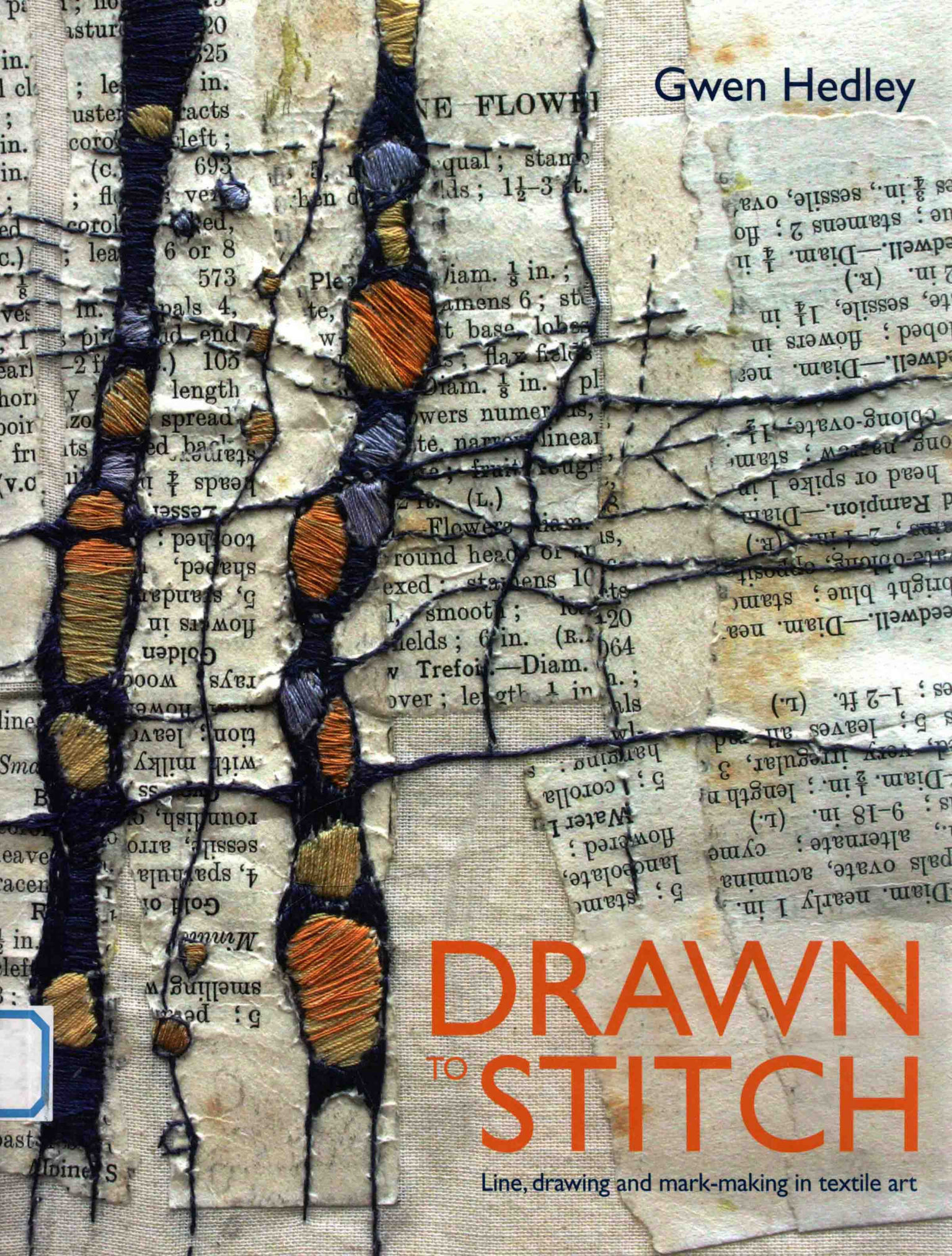


Gwen Hedley

DRAWN TO STITCH

Line, drawing and mark-making in textile art



DRAWN TO STITCH

Line, Drawing, and Mark-making
in Textile Art

GWEN HEDLEY





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INTRODUCTION

This book is aimed at those who are perhaps reticent when it comes to drawing as a preparation for stitch, or for any other purpose. Those who are unused to drawing or lack confidence to practice are frequently daunted by the prospect of a blank sheet of paper and the seemingly enormous task of accurately reproducing what is front of them. The tasks set here are not intended to result in perfect facsimiles of objects, but instead concentrate on taking sections or areas out of context, so as to focus on the different qualities of line and discover the essence of its character. Drawings will be your own particular interpretations of the lines, according to your own observations. Once confident in your ability to observe and draw lines for a variety of purposes, you will, with luck, always have a pen and a small notebook in your bag or pocket, ready to note down that particular visual reference with enthusiasm and enjoyment! You will then have a sound basis for some exciting stitch trials.

◀ *From a Bothy Wall.* Strips of painted cotton were woven together and patches basted on top. Twisted threads and scrims were couched on and the whole piece free-machine stitched. Further handstitching defined the textures (see page 123 for further details).

ABOUT LINE

Line, with its great versatility, is a fundamental element in art and design. Depending upon the placement and orientation of lines, we can use them to interpret texture, mark, tone, and form.

Prehistoric cave art gives evidence that by around 12,000BC, or possibly much earlier, man was depicting aspects of life on cave walls, drawing with fingers, sticks and pointed objects, using charcoal and ochre pigments. This earliest art shows animals drawn with lines that are dynamic, bold, fluid, and expressive. Often the lines are incised into the rock walls of the cave, giving recessed effects.

Fourteen thousand or more years later, in the 21st century, such elementary approaches to drawing and markmaking are still used, though the drawing grounds and tools have changed. Young children begin their artistic and visually expressive development with line, using fingers, brushes, paint, pencils, crayons, or whatever is at hand. They dot, dab, and daub, and their natural hand movements eventually make lines. Initially, line drawings are spontaneous and usually of retained, well-known images, such as a person, a house, or an animal. As children mature, greater hand-eye coordination develops and they can begin to look carefully and draw from observation, giving more accurately detailed line drawings.

Moving into adulthood, mark making remains an automatic gesture. We often tend to doodle when talking or listening with pen in hand, making spontaneous lines and marks upon a piece of paper; we draw local maps for people on scraps of paper or we might draw for visual explanation. We are all markmakers and fruitful observational drawing is but a few adventurous steps away.



▲ An example of early cave art.



◀ Granny by Amelia aged just 3.



▶ Granny by Amelia aged 6.

WORKING WITH THIS BOOK

Different people draw for different reasons—for relaxation and leisure, for professional purposes, as a means of self expression and, frequently, in preparation for further creative work.

Drawing from close observation enables us to get to know the design reference thoroughly, to appreciate its characteristics, and to understand every little detail of the qualities of its line, texture, and form. It is by observing and documenting, in both words and pictures, that we can distill the essence of the subject matter.

THE WORKBOOK

Your workbook/sketchbook/notebook can be of any size or shape you like. It can even be simply a sheaf or folder of papers. I tend to have several workbooks on the go at the same time—a small one for my bag, a hard backed, square format, that opens out into a good elongated shape, and a larger spiral-bound book, in which I can stick all manner of things, draw, and still have room to write descriptions or ideas. Initial ideas and drawn notes, taken from the small book, are usually developed in the A3 (11.7 x 16.5") book, along with further drawings from photographs. I often write or draw on old envelopes that I have unfolded, as I find the irregular shapes and used surfaces pleasing. These will eventually be stuck into the large book. There is no recipe here, no right or wrong way of doing things—it is all a matter of personal preference. Just try all sorts of methods and decide what works best for you.

LOOKING FOR LINE

No special locations are required, as we are surrounded by really interesting lines. Most of these go totally unnoticed, most of the time, yet when we look with intent and purpose, focusing upon finding lines, they seem to appear everywhere. I take the same walk several times a week, and I am still, even on this well-trodden route, finding lines that I haven't noticed before. They are on the path, in walls, wooden posts, rocks, fences, beach finds, stones and shells, the sky and the sea. I photograph avidly—taking shots of the whole, as well as close-up detailed images. I also collect interesting portable items, later using a magnifying glass to reveal lines of all sorts of qualities, the details of which are not immediately apparent to the naked eye.

I work mainly from my own neighborhood and environment, but when I go further afield I have my trusty pocket camera with me, as well as my small notebook—you never know when that amazing line will present itself.

My observed lines tend to be mostly from organic sources in which the lines have been made by natural processes, as this is my particular interest, but you may prefer to work with other sources, such as architectural or other man-made objects. Whatever your chosen sources, you will find lines of every quality that you will need to observe and record, in both visual and written form. I find that it helps if I write notes, just to remind me of the location of the image and my impressions of the place. It makes me think harder about the lines and increases my awareness of their characteristics and qualities.

Are the lines

- Straight, curved, varied?
- Geometric or contoured?
- Man-made or organic?
- Crisp, hard or soft edged?
- Continuous or broken?
- Jagged or even?
- Dotted, dashed or both?
- Thick, thin or varied?
- Raised or recessed?

It is important to remember that the aim of drawing is not to reproduce the line exactly—a camera will do that—but to interpret it, to find its essence, sometimes exaggerating its characteristics in order to do so.

SURFACE COLOR

When making our observation of lines, we need also to look carefully at the colors, not only of the lines, but also of the areas surrounding them. For example, simple pebbles, pieces of dried vegetation and so on, when looked at closely through a magnifying glass, will often furnish you with wonderfully subtle and unusual color schemes and combinations.

Once again, the written word is important. Make notes on the colors, likening them to well-known objects. For example, if you are describing something yellow, is it the color of butter, a lemon, a sunflower, an egg yolk, a primrose, or perhaps a banana? All are yellow, but each has a distinctive sort of “yellowness” about it.

It is always helpful to use soluble pencils or a basic watercolor palette, with an Aquash brush, to make small patches of color to accompany the notes.

Make notes on the characteristics of the colors. Are they

- Pure or blended?
- Muted or grayed and dusty?
- Bright or subdued?
- Solid or broken?
- Are the edges soft or hard?
- Are there layers of color? If so, what is the color order?

TEXTURAL QUALITIES

These are often clearly apparent, but again, the magnifier will often reveal further details and intriguing textural marks. Your notes will guide you towards the sort of surface on which to draw and ultimately towards the surface quality that will be the most appropriate to carry your stitching.

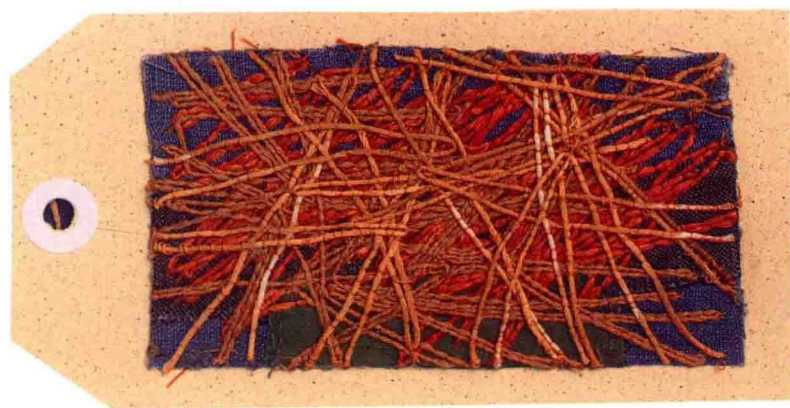
Is the surface texture:

- Smooth or rough?
- Varied?
- Shiny or dull and matte?
- Flat or knobbly?
- Complete or eroded?
- Ridged, gritty, or sleek?
- Opaque, transparent, or translucent?

It is usual to find that surfaces have a combination of many qualities and it is good to record them all.

When out on location, remember to take photographs of details as well as of the whole. It is an advantage to have a small digital camera with a close-up facility, so that you can enlarge and exaggerate characteristics. These photographs will be very useful, but they are to be used as a supplement to your observational notes and not as a substitute!

Armed with visual as well as written notes on line quality, surface color and texture, you are now ready to begin your creative journey by considering drawing tools, materials, and backgrounds.



▲ This piece was inspired by a piece of palm bark, with its rough and fibrous texture. Handstitching with raffia, threads and torn fabrics onto dyed scrim (see page 121 for more details).

◀ Taken from a drift of pine needles, a flat, spiky texture, free-machine stitching using cable stitch in multi directions (see pages 119 for more details).

CHAPTER I

TOOLS, MATERIALS, AND BACKGROUNDS

Qualities of line will be determined by the drawing tool and the media used, as well as the drawing action and the ground on which you are drawing.

DRAWING TOOLS

You can draw with a wide variety of easily obtained tools, such as those listed below, all of which will need to be used with a fluid drawing medium, such as ink, paint, and so on. Try using the following:

- Sticks—kebab, cocktail, and so on
- Twigs and bamboo
- Cotton swabs
- Blender sticks
- Card ends
- Plastic strips
- V-cut ends of wooden stirrers
- Brushes and pens
- Fingers
- Wires
- Pipe cleaners

SOLDERING IRON

A fine-tipped soldering iron can be used as a drawing tool on synthetic fabrics. It can make marks, create textures, join layers together, and cut shapes. For details of these techniques, please refer to *Fusing Fabric* in the Further Reading section.

► *Rock Studies* (Shelley Rhodes). On a background of emulsion-painted paper, lines and marks were drawn with a stick and ink. Chalk and oil were applied to the drawing, creating texture and surface variety.

