

TSIA RESOURCES

---

# CREATIVE MACHINE THREAD SKETCHING

COURSE NOTES



# CREATIVE MACHINE THREAD SKETCHING

Basic Techniques Foundation Course

Complete Course Notes



## DEBORAH WIRSU

**COPYRIGHT © 2020, 2023 DEBORAH WIRSU**

**All Rights Reserved**

This ebook has been created for the exclusive use of TSIA students or as distributed by the author. TSIA students may download and print **one copy** of this ebook, for personal use only.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without the written consent of the author.

**Legal Disclaimer:** This ebook contains techniques, strategies and advice that may not produce the same results for you or be suitable for you or your situation. You assume sole responsibility for the outcome of any technique or strategy provided in this ebook. Neither the author nor the publisher shall be liable for any loss or profit, or any other damages, including, but no limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

Wirsu, Deborah

Creative Machine Thread Sketching: Basic Techniques Foundation Course [Complete Course Notes]

© 2020, 2023 Deborah Wirsu

# Checklist of Course Notes

## Module One

- ◆ Checklist: Equipment and Supplies for Thread Sketching
- ◆ Checklist: Get Permission! Copyright Basics.

## Module Two

- ◆ Checklist: Setting Up Your Machine for Free Motion Stitching
- ◆ Puckering When Thread Sketching (and how to avoid it) \*\*\**Note: this is provided as a separate ebook.*

## Module Three

- ◆ Project 1: Doodling Project Instructions
- ◆ Project 2: Pine Forest Project Instructions
- ◆ Project 2: Pine Forest Design Template A5 size.
- ◆ Project 2: Pine Forest Design Template A4 size.
- ◆ Project 3: Whimsical Flowers Project Instructions.
- ◆ Project 3: Whimsical Flowers Design Template.

## Module 4

- ◆ Free Motion Zigzag Stitch: An Introduction

# MODULE ONE

## Getting Started in Creative Machine Thread Sketching

# Equipment and Supplies for Thread Sketching

- ◆ Domestic sewing machine with the ability to drop the feed dogs.
- ◆ Free motion presser foot (Open toe hopping foot recommended).
- ◆ Embroidery (or Zigzag) foot—supplied with all sewing machines.
- ◆ Thread—Polyester, rayon, or cotton machine embroidery thread (40 gauge recommended).
- ◆ Fabric—100% cotton recommended, in your chosen colours (or choosing similar colours to those used in the projects). Fabric scraps in your chosen colours for the appliqué.
- ◆ Sewing scissors and pins (flat head quilting pins recommended).
- ◆ Iron and ironing board.
- ◆ Rotary cutter and self-healing cutting mat.
- ◆ Quilter's ruler.
- ◆ Teflon Appliqué mat, or regular kitchen baking paper (unwaxed).
- ◆ Fabric marking pens—erasable (e.g. Pilot FriXion Ball® pen or disappearing quilt markers).
- ◆ Stabiliser—medium and firm weights (more information in videos).
- ◆ Fusible web, e.g. Vliesofix (paper-backed) and/or MistyFuse (not paper-backed).
- ◆ Low loft batting—cotton, polyester, poly/cotton blend, or bamboo.
- ◆ Pencils, pens, sketchbook or paper.
- ◆ Home printer and printer paper.

# Get Permission: Copyright Basics

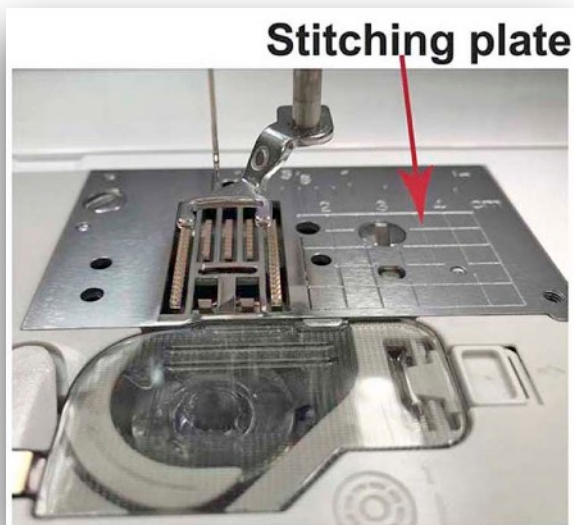
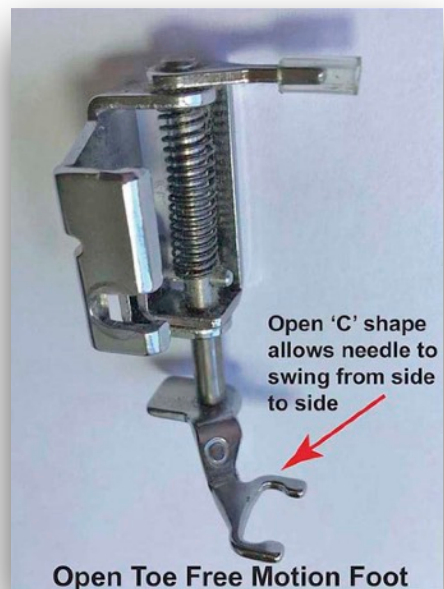
- ◆ The Copyright symbol © protects the rights of the legal owner of a piece of work, including *your* original work.
- ◆ There are many different types of Copyright. If you are granted the right to copy or use someone else's work, you are granted permission to use it for a certain period of time, or indefinitely, depending on the terms.
- ◆ Always assume that any original work is copyrighted, even if it does not have the copyright symbol attached.
- ◆ Images posted on the Internet for public viewing are, in most cases, copyright, and **should not be used without permission**.
- ◆ Ensure you have the right to use someone else's work by:
  - ◆ Reaching out to the creator to ask for their permission in writing.
  - ◆ See if the work is listed in the Public Domain or has a Creative Commons License.
  - ◆ Purchase the right to use the work.
- ◆ Use your own photos where possible, or find royalty-free images online. Check any terms and conditions (e.g. restrictions on commercial use) even if you have purchased the image.
- ◆ If in doubt, don't use someone else's image! Your work will be more original based on your own photos, anyway!
- ◆ Project images in this course are licensed for personal use only.

# MODULE TWO

## Getting Ready to Stitch

# Setting Up Your Machine For Free Motion Stitching

◆ Fit your machine with a free motion foot. Using an open toe 'C' hopping foot is recommended. Consult your sewing machine manual for more on how to fit a machine foot.



◆ Insert the correct stitching plate (the one with the horizontal slot for the needle, which is usually the default plate on most machines).

◆ Lower the feed dogs to the 'down' position. This is done using either a manual switch or button on an electronic touchpad.

- ◆ Fit a new needle—Machine Embroidery or Quilting needle recommended, size range 75/11 - 90/14.
- ◆ Thread the top (needle) thread and lower (bobbin) thread correctly, using matching or toning thread colours. Refer to your sewing machine manual for threading instructions relevant to your machine.
- ◆ Use good quality thread. Rayon, polyester, or cotton machine embroidery thread in 40-gauge weight recommended.
- ◆ Set the stitch length and width:
  - ◆ Free motion STRAIGHT STITCH — Length: zero; Width: zero (if using an older machine, otherwise leave it alone).
  - ◆ Free motion ZIGZAG STITCH — Adjust the length and width according to your desired stitch size and the type of project you are working on.
- ◆ Set the ‘needle stop’ position to ‘down’ (if available on your machine).
- ◆ Set the ‘presser foot stop’ position to up or down (if available on your machine).
  - ◆ My preferred combination of these is to set needle stop to ‘down’ and presser foot stop to ‘up’.
- ◆ Check your tension. If your machine is in good order, the tension should not need adjusting.
- ◆ Work a small sample piece first, to check that everything is in order.

# Puckering When Thread Sketching (and how to avoid it)

◆ See separate ebook.

TSIA RESOURCES

## PUCKERING WHEN THREAD SKETCHING

(AND HOW TO AVOID IT)



# MODULE THREE

## Free Motion Straight Stitching Techniques 101: Three Projects

# Project One: Doodling

## Doodling Project Instructions

### WHAT YOU NEED

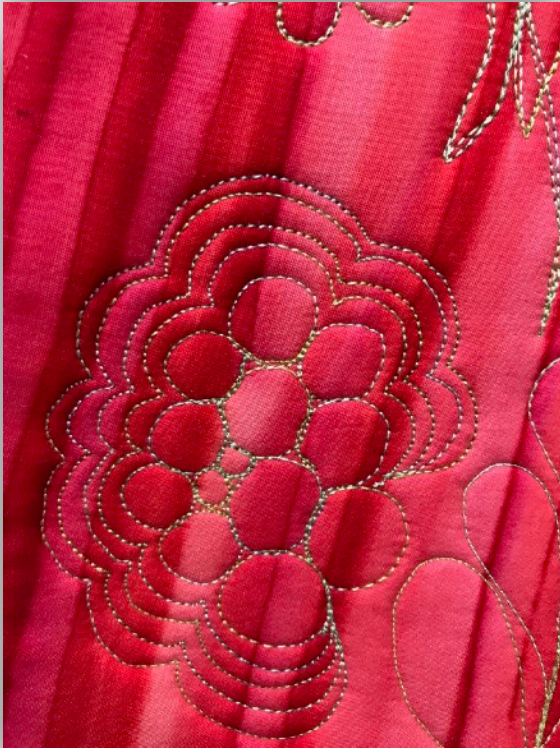
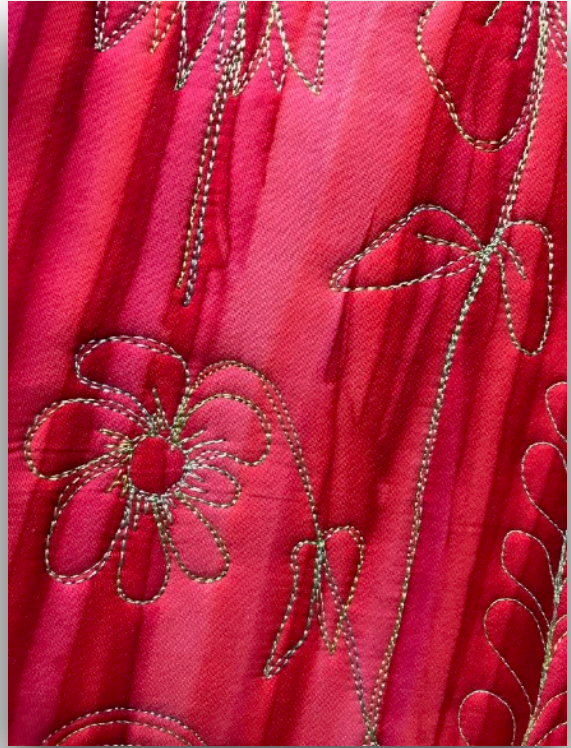
- ◆ 1 x piece of cotton fabric for the top — colour of your choice.
  - ◆ Recommended size: 8” x 10” or 20” x 10” approx.
- ◆ 1 piece medium to firm weight stabiliser, cut to the same size.
- ◆ 1 piece low loft batting (cotton, polyester, poly/cotton or bamboo) cut to the same size.
- ◆ 40 - gauge machine embroidery thread. Use a colour that contrasts with your fabric to improve visibility as you stitch. This project is about practising free motion stitching, rather than creating a masterpiece!
- ◆ Your sewing machine, set up for free motion stitching, and general sewing supplies.



## STEPS

1. Layer the stabiliser, batting and cotton top to form a stack. If preferred, you can also add a piece of backing fabric at the bottom of the stack (thereby creating 4 layers, rather than 3).
2. Pin the layers together firmly, smoothing out any bubbles as you pin.
3. Set your machine up for free motion stitching, lower the feed dogs and set the stitch length to zero.
4. Experiment with free stitching different designs, as demonstrated in the video tutorial. You can do whatever you like, so feel free to explore other shapes, as well.
5. Make as many practice projects as you feel you need to become comfortable with the prices of free machine stitching.

...SEE REFERENCE IMAGES ON THE NEXT PAGE...



# Project Two: Pine Forest Landscape

## Pine Forest Landscape Instructions

### WHAT YOU NEED

- ◆ 1 x sheet printer paper (A4 or US Letter size).
- ◆ Black marker pen or pencil
- ◆ Erasable fabric marker (e.g. Pilot FriXion Ball® pen or disappearing quilt markers)
- ◆ 1 x piece **firm** stabiliser — A5 size (5.75" x 8.25") or A4/US Letter size (to fit your chosen design size).
- ◆ 1 piece paper-backed fusible web (e.g. Vliesofix) — sufficient for the A5 or A4 size project, plus the separate tracings of the 5 trees and moon appliqué.
- ◆ 1 x piece of low loft batting (cotton, polyester, poly/cotton, or bamboo) — A5 or A4 size.
- ◆ Small pieces of black or tone-on-tone black cotton fabric for the trees (or colour of your choice).
- ◆ Small piece of yellow cotton fabric for the moon.
- ◆ 40-gauge machine embroidery thread in black, grey, yellow, white.
- ◆ General sewing supplies.



## STEPS

The pattern templates provided include two sizes: A5 and A4 (or US Letter) size. **The instructions below relate to the A5 (smaller) design.** If you prefer to make the larger design, adjust your fabric sizes accordingly.

### PREPARE AND TRACE THE DESIGN

1. Cut the stabiliser, fusible web, batting and top fabric to size — A5 (5.75" x 8.25").
2. Fold the sheet of printer paper in half to create A5 size.
3. Using a black marking pen or pencil, draw your design: 5 triangles resembling trees. Vary the sizes to create perspective. Add a freehand circle for the moon. Don't worry if you draw each over the top of the others. This is merely a design for tracing and placement. *Alternatively, print a second copy of the supplied design and use that.*
4. Open out the paper and turn **face down**. Place the fusible web (paper side UP) on the **wrong** side of the design and trace each tree shape and the moon, keeping them separate from each other. If you can't see the drawn design through the paper, tape it to a window while you trace, or use a light box.
5. Roughly cut each shape from the fusible web, cutting a little outside the drawn lines.

## FUSE THE TRACED TREES AND MOON TO YOUR APPLIQUÉ FABRIC

6. Place each piece of fusible web, STICKY (GLUE) SIDE DOWN, on the BACK of your chosen appliqué fabrics and press with a hot iron to fuse. Protect the surface of your iron with an appliqué mat or sheet of kitchen baking paper (unwaxed). **Do not remove the paper backing yet.**

7. Now cut each fused appliqué shape from the fabric, cutting along the drawn lines.

8. Place your white top fabric over your original design (right side up). If using white or light-coloured fabric, you should be able to see the design through the fabric, which aids placement of the pieces.

9. Arrange the appliqué pieces on the design, adjusting the layout until satisfied. Remember to consider perspective, and which trees should be behind the others. The moon will be in the background, behind the trees. When you're happy with the way it looks, peel off the paper backing and put them back in position. *Make sure the glue side is facing down.*

10. Cover with an appliqué mat and press with a hot iron to fuse. Your appliqué pieces should now all be fused to the top fabric.

## CREATE THE 'SANDWICH' LAYERS

11. Take the A5 sheet of fusible web and fuse with a hot iron to the **right side** of your stabiliser.

12. When cool, remove the paper backing and fuse the stabiliser to the **wrong side (underneath)** of the low loft batting.

13. Place your appliqué design on top of the batting and press. Pin the layers securely together around the edges.

## STITCHING THE DESIGN

14. Set up your machine for free motion stitching.

15. Using yellow thread, free motion stitch around the edge of the moon to secure it in position. Start and stop where necessary so you don't stitch over the trees.

16. Change to black thread and stitch around the outside edge of each tree.

17. Using grey thread, stitch the central stem of each tree (not the trunks yet, though) and work the 'leaves' as demonstrated in the video.

18. Change back to black thread and stitch the trunks. If you feel you need a guide, use an erasable fabric marker to lightly draw them on the fabric.

19. Add a few 'trees' in the distance to create perspective. These are simple single lines of stitch, worked in one direction, then the other.

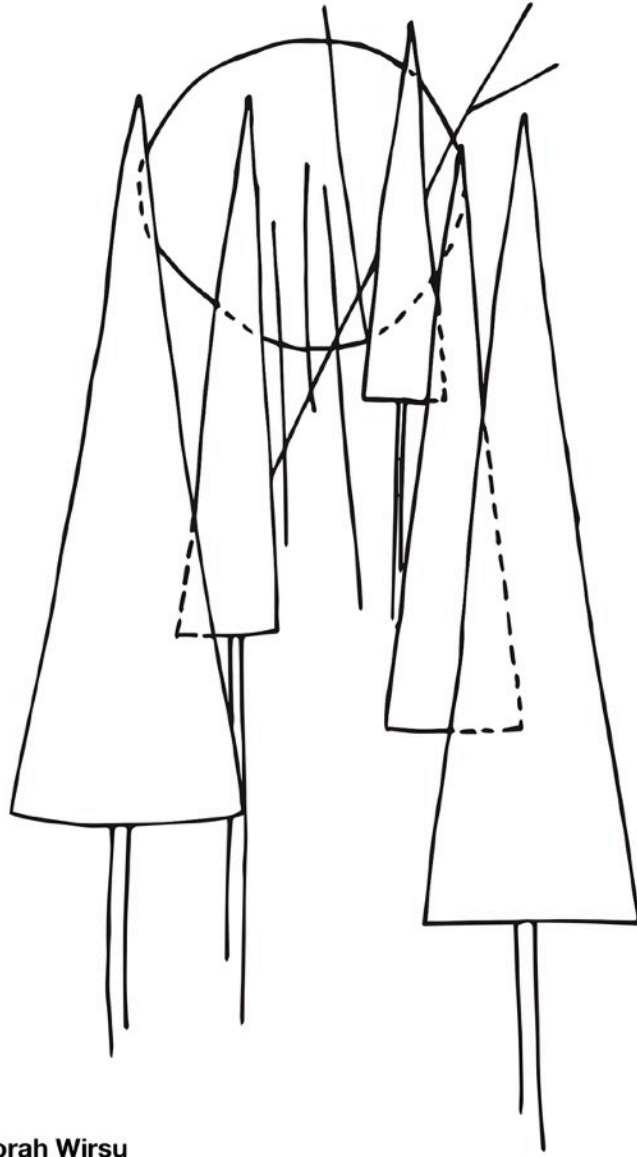
20. Finally, use your rotary cutter, quilt ruler and cutting mat to trim the picture to size. Finish as desired. The example was finished by changing the presser foot to a regular zigzag (embroidery) foot on the machine, engaging the feed dogs, and satin stitching around the outer edges of the design.

*This design could be reduced further in size to make a postcard, or greatly enlarged to create a wall hanging.*

*Two sizes of the design are included for download with this lesson: A5 and A4 size.*

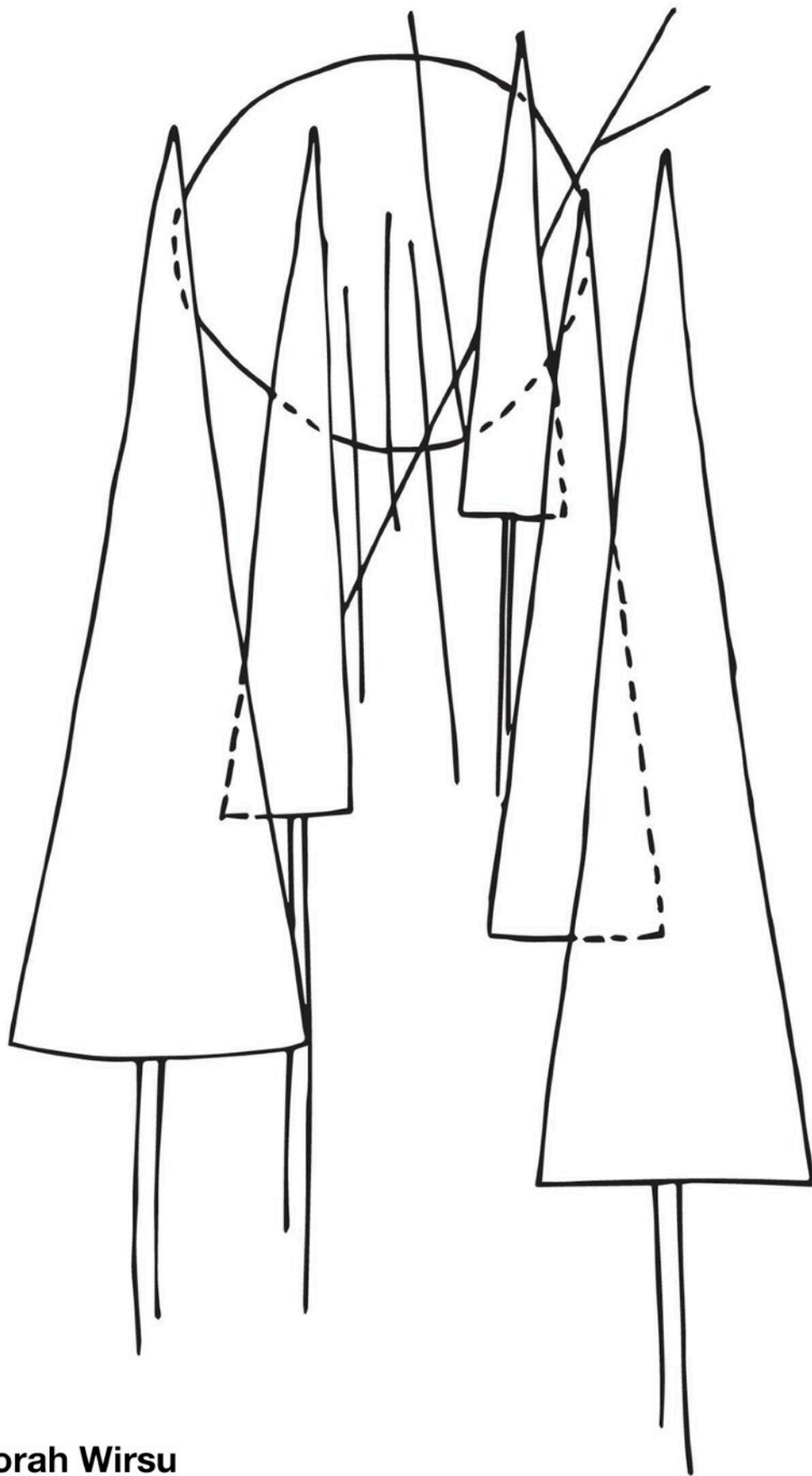
*Experiment with varying the number and position of the trees to create a different look, or even a series of cards!*

**Creative Machine Thread Sketching:  
Pine Forest Project Template A5 size**



© Deborah Wirsu

**Creative Machine Thread Sketching:  
Pine Forest Project Template A4 size**



# Project Three: Whimsical Flowers

## Whimsical Flowers Project Instructions

### WHAT YOU NEED

- ◆ 1 x sheet printer paper (A4 or US Letter size), or sketchbook
- ◆ Black marker pen or pencil
- ◆ Erasable fabric marker (e.g. Pilot FriXion Ball® pen or disappearing quilt markers)
- ◆ *(Optional)* Carbon paper suitable for use on fabric, e.g. Transdoodle or dressmaker's carbon.
- ◆ 1 x piece **firm** stabiliser — A4/US Letter size (approx. 8.50" x 11.50")
- ◆ 3 x pieces paper-backed fusible web (e.g. Vliesofix) — each cut to A4/US Letter size.
- ◆ 1 x piece of low loft batting (cotton, polyester, poly/cotton, or bamboo) — A4 size.
- ◆ 2 x pieces toning or contrasting coloured cotton top for the top — A4 size.
- ◆ 40-gauge machine embroidery thread in black (or deep purple/mulberry), purple, magenta, white/ecru.
- ◆ General sewing supplies.



## STEPS — PART 1: PREPARATION

1. Cut the stabiliser, fusible web, batting and top fabrics to size — approx. 8.50” x 11.50”. Allow a little extra on each side, if you like.

2. Using a sheet of printer paper or sketchbook, free-draw your whimsical flowers design using a black marking pen or pencil. *Alternatively...use the supplied design.*



3. **Create the foundation:** Take one piece of **fusible web** and fuse it to the *right* side of the **stabiliser**, using a hot iron.

4. When cool, remove the paper backing from the fusible web and fuse the **stabiliser** to the *wrong* side of the **batting**. You should now have two layers (stabiliser and batting) fused together. The stabiliser will form the bottom layer of your design. The batting will be in the middle.

5. **Prepare the top:** Apply a sheet of fusible web to the *wrong* side of both your contrasting top fabrics.

6. Using a rotary cutter, and free-cutting, cut one piece of top fabric into 5 wavy segments, cutting *vertically*.

7. Cut the other piece of top fabric into 5 wavy segments, this time cutting *horizontally*.

8. Remove the paper backing from each of the top fabric segments, taking care to keep them in order.

9. **Combine the foundation and the top:** Arrange each cut segment on the batting/stabiliser foundation, weaving them into a chequerboard effect. *Refer to video demonstration.*

10. Using a hot, dry iron, fuse the top and foundation together.

11. Transfer your sketched design onto your chequerboard top using dressmaker's carbon or Transdoodle. Alternatively, free-draw your own design on the fabric using an erasable fabric marker.

## STEPS — PART 2: THREAD SKETCHING

12. Set up your machine for free motion stitching. Lower the feed dogs and set stitch length to zero.

13. Using black or deep purple/mulberry thread, free motion stitch the design outline. Work over each inner and outer petal twice, but do not try to stitch precisely over previous lines. The beauty of the whimsical style is that the aim is to look like a *sketch*.

Begin near the centre and work outwards, as much as possible. Although the foundation layers are fused, fabrics may shift a little while stitching, causing unwanted puckering. Adding a few pins, and stitching from the centre, toward the edges, helps prevent this from occurring.

### STEPS — PART 3: THREAD PAINTING

*Refer to the video demonstration to see the thread painting process in action.*

14. Using magenta thread and free motion straight stitch, gradually fill the inner petal segments with colour.

15. Using purple thread and free motion straight stitch, fill the outer petal segments with colour. Use two different shades of purple, if that appeals.

16. Using the original deep purple thread, fill the central steamed on each flower by stitching in a circular fashion within the boundary.

17. Using white or ecru thread, add a few colour highlights to the vase.

18. When all the stitching is complete, brush away or remove any of the traced design still visible, and lightly press the picture. *Note: Lines drawn with FriXion Erasable Pens will disappear when pressed.*

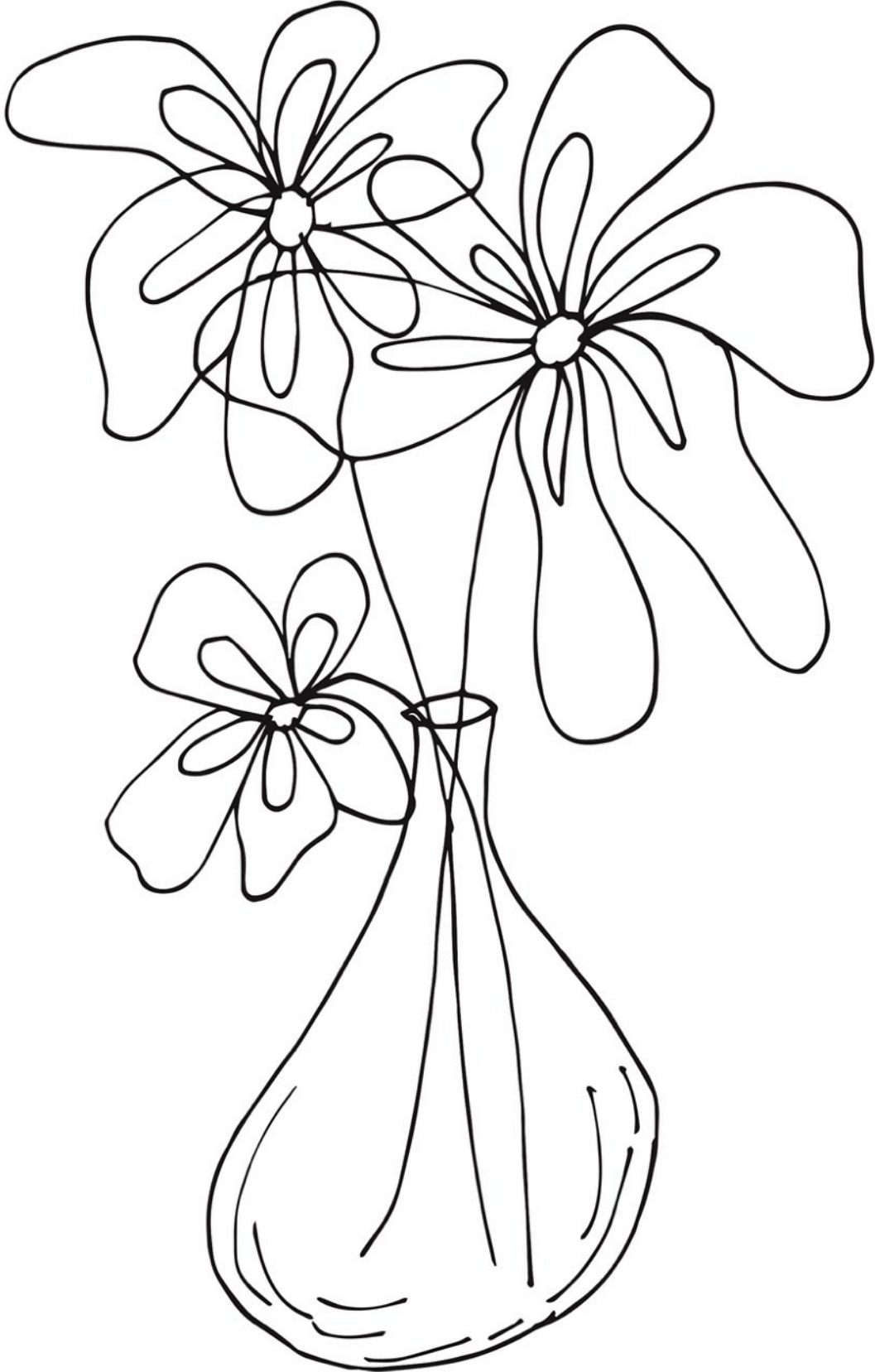
19. The background of this picture could be filled with free motion quilting, if desired, or left unstitched.

20. Finish the picture by edging, binding, or framing, as desired.

*This design can be reduced in size to make a postcard, or enlarged to create a wall hanging. Try creating a series, using different whimsical flower arrangements or colours for each one.*



**Creative Machine Thread Sketching:  
Whimsical Flowers Project Template size**



# MODULE FOUR

## An Introduction to Free Motion Zigzag Stitch

# Free Motion Zigzag Stitch: The Versatile Stitch

Free motion zigzag stitch can be used in myriad ways — as with straight stitch, colours can be overstitched and blended, working just as you might with paint, only on fabric! Free motion zigzag stitch is truly versatile, as it can be used to create many different effects, from complete pictures to fillers.

Depending on the type of thread sketched or free machine embroidered design you choose, you will often find yourself using both free motion straight and zigzag stitch.

## FREE MOTION STRAIGHT STITCHED DESIGN

This little free machine embroidered design of a *Superb Blue Wren* is worked entirely in free motion straight stitch.



### FREE MOTION ZIGZAG STITCHED DESIGN

On the other hand, the *Red Berries* shown here are worked entirely in free motion zigzag stitch.

It's easy to see the different effect each of these stitches produces.



### COMBINING FREE MOTION STRAIGHT STITCH AND ZIGZAG STITCH

Many thread sketches and thread paintings call for a combined use of free motion straight and zigzag stitch. For example, this picture of a Sulphur Crested Cockatoo uses straight stitch for the feather detail on the body, and zigzag stitch for the crest feathers.



## MULTI-DIRECTIONAL FREE MOTION STITCHING FOR THREAD PAINTING

The Module 4 video demonstrates, in fundamental terms, how multi-directional free motion zigzag stitch works.

Wonderful effects can be achieved by stitching in random directions, and colours can be blended, just as you would when mixing paint. There is no need to keep all your stitching aligned in neat rows.

Multi-directional free motion zigzag stitch opens up an entire new world of possibilities! With free motion zigzag stitch, you can use the different stitch directions to create texture, realism, depth or even abstract designs in your work.

Think about whether you want to create a photo-realistic portrait, or a more Impressionist-style thread painting.



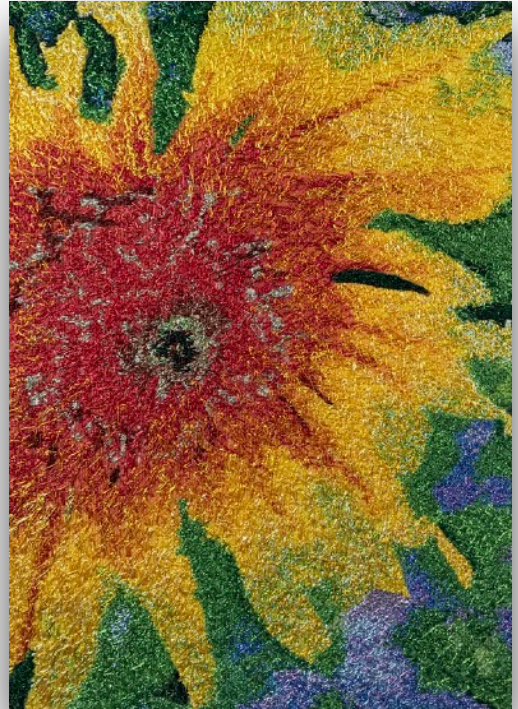
*Photo -realistic thread painting*

## TIPS FOR USING FREE MOTION ZIGZAG STITCH

◆ Set the stitch width and length as you would when **not** stitching free motion.

◆ However, a smaller setting is easier for tiny stitches (e.g. in the *Red Berries* and *Puppy Love*, above), and a larger setting works well for backgrounds (see *Red Berries* or the two more contemporary images below).

*Impressionist-style thread painting*



## TIPS FOR USING FREE MOTION ZIGZAG STITCH (CONT.)

- ◆ Keep in mind that, when working with free motion zigzag stitch, how much you move the fabric around under the needle also affects the size of your stitches.
- ◆ Use long and short stitches.
- ◆ Change direction often. Don't be afraid to stitch "sideways", thus creating the effect of a solid straight line.
- ◆ Change the thread colour.
- ◆ Layer and mix colours, just as you would when working with paint.
- ◆ Vary the size of your stitches, too. Different sizes lead to different results.
- ◆ Explore the possibilities of multi-directional stitching, using the straight stitch setting, too. It will create different results to multi-directional stitching using zigzag.
- ◆ Experiment!

# Additional Resources

## Books

I have a selection of books available for anyone interested in thread sketching, thread painting, art quilting, or even writing your own arts and crafts books.

Find out more at:

<https://www.threadsketchinginaction.com/books-catalogue/>



## Courses and Resources

Explore the range of resources and online courses available from TSIA (Thread Sketching in Action).

For more information, visit:

<https://www.threadsketchinginaction.com/>

# About the Author

**Deborah Wirsu** is an Australian author, artist, musician, and business owner with over 30 years experience in the arts and crafts world, and 15 years of running online businesses, including the highly successful Thread Sketching In Action.

She is a 4 x Amazon Best Seller and has written and self-published eight non-fiction books in the arts, crafts, and online business fields.

Deborah's strong background in creative arts and business, combined with her teaching experience, authorship, positivity, and *'leave no person behind'* attitude have earned her a dedicated following among her fans.

Deborah has qualifications in Creative Textiles, Freelance Journalism, Editing and Proofreading, Music, and (curiously) Medical Administration. She is also a Certified Business and Entrepreneurship Coach.

[ThreadSketchingInAction.com](http://ThreadSketchingInAction.com)

[DeborahWirsu.com](http://DeborahWirsu.com)