



Transparency in Textiles

Dawn Thorne

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DAWN THORNE



BATSFORD

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my Father, John Joseph James, whose great artistic talent always encouraged me to find my own way. An exceptional man in many ways. To those that knew him it has been a privilege. My hero and inspiration. Thanks Dad.

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Right: Sketchbook page with design work showing
transparent layers in tissue paper and wax.
Opposite page: Shot organza layered and
gathered with stitch.



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INTRODUCTION

Back in the 1970s, when I had just started my teenage years, I was given a hobby kit called Plasticraft™. For me, this was the most amazing and inspirational gift. The idea was that you would trap small objects into a clear plastic block, which was then backed with a coloured plastic in liquid form. A ceramic mould was supplied with a range of different shapes and sizes to choose from. The whole process took a few days, as it took time for the layers to set and the finished shapes to become completely hard. Once hardened, the plastic could be turned into rings, cufflinks, brooches and paperweights.

That kit has remained one of the most memorable and exciting gifts I have ever received; even now, some thirty years later, it still manages to excite me.

Looking back, plastics have always fascinated me: the wonderful colours, the edges that glow, the feel, handle and texture of matt surfaces that contrasts with the glassy, transparent quality of perspex and acrylic. Some plastics are rigid, bendy, springy and pliable, and all extend their potential when combined with textiles.

Many types of plastic are covered in this book and you will see how, with careful consideration and selection, these offer additional materials with which to explore levels of transparency, low relief, form and dimension that could inspire future textile work.

In addition to the plastics, we will look at ways of translating and creating translucent fabrics and surfaces with waxes, oils, fibres, fabrics and thread. You will also learn how to select and interpret inspirational sources that are then taken forward into design exercises specifically aimed at transparency and structure. Looking at the three-dimensional form requires more than one viewpoint.

To add to the thrill, methods of incorporating lighting into your work, using fibre optics and conventional lighting approaches, are demonstrated.

We all have a passion for what we do and sometimes we can't contain our excitement when challenged to play and experiment with the new products that continually cover the pages of magazines and publications. To this end, I hope to challenge and inspire you with my own passion for transparency and structure.

Have fun and enjoy!

Right: Jute fibre, handwoven into a machine-made grid and embellished with further machine stitch.

Below: An example of traditional reverse appliqué in black cotton applied onto a sheer organdie fabric, which allows light to filter through the turned-back areas.





1 Materials and Equipment

In this section, I have listed some of the materials and equipment you will need for the processes covered in this book. Most of the items can be sourced through the internet, hardware stores and garden centres, as well as the more usual art and embroidery outlets. Some of the tools I have used are available from specialist suppliers. In many cases, you can utilize items you have around the house.

Art and design materials

Wonderful coloured surfaces and textures can be achieved relatively easily using a range of colouring media. Commercial dyes are readily available and easy to use to add colour and designs to natural and synthetic fabrics, and flourishes of sparkle and iridescent shimmers can be applied with Markal Paintstiks, bronzing powders and metallic rubs. Try using the following:

- Acrylic paints
- Gouache
- Brusho
- Water-soluble crayons
- Markal Paintstiks
- Bronzing powders
- Graphite and charcoal
- Fine liners
- Transfer paints
- Acid, Procion and disperse dyes
- Treasure Gold wax gilt
- Metallic rubs



Left: Brusho paints.



Threads and fibres

There is a huge array of embroidery threads available, in amazing colours, some variegated or shaded, as well as in seductive textures – thick or thin, matt or shiny. All these threads increase the range of your palette and can be used to add embellishment to your work, from the simplest marks to rich, heavily worked surfaces, as well as being used in the construction process. In addition to embroidery threads, there are also a number of different fibre types that can be used in a variety of ways in their unspun state. These fibres offer the potential to create delicate and translucent fabrics and papers, as well as adding interest to store-bought fabrics. You could use:

- Silk fibres and wool tops
- Cellulose
- Sisal fibre, kozo fibre
- Embroidery threads, both hand and machine

Below: An example of the devoré technique used on acid-dyed silk/viscose velvet. In the places where the pile is removed the design becomes see-through.

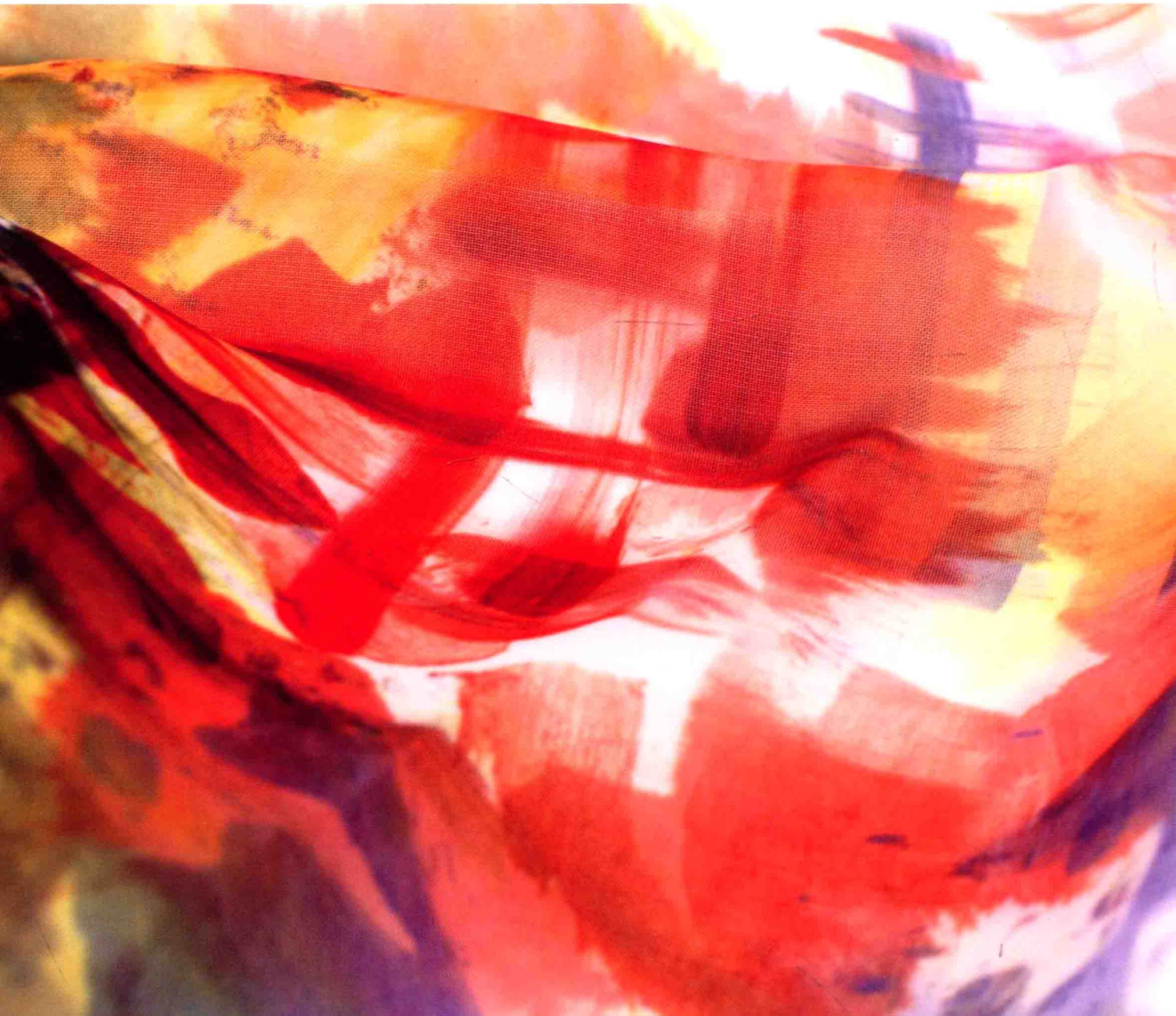


Woven fabrics

Woven fabrics are ones that have a weave: the warp (vertical) and weft (horizontal) threads. The way that weft threads are woven in and out of the warp threads gives the variety in weave patterns. In evenweave fabric, the warp and weft threads are spaced evenly over the entire cloth. By altering the thickness of the threads used, a whole range of different weights of fabric can be produced, from the most delicate chiffon and silk mousseline to heavy canvas and sacking (burlap). There are many translucent woven fabrics to choose from, including the following:

- Sheers: chiffon scarves, synthetic sheers
- Silk chiffon, organzas and organdie
- Plastic netting
- Cottons: calico, scrim, muslin, fine lawn

Below: A plain white synthetic voile fabric, to which colour has been added using disperse dyes. The transparent quality of the fabric allows for subtle shading when it is layered over a solid-coloured fabric.



Non-wovens

Non-wovens is a collective term for a wide range of materials, many of which have been used to create the looks and finishes in this book. These non-wovens are all man-made and fall into two categories – those that react with water and those that react to heat.

SOLUBLE AND DISPERSIBLE FABRICS

Soluble fabrics can be stitched; once stitching is complete, you can simply wash away the fabric with water, leaving just the stitch.

- Solufleece is a fabric-like soluble that allows you to trace or draw your design directly onto the surface with ease.
- Soluthick is a similar fabric but, as the name implies, it is a thicker product. This is useful if you intend to stitch heavily or attach fabrics and additions.
- Romeo is a durable clear PVC-like film, which is cold-water dissolvable. Your design can be drawn on or you can put the fabric through an inkjet or laser printer (using a sheet of paper as a carrier). It can be stitched without a hoop.
- Giulietta is a lighter-weight, clear, cold water-soluble film that can also be put through the printer. This does need to be put into a hoop for stitching.
- Solusheet water-soluble paper will also go through the printer and can be stamped and coloured. Using a brush and water, you can carefully remove sections of paper, leaving areas of stitch as well as print and paper.
- Aquabond water-soluble fabric is similar to Solusheet, but has a sticky adhesive side. This allows fabrics, threads and so on to be positioned in place without fear of movement or displacement when free machined.

HEAT REACTORS

- Horticultural fleece is available from garden centres and is a fine, soft non-woven fabric that is designed to protect vegetation from frost and cold weather. It can be coloured with acrylic or fabric paints; it can also be stitched into, and reacts brilliantly to heat. Once stitched, it can be zapped with a heat gun.
- Lutradur is a non-woven fabric made from spun polyester. Its surface is strong and robust, it takes colour well and can be coloured with pigment-based paints, Paintstiks and acrylics, or transfer paints and disperse dyes. It can easily be cut, sewn by hand or machine and reacts beautifully with the heat tool and soldering iron.
- Evolon is a new microfilament fabric that has the softness, look and drape of a traditional fabric. Like Lutradur, Evolon can be cut, sewn and coloured, and because of its polymer mix it can also be acid-dyed. It can even be printed via a computer. The fabric also reacts to a heat tool or soldering iron to create distressed effects.



Papers

There are many different types of paper available. Most can be treated to create transparent effects, or exhibit sheer qualities when used as a design tool for transparent work. Papers can be cut, glued or layered to achieve interesting results. Useful types include:

- Tissue paper
- Glassine
- Drafting film
- Cartridge paper

Plastics, films, resins and gels

We come into contact with a number of these materials daily: cellophane wrap from a bunch of flowers, plastic file pockets from the stationery store, and packaging. They can provide crystal-clear overlays or offer light-diffusing qualities. For example, you could try:

- PVC
- Acrylic sheet
- Casting resins
- Acrylic gel media

Metals

Metals can give shimmer, support, structure or additional embellishment to your work, as well as providing interest to surfaces. Useful metal items include the following:

- Wire
- Aluminium tube and sheet
- Steel rods and tubes
- Metal mesh

Tools and equipment

When working with some of the materials explored in this book, you may need additional equipment that is not necessarily familiar to the textile artist. One item from the list that will be familiar, however, is the sewing machine. Also consider:

- Laminating machine
- Jeweller's tenon saw and metal files
- Wet-and-dry sandpaper
- Glue gun
- Cordless drill
- Iron
- Heat gun
- Blow torch
- G-clamps
- Craft knife and cutting mat
- Soldering iron



Above: Three layers of transparent fabrics joined together with a network created with a glue gun. When the piece is held up to the light a stained-glass effect is achieved.

Opposite page: *Quiet Reflection* by Dawn Thorne. Waxed and oiled paper quilt with photographs and screen-printed additions, plus hand- and machine-stitch embellishment.