

Goldwork: An Introduction to Metal Thread and Bullion Embroidery Techniques



I. Materials:

Metal Thread/Passing Thread – gilded silver drawn into wire and beaten flat then spiraled around a silk core. This is the common form of “thread” which was used and then couched down with silk. An inexpensive modern version is called “Jap Gold” which is made with a cheap imitation gilt or lesser quality gilt.

Purl – comes in many sizes and textures. Finest smoothest wire twisted into a tube is called smooth purl. When not done with the most polished wire, but still a fine wire twisted into a tube its is called rough purl. When done with a wire which is beaten so as to appear with facets, this is called check purl. Each is used by cutting pieces into “beads” and being applied like beads by passing a silk thread through the bead and into the fabric. The purl “bead” may be laid straight, on an angle, or in a “S” and “Z” formation to form a “twisted cord” effect.

Pearl Purl – a variation of the twisted wire tube is pearl purl, where in the tube is springy. The method is then to pull on the tube slightly to open up the spaces between and then couch down with silk between the spaces.

Braid – a variation on the above types of metal threads is braid. With braid, various passing threads are twisted or woven into strands. Some are very fine and contain a single thread twisted and others contain several threads of similar or different types to form a single thick thread suitable for being couched down.

Plate (or plat) – the metal is pounded flat and cut into “ribbons”. This is then couched down and the plate is twisted or folded as needed. Flat braid would be the modern substitute. Usually the plat is couched down. With metal plat the plat is then folded over the stitch to change direction.

II. Techniques:

Couching – in its simplest form it is the method of using a thread – coming up from the underside of the fabric to the top, passing over the item, and then returning down into and through the fabric. This can be repeated in various fashions For example:

 Angling for Pearl Purl or Twist or Braid – angle the thread so as to follow the line of the twist and sink into the line as much as possible.

 Patterning for Twist or Metal Thread – bring the thread up and over in a pattern to give dimension and reflect light such as in brick or herringbone pattern. Coiled thread can also be done to accentuate the coil or to create a spiraling effect.

Plunging – end of twist or thread are passed through or plunged to the back of the fabric and there they are secured on the backside of the fabric.

Beading – smooth purl, check purl, and rough purl are usually cut in lengths to cover a particular area. They are then applied as if they were a bead with the thread, which is either doubled or waxed for strength, being passed through the “bead” and through the fabric at the beginning and end.

Chipwork – cut the smooth, check or rought purl into beads which are 1mm to 2mm in length. Then apply the “chips” as beads in a random pattern.

Common Types of Metal Thread, Bullion, and non-metallic threads of similar character:

Coil	Thread	Twist & Braid
Smooth purl	Gold/Colored Metal Threads	Metal Braid
Rough purl	(from sewing weight up)	Gilt Grecian Twist
Check purl	Gilt Thread	Kreinik Ribbon 1/8in & 1/16in
Gilt Pearl Purl	Passing (gold, gilt, silver)	Kreinik Braid – from very fine to Medium
Milliary	Kreinik Jap Threads #1 (sewing weight)	
	Kreinik Jap Threads #5 (sew or couch)	
(all these come	Kreinik Jap Threads #7 (couch or braid)	
in gold & silver)	DMC “Metallic” Floss – strandable	
	Treasure Braid – from petite up	

Padding – padding may be thread, felt or other material. This is tacked down to the fabric. Then the bullion is placed on top and sewn into place. By adding layers of padding or padding areas differently you can get different effects. Sometimes called “padding up”.

III. Further Reading on Goldwork:

Franklin, Tracy A., “New Ideas in Goldwork”, BT Batsford, London, 2002, 0 7134 8780 1.
 Lemon, Jane. “Metal Thread Embroidery”, BT Batsford, London, 2002, 0 7134 8758 5.
 Beck, Thomasina, “Gardening with Silk & Gold: A History of Gardens in Embroidery”, David & Charles, Devon, 1997, 0-7153-0487-9
 Zimmerman, Jane D., “Traditional Silk and Metal Thread Techniques on Canvas”, self, Richmond, 1995,0-9646219-0-8
 Krody, Sumru Belger, “Flowers of Silk and Gold: Four Centuries of Ottoman Embroidery”, Merrill in association with The Textile Museum, Washington DC, 2000, 1-85894-105-9
 Pyman, Kit, “Gold & Silver Embroidery”, Search Press, Kent, 1987, 0-85532-550-X
 Dawson, Barbara, “The Technique of Metal Thread Embroidery”, B. T. Batsford Ltd., London, 1992, 0-7134-3919-X

IV. Recommended Sources for Materials:

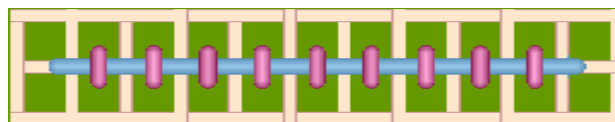
Benton & Johnson <http://www.bentonandjohnson.com> (producer of metal work)
 Hedgehog Handworks <http://www.Hedgehoghandworks.com> (sells Access Commodities products)

The 1st Exercise:

Draw a triangle - 1” each side. Outside of this draw another triangle 1/4” outside of the other.
 Metal Thread - couch down metal thread doubled in brick pattern along all 3 sides - going around 4 times.
 Braid - couch down braid inside or outside the metal thread triangle
 Pearl Purl - couch down a circle inside of the triangle
 Purl and Check Purl - cut 2 beads of about 1/2” plus 2-4 chips each 1-2 mm long and lay inside circle.

The 2nd Exercise:

Cut a small (about 1/2”) circle, oval or leaf of the felt and tack down the center and edges. Decide how you want to cover it with your remaining bullion. Cut and lay purls and chips as appropriate to cover in the pattern you have



Couching diagram courtesy of Johanna Needlework Stitches http://webstitch.designwest.com/needle_stitch.html