work that's in the middle of being documented so it's just a part or a stage of that work. But I'd like to say that none of us arrive at our ideas on our own and I'll begin by giving my thanks to the people who've taught me directly or in their published work, in particular Louisa Pesel whose notebooks are at ULITA which is part of the University of Leeds. And really these are extraordinary notebooks (1), they're about one hundred years old. The way that the information about the stitch is put down is what I think is remarkable, the painted descriptions of the stages of the stitches, the samples and the writing adding up between them to give a total picture of the information, and really these have been very influential to the way I have looked at and described stitches.

from a Louisa Pesel notebook at ULITA



1.

The other person is Alfred Bühler whose galleries I've seen in Switzerland and India. He was the director of the Ethnographic Museum in Basel, Switzerland. But also made a gallery at the Calico Museum in Ahmedabad, a gallery next door to the one I've made on embroidery techniques. He was an anthropologist and his whole approach to textiles, the way that he saw textile techniques generally moving across from people to people was way ahead of its time and in turn had a great influence on the work I've done over the years.

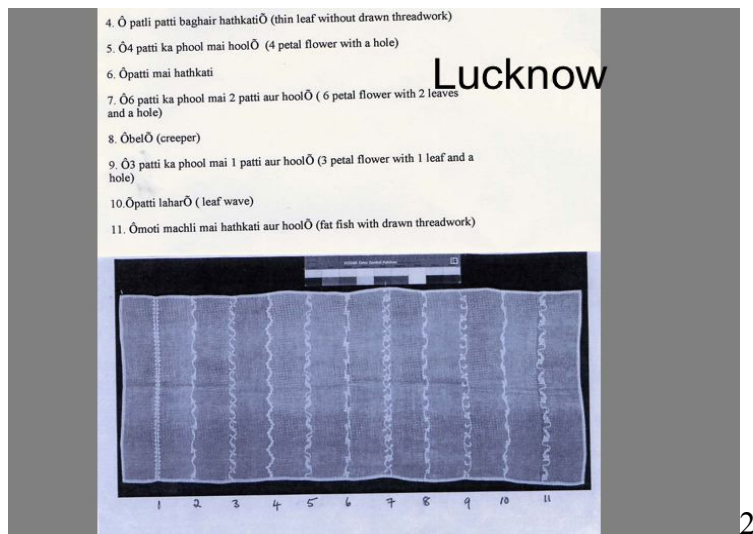
This presentation will be made with simple, perhaps obvious points but what you make of them I feel can be very complex. But please don't take this into a place where it has to be classified, defined or named; I would rather you use it to better understand what you see. So, with regard to the matter I am currently putting together, here is a summary.

The practice of stitch by movement is one that engages the migration of people and stitches; the ingenious, in my view, development of stitch with different fabrics, threads

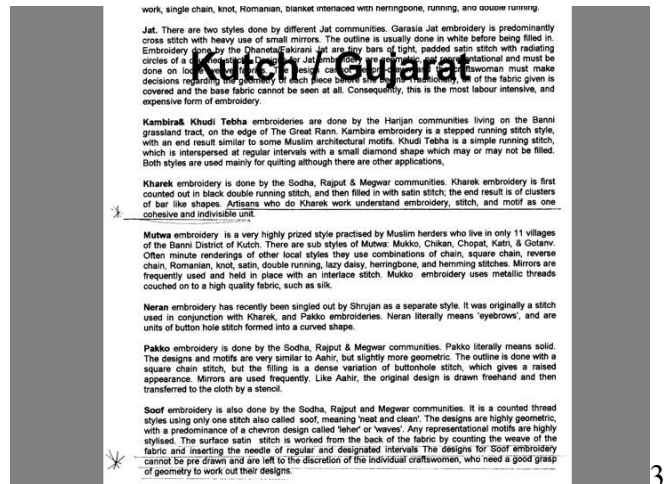
and tools. I'm currently putting together matter that deals with this development under embroidery terminology in an attempt to give others a broader understanding of embroidery stitches. This developed out of a need in my work to look at stitch differently, certainly not in the way I did for the book I put together in the 1970s, *The Encyclopedia of Embroidery Stitches*.

At the Calico Museum where I work as a consultant I have a number of stitch projects on the go. And I give you something from three of these projects.

One is a naming project, that is collecting samples of stitches and their local names from all parts of India, recording in various ways what I see including moving image like the DVD which I will show at the end of this presentation. This project has confirmed there are various and different methods of naming stitches. With this piece (2) we have seam samples, they are numbered and then the women in the workshop have been asked to name these seams so that we have the local name. This is part of that project of getting different samples from states all over India, with their local names.



In the Gujarat, there are still groups for whom stitch and motif are as one and here (3) we have a report by a local group, Shrujan, who work near Bhuj, and you can see here motif and stitch are seen as one. In other reports, we learn that music and songs are performed as part of the rhythm in the movements of the stitches. Stitches in this instance are not named at all, they are part of the movement – the whole thing is one package.



Thirdly, I find some local techniques like this one, called badla, which haven't been documented at all. We often find that it (the technique) started elsewhere – in this particular instance it came from the west, Turkey, and moved, until recently, only as far east as the Gujarat in West India. No documentation seemed to exist for this process so that we (from the Calico Museum) documented it by visiting a local workshop and taking photographs and video of the process. This monograph (4) was made in order to make that information accessible for people who were interested, all the other material gathered is in store for researchers who now, or in the future, want to learn more about it.



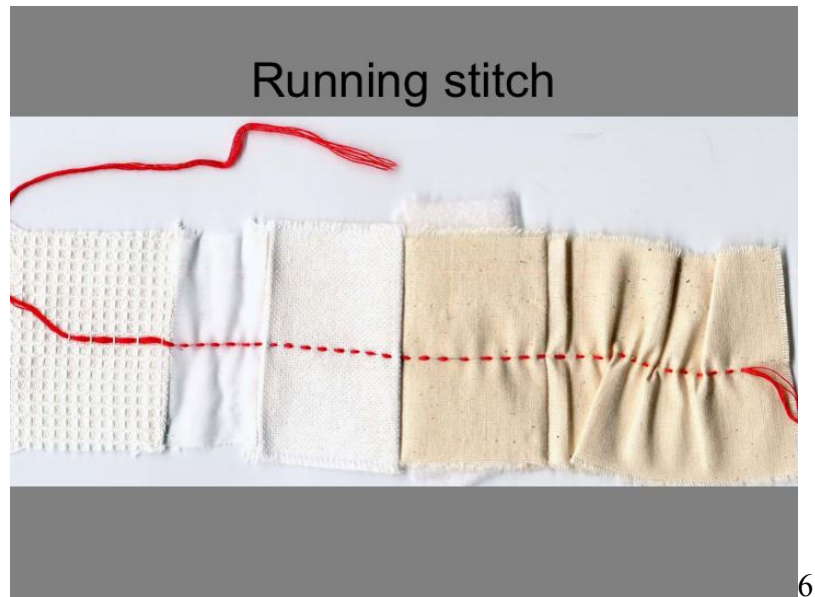
The categorisation of stitches to make them belong to a particular technique is an approach we need to be very aware of as it can limit what you understand. It has been very evident when working on this embroidery terminology sheet (5) that even within those categories only a small change – a change in a fabric, type of thread, whatever, and we give a new name.

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| 1. SURFACE DECORATION OF EVENLY WOVEN OR NETTED FABRICS | | 6. MISCELLANEOUS | |
| a. Curves-work | | a. Edgings | |
| b. Counted-thread work | 1. Blackwork 2. Pattern Darning 3. Cross Stitch | b. Hems | |
| c. Net embroidery | | c. Bottoms 1. (Dorset) crosswheel bottom | |
| 2. SURFACE DECORATION OF OTHER FABRICS | | d. Decorative seams | |
| a. By the addition of stitchery | 1. Hand surface embroidery 2. Machine stitches 3. Tambour work (or) | e. Fannings | |
| b. By the addition of fabric | 1. Appliqué 2. Inlay | f. Piping | |
| c. By the addition of metal threads | 1. Laid work 2. Pail 3. Beads | g. Thraibwork | |
| d. By the addition of beads, etc. | 1. Bead work 2. Mirror work (Shisha) 3. Tambour (or) beading & sequins 4. Curves bead work 5. Sequin work 6. Stones & Jewels | h. Patching, mending & darning | |
| e. By the addition of padding | 1. Surface padding (raised appliqué) 2. Raised work (stump work) 3. Wadded (Quilting) | | |
| 3. DECORATION ADDED FROM THE BACK OF THE FABRIC | | | |
| a. Shadow work | 1. Shadow work embroidery 2. Shadow work quilting | | |
| b. Quilting | 1. Faler or flat 2. Curled 3. Stuffed | | |
| 4. NEGATIVE SPACE TECHNIQUES | | | |
| a. By pulling holes | 1. Open work 2. Eyelot embroidery | | |
| b. By drawing either the warp or weft threads | 1. Pulled fabric or drawn fabric work | | |
| c. By cutting & drawing threads in both warp & weft | 1. Pulled fabric or drawn fabric work | | |
| d. By cutting spaces | 1. Cut work 2. Eyelot embroidery | | |
| e. By building across cut spaces | 1. Lace stitches | | |
| 5. CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES | | | |
| a. By piecing | 1. Smocking 2. Sherring | | |
| b. By piecing | 1. Insertion 2. Patchwork | | |
| c. By using thread alone | 1. Cords 2. Fringes 3. Tassels 4. Braids | 5. Needle-made laces (needlepoint) 6. Tasseled Laces 7. Bobbin Laces 8. Macramé | |

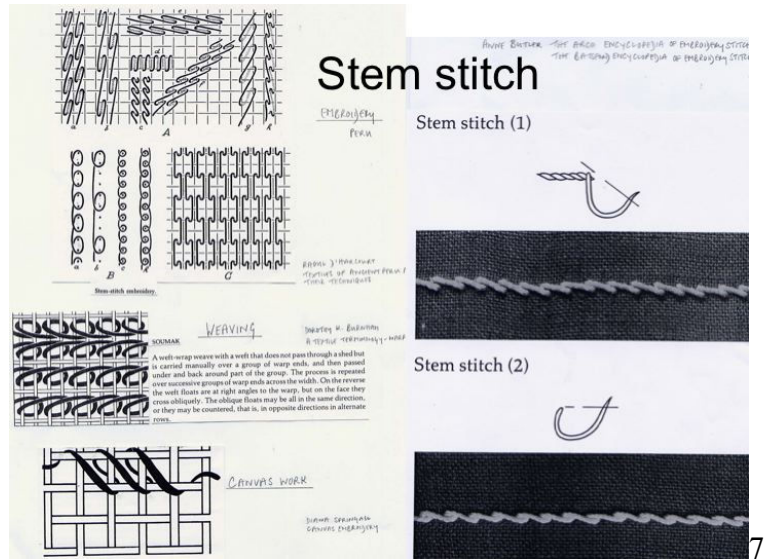
5.

The wonder of embroidery stitches is how small changes of stitch direction - changing the fabric or where the stitch is placed - and something new appears. And for this I show you this example with the running stitch (6).

Here the sample (6) has been made up of different fabrics (from right to left), a calico, two layers of fabric with a wadding in between, an even weave fabric, a semi-transparent fabric and a honeycomb fabric that has a float on the fabric. When the running stitch is taken through these different fabrics, and the calico first of all, it is simply a running stitch but as you can see it can be gathered up, it doesn't have to be flat. So you get all those gatherings that can become smocking and techniques of that kind. As soon as it passes through the three layers with wadding, we suddenly call this quilting. If you then take this through an even weave fabric and count it - the running stitch goes over two, under two, over two - we call this counted thread work. If we go through the semi-transparent fabric this becomes shadow work, and if we pass it through the floats on this weave then we've got a stitch that only passes through to the back at the beginning and the end, using that movement as if we'd laid down a thread previously rather than relying on the weave float. - in this way composite stitches are formed in embroidery. Looking at fronts and backs begins to raise all sorts of questions about the construction of stitches. But the thing is here that we've gone through four or five different nomenclatures but the stitch remains the same. It's that aspect I think that we have really never investigated. We know one stitch but it's that clever use of altering the length of the stitch or altering the fabric or interacting with a piece of specially woven fabric that something new appears. This is what then leads me to speak of stitches being much simpler than any encyclopedia would ever lead you to believe.



Some of these changes allow for more thread to be seen on the front than on the back and I would suggest that economy – the cost of thread – also has a part to play in why some changes have occurred, as well as the need for the piece to be hard wearing when the stitch can sandwich the fabric such as we get in canvas work for church kneelers. Here we are looking at a stem stitch (7). On the right, two variations in the way stem stitch can be worked and on the left how it has been worked in early Peruvian textiles where the structure is the same, the movement is the same, when we are doing Soumak in weaving. Also, we can see the same movement has been used by the Peruvians with a needle to put embroidery on top of their weave. So sometimes they have worked it in with the weaving process and sometimes they have worked it on the top of the finished cloth. It's the same movement as we see in what we call stem stitch and the same if we are looking at tent stitch in canvas work. Different names occur, sometimes the movement is on the top of the fabric, sometimes in with the weave; and in embroidery itself it is used in two different contexts – as a surface stitch or to sandwich the fabric – the whole matter of whether you are doing something decorative or practical merges but the movement remains the same.



A piece can have a use and a purpose, but here in this Hazara piece (8) from today's Afghanistan, other issues come out. This piece is used but it also raises questions as to which is the right and the wrong side. This Hazara piece is a little prayer mat. A clay piece, the mohr, is placed in the centre of this mat and is a very special part of prayers. But the interest for us here really is that those stitches (which I show to one side how its made)...because when you are working with the pink colour, as you are working to make these diamond shapes on one side, little squares are being made on the reverse. And then it's turned and the blue thread is stitched, so that the opposite happens. And that's what's happening in those two squares in the middle of the prayer mat. So which then is the back and which is the right side? Certainly the little clay piece is left in the middle and is wrapped with this cloth so that both back and front are seen, there is a religious and practical use. But personally I have never seen such a complex stitch to do with back and front. This is a distinctive example, but you have to see the back to understand the movement of stitches. Just looking at the front is not enough and often leads to a guess. Without seeing the back several stitches can look similar from the front. Consideration also needs to be given to matters of stitch direction and tools used.



8.

Here (9) I show an example where I was asked to give an opinion about a stitch used in a piece at Hardwick Hall. This is just three of about twelve examples I made because the back of the piece could not be seen and was unknown to me (they were C17th pieces and behind glass). Eventually out of those the person I was doing the work for recognised one of them because she had once seen the back and was able to select one (below, left).



9

When it comes to stitch direction and tools, we need to look at things very carefully. Here (9) we are looking at the front and back of a chain stitch which I have worked, one set with a regular needle and one with a hook (above, top right). Unless you know the actions of either of these, even if you know the work of a particular worker, it's almost

impossible to guess which it is. You really have to know how they start and finish and move from one line to another to know which is done by a needle and which is done by a hook. Stitch direction is another thing you have to understand, to know why it is that certain stitches are occurring in a given locality. Generally in India you stitch away from yourself and in the UK generally towards yourself. So if you took this chain stitch (above, middle right) and tried to move it out to this wider chain stitch, if you tried to do that towards yourself, it's the most uncomfortable action, you just don't do it. If you do it away from yourself it's the easiest thing to do and that's why you see it a lot in Indian embroidery, that is moving from a closed chain stitch, opening out and closing again. So never suppose that someone stitches in the direction that you yourself work in. Also it is not always the case that a fabric is stitched with the front of the fabric facing the workerfor some embroidery techniques (above, bottom right), this example is a phulkari, the counted stitch is worked with the reverse of the fabric facing the worker.

With this range of hook tools (10) we've got from the left an awl which is used to make a chain stitch through leather for shoe making and it is thought in India that probably the ari hooks, which are the next two, used for chain stitch embroidery, probably developed out of that shoe making tool. But here in Europe, development could be different, here is a tambour hook, used for chain stitch embroidery, (fourth from left). The next is a hook tool used for doing rug making and on the right side are hooks used for crochet. If you see ari chain stitch in India (which has probably come there from the west) and you know that crochet is thought to have been developed by the Arabs, it suggests that somebody possibly, (just like with the running stitch going from one fabric to another creating different things), developed the use of the hook. You put it through leather, use it with thread to make crochet, you stick it through a piece of fabric and you've got ari (or tambour) chain stitch. The hook tool is also interesting because it's used across different textile techniques, not just for embroidery.

Hook tools – awl, ari/tambour, rug and crochet



This is a set of needles I have (11) which are, as you see, sometimes given numbers and sometimes names, but I have never heard anybody talk about different types of needles – archaeologists and so on – I’ve never come across any reference to type of needle and yet within the trade they are described in these different ways, so the type of needle used (to make the embroidery) is not recorded.



11.

I hope you will see from what’s been said that the stitch techniques are interconnected. Their separation is for ease of identification. Embroidery stitches can be found in the different techniques but they themselves come down to three different movements. I show you here (12) the back and front of one stitch that I have selected from each movement – the running stitch, the satin stitch and the chain stitch. Running stitch (on the left) is simply an up-and-down movement. Here (in the middle), the second movement, is up-and-down with a circular wrapping movement, it’s a satin stitch, similar back and front (it wraps the fabric). And the third movement, (a looping movement, on the right) is a chain stitch which comes up-and-down but then holds the thread to create the chain stitch.

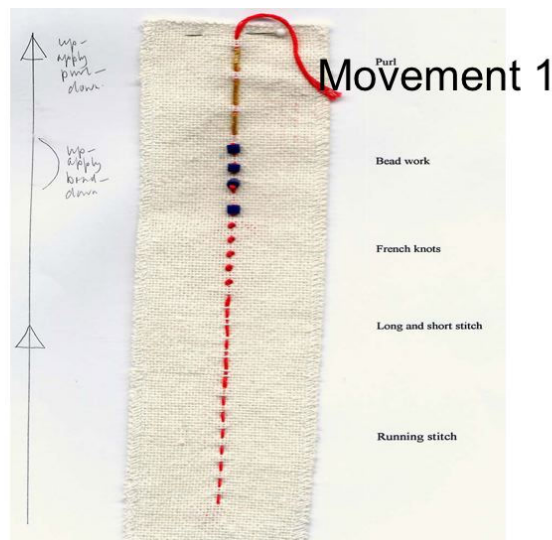
Embroidery Stitches fall into 3 movements

1... up and down movement 2. up and down with a circular wrapping movement 3. looping movement



12.

If we move on to the use of the first movement (13), starting from the bottom of the image, working away from myself, first the running stitch; then if I just change the length of the running stitch in the manner that you see, you get long and short stitch. The next thing you see is a little wrap – you just wrap the thread round the needle before you go down through the fabric and you create what's called a French knot, just by wrapping your thread round. If instead of wrapping the stitch, the next one along, you put beads on, you come up, you put a bead on your needle and you go down. At the top, what we call a purl, which is a word used in zardozi work (here called metal work) you come up, put the purl on your needle, slip it over on to the thread and down again, and in this way you place purls on the fabric. But all those are the same movement, they're just a running stitch.



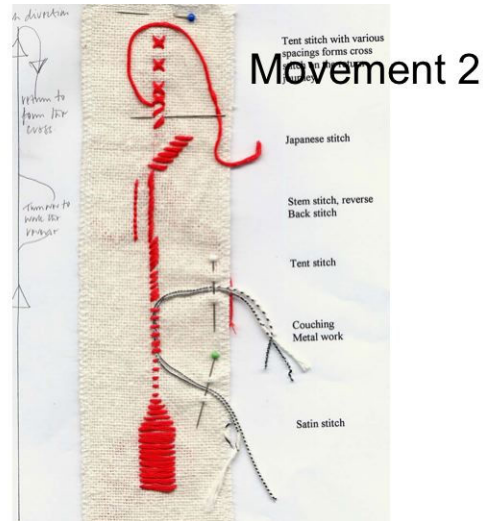
13.

Looking at the development of a running stitch (14) – I start at the top left hand corner with a running stitch, then the next stitch I've just wrapped a thread around it in a regular way. The next one is worked in and out producing a zigzag. Then a zigzag one way, a zigzag the other way. All these are given names. They all suddenly become different stitches, just by changing one thing or adding one thing. For instance, I can take the running stitch and group it in rows forming blocks. The example in the middle shows a thread weaving in and out through the running stitch. At the bottom where I start working in a vertical and diagonal direction, those vertical and diagonal stitches are forms of double running stitch. But they take on totally different names when they are used in some of the techniques, like these ones used in Chope Phulkari in the Punjab. But all of them are just a running stitch developed and added to.



14.

And so movement number two (15), starting again at the bottom. We start with a satin stitch and as you can see you can create all sorts of shapes with it and also you can leave gaps between the stitches. While making the gaps, if I actually do it over another thread, this becomes couching, or, if I use metal, this all becomes part of metal work. Following that we can make tent stitch as used in canvas work; then it becomes a stem stitch and if you look along the line from bottom up to that point, where I'm making a stem stitch, all that's happened to the stitch is that the angle is being changed – the movement is exactly the same. The interesting thing with stem stitch is that the back of the stitch has a name too. When moved out at an angle this becomes another stitch, Japanese stitch; and if I take tent stitch and work it with gaps in between, which is the final stitch on this sample, come back across it, we create cross stitch, which is used in two or three different embroidery techniques.



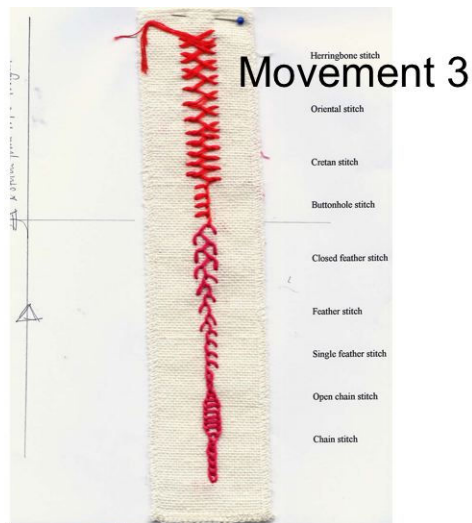
15.

The next image (16) takes us through the varieties that can be achieved just with that movement. Top left we've got a simple satin stitch but now its called satin stitch filling square. Top right, when worked in an irregular way, it becomes dot stitch. Below that I've worked satin stitches which are used as border patterns, with the one on the right, it's not the stitch you are to see, and it's the negative pattern or shape, which is left in the cloth, which you are supposed to read. There is another kind of twist, if you like, to the marks that are being put down. Below that, and in the centre, is the opposite of what I've just said, here the satin stitch is used very deliberately to make a row of small diamonds. Working from left to right in the bottom section, the satin stitch is taken and another thread is introduced, first to whip it; then to whip two rows of it together; then to go through in irregular ways; and on the right hand side to create different kinds of patterns when it's used to lay down threads, that becomes laid work. Again though, the movements throughout all of these are the same, the stitches are developed from that basis.



16.

And so to the third movement (17) which is worked from the bottom through to the top. And this is perhaps the most complex of the three, as in this format there are more stitches that develop from it. First at the bottom chain stitch, then opened up to become open chain stitch; if you move to one side single feather stitch, then feather stitch, closed feather stitch, in the middle, buttonhole stitch. Working from side to side you create a cretan stitch, herringbone stitch and oriental stitch, all of them just flowing one from the other. Having said that, having started at the bottom and having stitched away from myself, when you get to buttonhole stitch, it becomes necessary to turn the fabric so you are able to stitch comfortably (from left to right). That brings up the point, that though the movement of the stitch might remain the same you don't necessarily keep the fabric facing you in the same way to create stitches, it does become at times necessary to turn the fabric, this is not apparent when you are just looking at the finished stitch on the cloth. You do need to observe people stitching to see the way they move the fabric around.



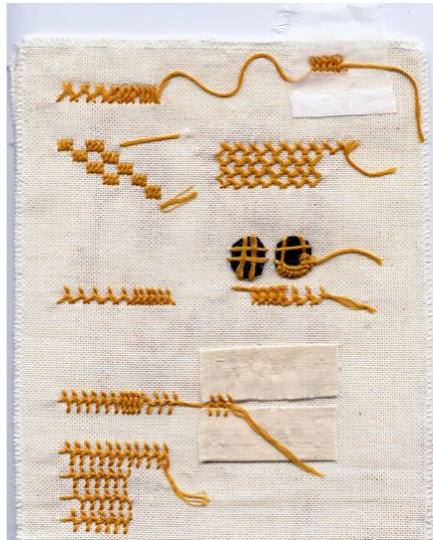
17.

The stitches that develop from here (17) we see in these last two images (18 & 19), are numerous and variable; but just to point out one or two that crossover into other techniques. At the very top (18), taking a herringbone stitch, it can be seen that just by altering the way you work the gap between the stitches, whether it's spaced or worked close together, you can alter the whole look of this stitch.

If I took one stitch and worked it in different threads I could make it look entirely different again. Same thing if I changed the fabric. It is not only the change in the spacing that can produce a different look, but change the thread, change the fabric and all the combinations between that, and varieties occur.

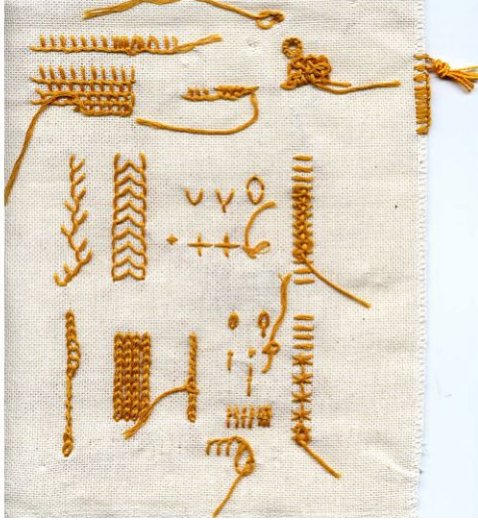
Work it (herringbone stitch) on a semi-transparent fabric and turn the fabric over, that's the little piece that you see in the top right hand there (18), where a regular herringbone stitch is used in the technique called shadow work. Looking at the third row where you can see the spaced oriental stitch (left hand side), to the right you see how the top edge of the stitch doesn't go through the fabric, here it's under a thread that's been laid down first. And that principle is used to hold down a mirror (shisha) and then it's given a totally

different name, its called shisha stitch. But in fact it's the same movement, it's taken under the thread that holds the mirror in place and then through the fabric. Below that is a regular cretan stitch. Which again is seen here on the left hand side spaced differently, if then it is used to hold two edges of fabric together, it is called insertion. Below that I've tried to show how cretan stitch is used, by placing one beneath another again, to make negative shapes important and it takes on a totally different look; it's a very versatile stitch.



18.

And in the next image (19), you see buttonhole stitch first, with different spacings and so on, along the top row it has been used to create different shapes, and all sorts of effects can happen with that; but here on the right hand side you see where a stiletto, an embroidery tool, has been poked through the fabric, to displace the warp and weft, and the buttonhole stitch is worked around it, and that's then called eyelet embroidery. And then you see where I've worked it on the edge of the fabric, that's often used with tassels and so on to create all sorts of decorative edges, edges that are also practical and strengthening. If you look to the left of that, you'll see where that stitch has been worked to be detached from the fabric – and there are examples of this in early Peruvian textiles. This is an example of one of the many embroidery stitches which have their origins in basket work. Below that we see other developments, first on the left the feather stitches and last, on the bottom, chain stitches. One of the last stitches there at the bottom shows how a chain stitch, if it's pulled back on itself, has exactly the same look as a buttonhole stitch. That's a movement you'd find with a hook as well as with a needle.



19.

I feel that the practice and the understanding of these three movements are essential to the understanding of stitch. And of understanding what you SEE being stitched. I will next show the DVD which is a small example of the recording of processes, many fast disappearing, which have been made over the last fifteen years in the Gujarat. Hopefully this gives an example of the importance of this kind of record. To my mind this kind of record allows other people to stand in your place, to observe and learn from their own observation. It is all very well writing and notebooks and research, but there's nothing like being there and actually learning with your eyes and making yourself see what's going on. The more you understand embroidery stitches the more you'll see.

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