



Adding text to textile art: Merill Comeau

Community Stitch Challenge 2021
Workbook

TextileArtist.org





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“Continuing a long history of incorporating text into art, in this workshop you will experiment with ways to use words and language in your work. Through text you’ll communicate your ideas, thoughts, feelings, memories, or dreams.

Medieval illuminated manuscripts, eighteenth century needlework samplers, surrealists and cubist collage artists all included the written word in their work. Illuminated manuscripts, with their embellished letters, showed reverence for religious content. Samplers included adages and biblical passages providing behavioural guidance to young women while learning the needlepoint skills expected of their gender. Surrealists and cubists often used words to obscure meaning, as well as to communicate hidden messages.

In today’s post-modernist Text Art, the meaning and the aesthetic presentation of the words are united into an art form. Many artists use language to communicate societal concerns and calls for activism. *Barbara Kruger*, *Jenny Holzer*, and *Glenn Ligon* are a few artists exploring social justice topics through Text Art.



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For this project, your text might reveal or obscure, scold or inform, spur action or cause people to stop and smile or think. Your text could be witty, sober, instructive or provide comfort. To incorporate text you have the option of using hand stitch, machine stitch and/or appliqué.

You will generate a relevant phrase and choose a suitable font style and colours, to visually reinforce its meaning. Then you'll discover ways to transfer stitch guideline marks, and think about which stitch styles are effective for text and lettering.

Developing the facility to insert words into your work will expand your ability to share what matters to you. It will help communicate your narrative and tell stories. This is your opportunity to bring language into your work in order to create a personal expression of meaning."

Merill Comeau

What you'll need

- Base fabric, a plain fabric, a patchwork or garment
- Threads in varying weights and thicknesses
- Needles to match the thickness of your threads
- Scissors
- Paper
- Sketchbook or notebook
- Embroidery hoop (optional)
- Thimble (optional)
- Pins (optional)
- Tools for making stitch guideline marks
- Choose from these options:
 - Use a computer to create and print a word to trace onto fabric
 - Commercially-made stencils
 - Freehand writing
- Portable handheld projector
- Pencil, HB/B softness
- Black marker pen (optional)
- Vanishing/erasable pen for use on fabric (optional)



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The creative stitch exercise

Step one

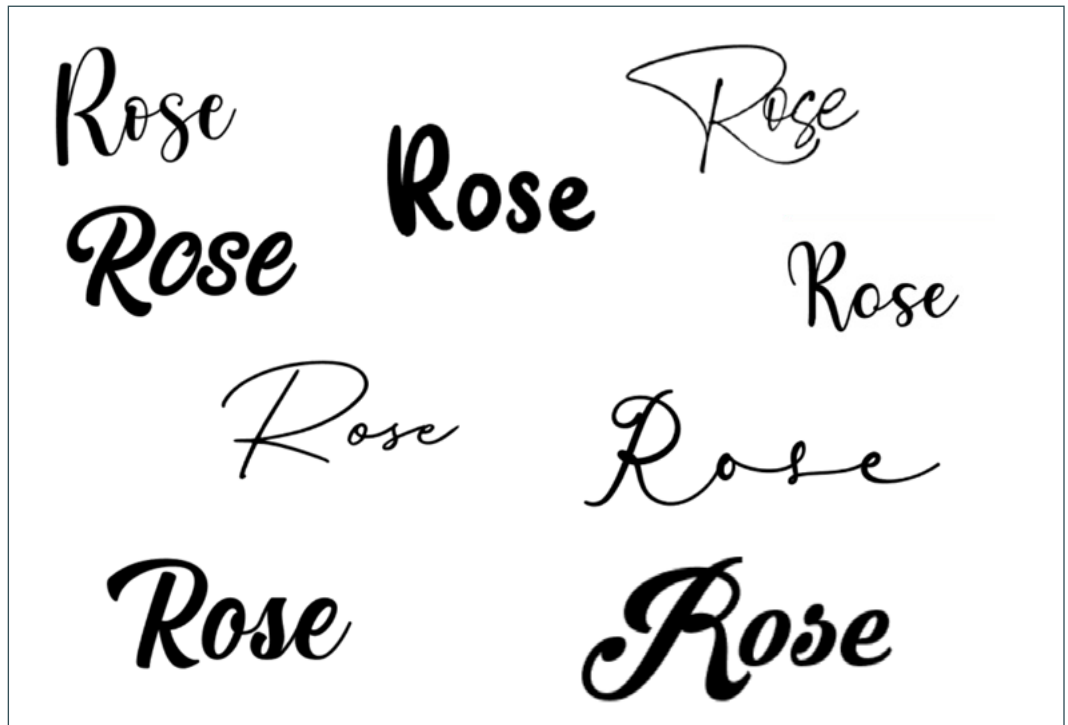
Choose your text: In a journal or sketchbook, answer the following prompts:

- Do you have a nickname, or did you have a nickname as a child?
- Can you find phrases from your journal/diary writing to explore in stitch?
- What is the best lesson you have learned so far?
- Do you live by a motto?
- What behaviours in others do you want to emulate?
- What makes you really angry?
- What do you care about the most?
- Do you like puns, jokes or silliness?
- Do you use any meditation mantras to calm your mind?
- Do you have a family rule?
- Do you have a memory you can describe in words?
- Do you have a favourite lyric or line from a poem?
- Do you have a favourite quote of someone you admire?

Select a phrase, keeping in mind the time that is required to hand stitch it! If you are a beginner, you may want to start with a single word. If you are an experienced stitcher, you may want to push yourself and tackle a longer phrase.



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Step two

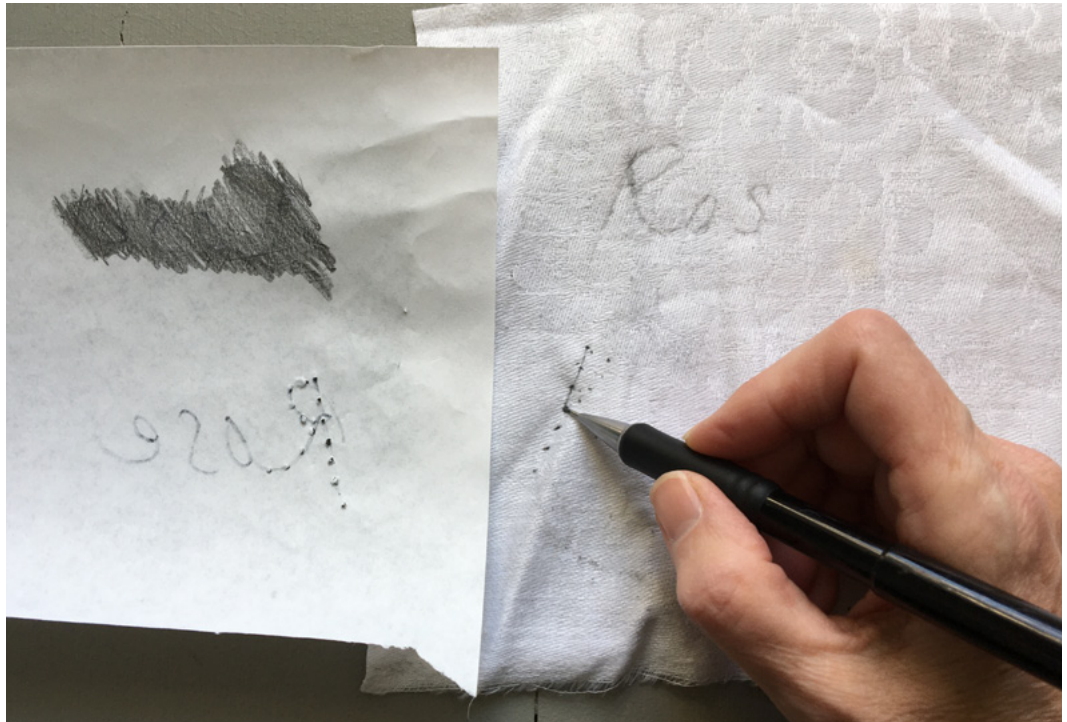
Decide on the text style and size: First consider the meaning behind your words. Would your message be enhanced by using curly script, block letters, upper case letters, or a lower-case text? For example, flower names might be enhanced by an elaborate script. The larger the letters, the stronger the message.

Words of anger might benefit from a large typeface. Smaller letters make the viewer move closer, thus creating a more intimate viewing experience.



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Step three

Transfer the guidelines for the text onto fabric: Use a vanishing pen or sharp pencil to draw the design onto your fabric. There are several ways to do this, so try out different options to find what suits you best:

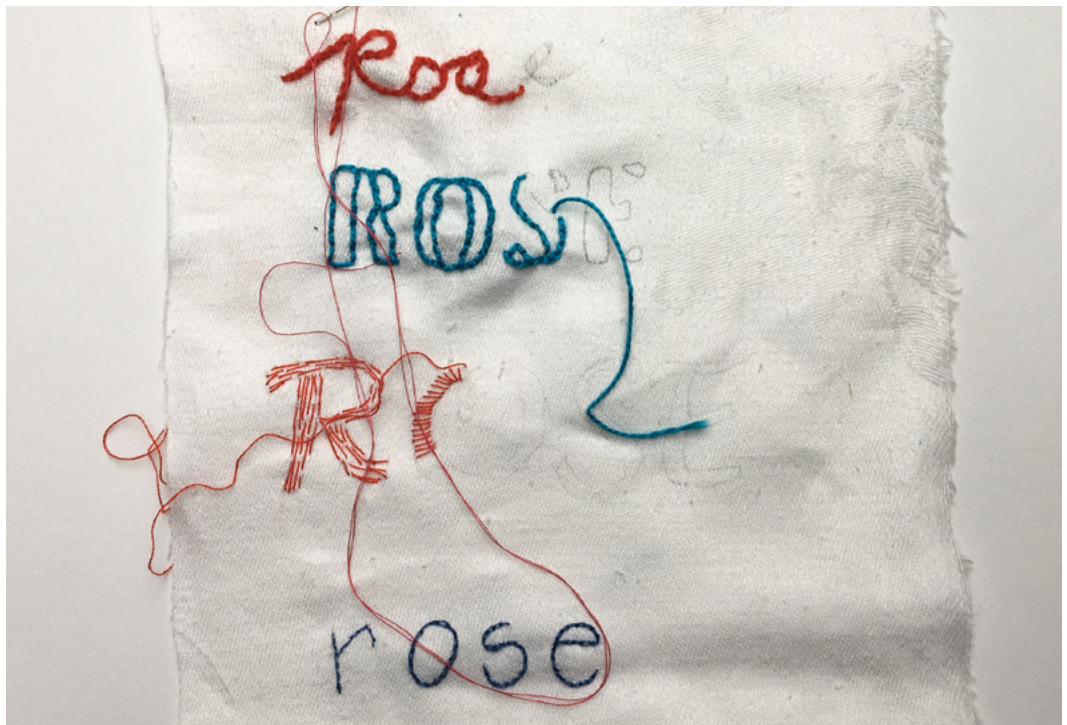
- Draw your letters freehand, directly onto the fabric.
- For large letters, try drawing out the words on paper with a marker pen. Cut them out, pin to the fabric, and trace around them.
- Use a computer word processing program to play with fonts. Try enlarging or reducing the font size. Test bold or italic font styles. Print the word onto paper and tape it to a bright window. Tape your fabric on top of the paper and trace the words. Alternatively, tip your computer screen flat, lay the fabric over the screen and gently trace the letters without putting pressure on the screen.
- Colour over the back of your printed words with a soft pencil. Lay the paper face-up on top of your fabric and re-trace over the words, pressing down hard. The graphite on the back of your paper will transfer to your fabric.



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- Using an awl or large needle, make holes at small intervals along the outlines of the printed out letters. Lay the paper over your fabric and use a sharp pencil to make a dot on the fabric, through the holes. Remove the paper, then connect the dots on the fabric to complete your letter guidelines.
- Use a commercial stencil, marking the letters onto your fabric with a sharp pencil or erasable pen.
- Project the letters onto a wall and trace them onto fabric that you have taped or pinned to the wall.



Step four

Carefully consider colour and stitch type selections: Which stitch and colour of thread would strengthen your underlying meaning?

A combination of selections enables multiple meanings. For example, block letters filled in with dark coloured satin stitch conveys strength and graphic clarity. Single strand back stitch with pale coloured sewing threads conveys delicacy. Chain or stem stitch in a mid-value colour provides middle ground thickness of line and visibility.

Decide if you want the fabric to be visible through the stitching, or if you want a solid block of stitching.



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Step five

Stitch your letters using a stitch style and colour of your choice: Back stitch, stem stitch and chain stitch are good options to create the fluid curves of lettering.

Or you might want to try using appliqué to construct the lettering out of layers of fabric.

Back split stitch (a chain-like stitch as shown in the workshop video)

- Double the thread and knot the end. Bring the needle up through the fabric and make a straight stitch back down through the fabric.
- Bring the needle up to the front of the fabric, a stitch length forward from the last stitch on your guideline.
- Push your needle down through the middle of the previous stitch, between the two threads.
- Repeat by bringing the needle up a stitch length further along your guideline, then going back down through the middle of the previous stitch. A row of these stitches will form a chain-like pattern.



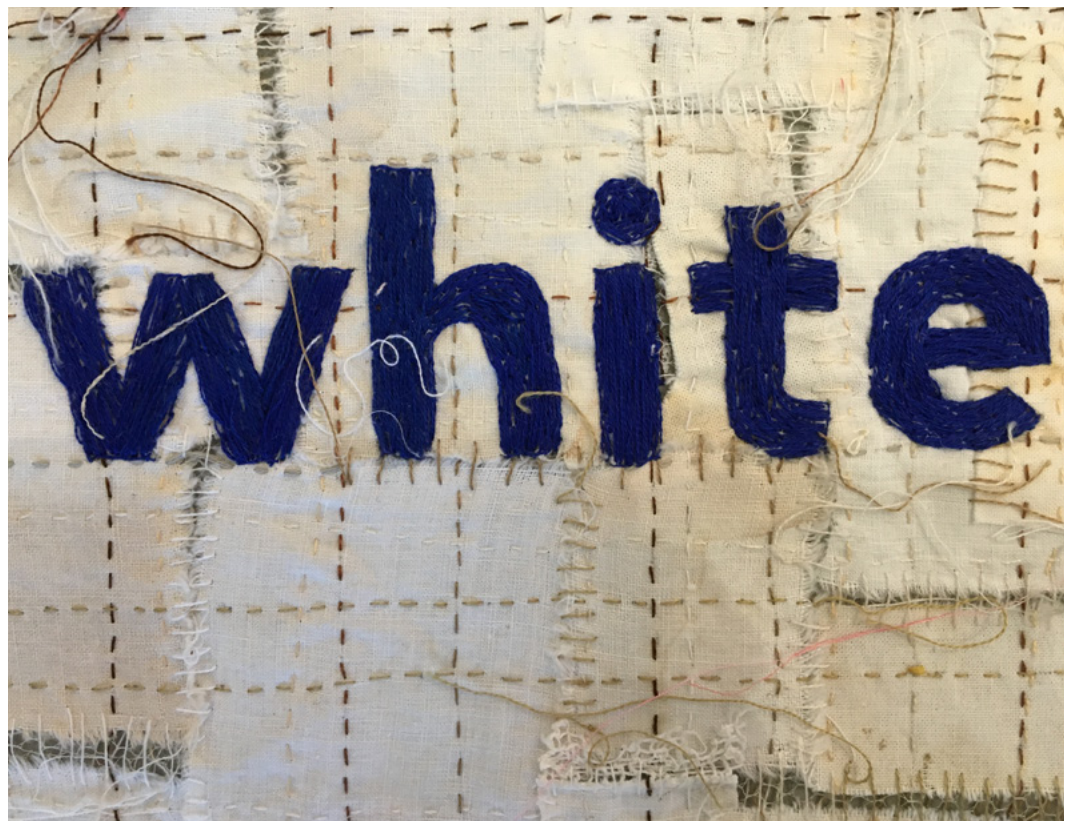
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Back stitch (a continuous line of stitches)

- Knot the thread. Bring the needle up to the front of the fabric and make a straight stitch back down through the fabric.
- Bring your needle back up one stitch length further along your guideline and make a stitch going backwards, taking the needle back down the hole where the previous stitch started. Repeat this along your guideline markings.

Possible approaches



Stitch variation with one word in solid stitching



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Stitch variation with spaced stitches



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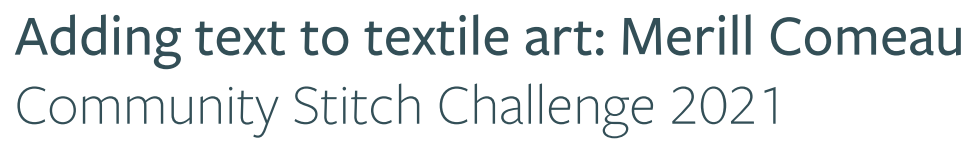
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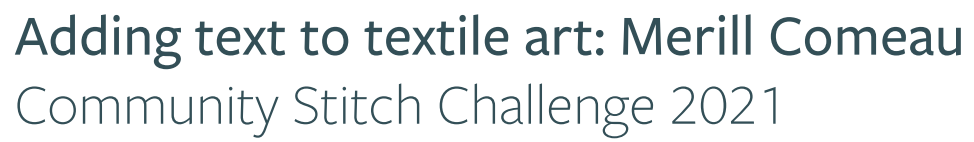


Series of words in a small scale



Many words on a garment, with single thread stitch

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