

Topic Page: [Embroidery](#)

Definition: **embroidery** from *Collins English Dictionary*

n pl -deries

1 decorative needlework done usually on loosely woven cloth or canvas, often being a picture or pattern

2 elaboration or exaggeration, esp in writing or reporting; embellishment



Image from: [Beginners work, embroidered in silk cross-stitch on linen, initialed ADB and dated 1817 in Bridgeman Images: DeAgostini Library](#)

Summary Article: **embroidery**
from *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

ornamental needlework applied to all varieties of fabrics and worked with many sorts of thread—linen, cotton, wool, silk, gold, and even hair. Decorative objects, such as shells, feathers, beads, and jewels, are often sewn to the embroidered piece. The Bayeux tapestry is among the most famous examples of embroidery. The art probably antedates that of weaving. Needlework is mentioned in the Vedas and in Exodus in the Bible. In ancient Egypt, gold was used for the decorative stitches, which often covered the entire garment; such work has been found on mummy wrappings. The borders of Greek and Roman garments were often finely embroidered. In Asia, sumptuous designs of gold and silver thread were produced from remotest times; the intricate embroidery of China became stylized and remained unchanged for centuries. From the richly decorative art of Byzantium (4th cent.) embroidery was introduced into Europe and thereafter followed the great period (12th–14th cent.) of church embroidery. The famous opus Anglicanum, or English work (e.g., the Syon cope, Victoria and Albert Mus.), dates from this time. Monasteries and

convents were kept busy adorning vestments and altarpieces, and embroidery ateliers were founded. Secular needlework was far simpler, confined to embroidered bands around the edges of hems, sleeves, necks, and mantles in coarse and dull-colored threads. When Crusaders returned with examples of the superb fabrics of the East, interest in embroidery for nonecclesiastical uses was stimulated, and the technique of appliqué was developed. By 1389 pearls and spangles were being set in the embroidery. After the Renaissance, peasant embroidery flourished in Greece, Scandinavia, the Balkans, and many other areas. Embroidery as folk art was far less varied, complex, and imaginative than the masterworks produced by professional church and court embroiderers. The Elizabethan period was famous for its household and costume embroidery. Gold and silver thread was used on velvet, brocade, and silk, and the allover design was often enhanced with pearls and gems. “Spanish blackwork,” black silk on white linen with touches of gold, became enormously popular, while the use of drawnwork and cutwork led to the development of fine lace. In the 18th cent., French influence refined embroidery techniques; quilting was developed using backstitch embroidery, especially popular in making petticoats and coattails. By the 19th cent. embroidery for male attire had declined except for occasional decorative vests and ties. Modern embroidery is most frequently used on lingerie and linens, but with the introduction of machine-made embroidery, the quality has deteriorated.

See Bath, U. C. , *Embroidery Masterworks* (1972);

L. F. Day; M. Buckle, *Art in Needlework* (1900, repr. 1972);

Mary Thomas' *Embroidery Book* (1984).

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