



FUSING FABRIC

CREATIVE CUTTING, BONDING AND
MARK-MAKING WITH THE SOLDERING IRON

MARGARET BEAL

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Margaret Beal



BATSFORD

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must first thank my husband Andrew for the continuous help and support that has made it possible for me to write this book.

My thanks also go to Jo, who has helped and encouraged me over many months, to Tracey and Cindy, who have tried and tested the text and many of the methods, and to Michael Wicks and Andrew Smart for the beautiful photography.

Finally, I would like to thank the many friends and embroiderers who encouraged me to write this book.

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Page 1 A small panel combining mark-making, cutwork, reverse appliqué and a relief effect (photograph: Andrew Smart).

Page 2 This panel was created by bonding fragments of organza to Wireform Sparkle Mesh. The Wireform was then cut into strips, which were rolled around a pencil to form straws.

Page 3 Three-dimensional bubbly, scrunchy-textured surface created by tying pebbles into three layers of nylon organza, then steaming. The scrunchy texture was created with the soldering iron. By Pauline Miles.

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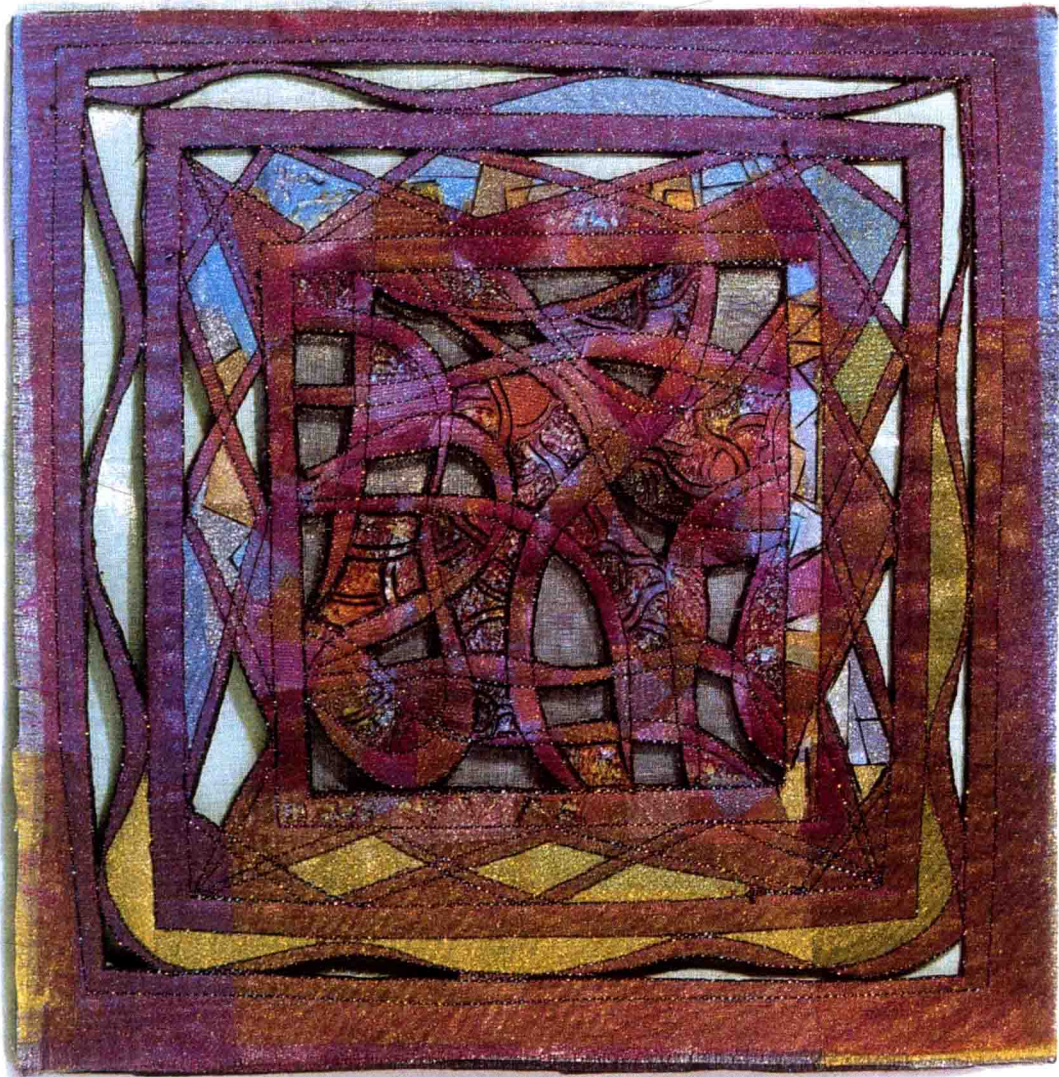
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Book cover created using simple
mark-making techniques.



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Introduction

For many years the fashion industry has used heat to bond, cut and make textured marks and patterns on fabric, and this has influenced me in the development of my own ideas for using a soldering iron on synthetic fabric. The resulting techniques and methods in this book have developed over many years by trial and error, and all are based on traditional embroidery or textile techniques.

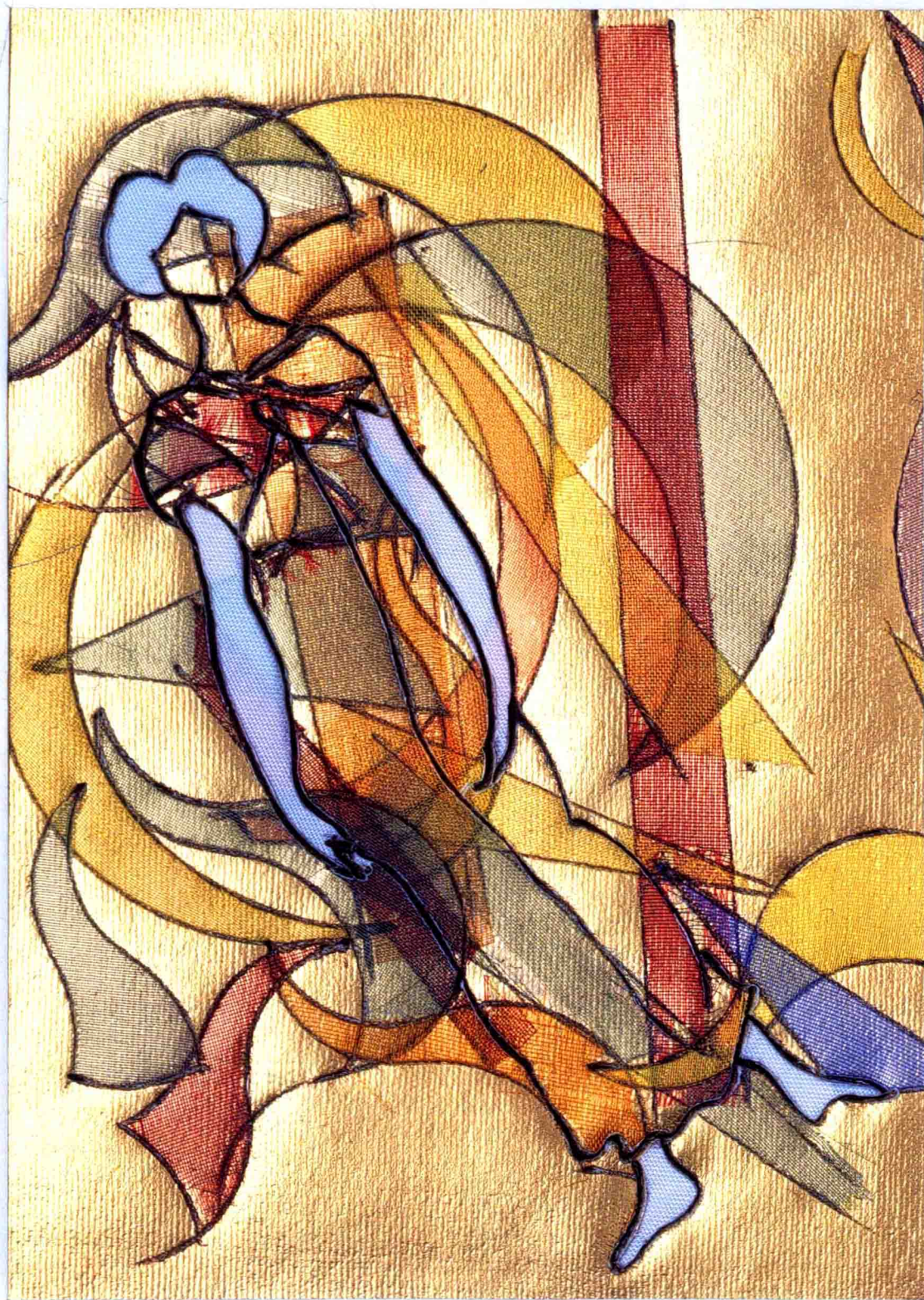
If you have never tried heat techniques, you will be unaware just how exciting and creative they can be. Mark-making, cutting and bonding are the three basic methods used throughout the book. By combining all three, with or without stitching, magical effects can be achieved.

The methods have been planned so that each one will naturally lead on to the next. For this reason, I recommend that you work through them in the set order. If you give yourself time to experiment, you will discover the magic and realize the potential. You will find that your mind will soon be full of ideas for developing and combining ideas with many other mixed-media embroidery techniques – the ‘what if?’ factor will have kicked in!

I continue to experiment with new ideas and with fabrics that I have not used before. I hope you will enjoy using this book and will discover ways of using the soldering iron that I have yet to consider.

Right

Organza shapes were bonded to PVC on acrylic felt and covered with a design traced on paper nylon. The design, which was taken from *Art Nouveau* by Edmund V. Gillon (Dover Pictorial Archive Series), was scored on the traced line with the soldering iron through all the layers, but only lightly into the felt. Using the reverse appliqué technique, most of the paper nylon was cut back to reveal the colours beneath.



Basic tools and equipment

SOLDERING IRON

You will require a soldering iron (A) with a very fine tip. Mine has a very sharp, fine tip – size 0.12mm (approximately $\frac{1}{200}$ in) – and looks like a well-sharpened pencil. It uses 18 watts. Because the tip is so fine, all the heat is concentrated on the point, which means that it will cut and score very neat, sharp marks into fabrics. The temperature is also very important: if it were too hot, the fabrics might be reduced to a sticky goo; if it were too cool, you might find that some fabrics would not melt as readily as you would like. It usually takes from three to four minutes for the soldering iron to reach its full heat, but once hot it will stay hot until switched off. Soldering iron tips do wear down, but can be replaced. Angled fine-pointed tips are also available.

The soldering iron is also available with a special silicon flex, which will not melt if you accidentally touch it with the tip of the hot iron.



SOLDERING IRON STANDS

Manufactured soldering iron stands (not pictured) are readily available in a variety of forms. Those that clip onto the workbench are very useful. With this type, the soldering iron sits in a metal coil. A word of warning, however: the metal coil gets hot and it is possible to burn yourself on it.

I use an upturned terracotta flowerpot as a stand. This also gets a little warm, but the pot makes quite a safe place for the tip of the hot iron. Choose a pot big enough for the tip of the soldering iron to sit safely in the drainage hole, with the handle sticking up. The pot must be sufficiently tall so that the tip of the iron cannot touch your workbench, and wide enough for the tip not to touch the sides.

PROTECTIVE FACE MASK

Because of the risk of inhaling toxic fumes from melting fabric, it is advisable to wear a protective face mask or respirator (B) and to work in a well-ventilated room. An extractor fan is also useful.

GLASS

You will need to work on a piece of ordinary picture glass (C), A4 size or larger. To avoid cutting yourself, cover the edges with masking tape.

FINE WIRE WOOL

I use fine wire wool – a very soft grade 0000, pushed into a cardboard tube (D) – to keep the tip of the soldering iron clean. This prevents a build-up of melted fabric spoiling the tip and inhibiting the efficiency of the heat.

METAL RULERS

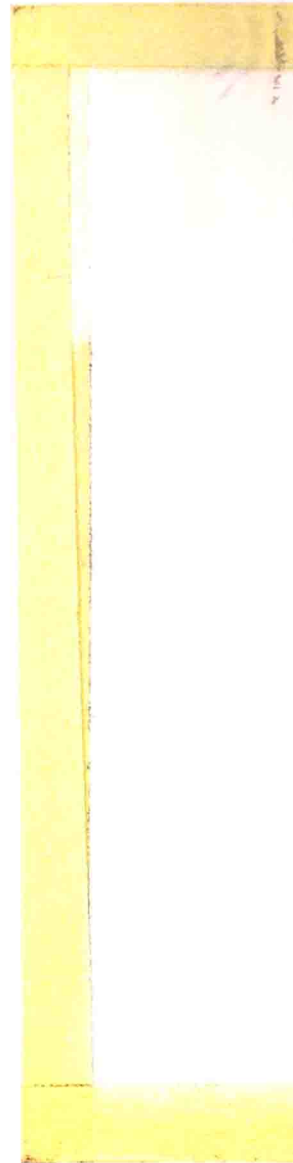
You will need a range of metal rulers in a variety of widths, but a short, thin smooth-edged ruler (E) is ideal for most of the techniques.

A safety ruler (F) will keep your fingers safely away from the tip of the iron. This type has a recess for your fingers, but unfortunately it also has graduation marks, which sometimes hinder the tip of the soldering iron from running smoothly along its edge.

Normally used to hang a picture on a wall, a mirror plate (G) makes an extremely useful small ruler. I use one all the time, because it is practical and safe, and I recommend that one of these becomes part of your basic tool kit.



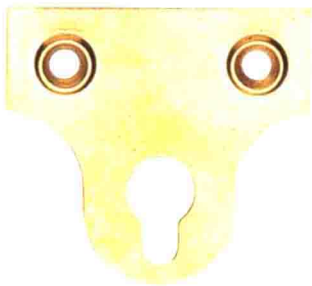
C



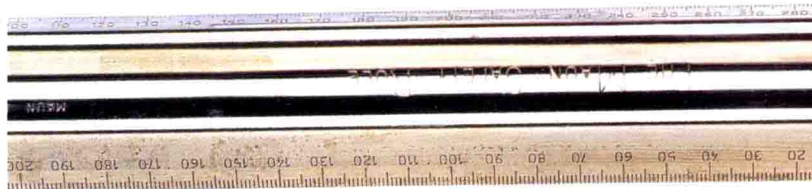
E



G



F



Other tools and equipment

Left and below METAL TEMPLATES

A variety of templates, both custom-made ones and 'found objects', can be used for cutting out shapes and mark-making. A variety of flat metal templates (pictured on opposite page) can be used for cutting out shapes and for mark-making. Start collecting by looking in junk boxes, tool boxes or charity shops for badges, brooches, earrings, medals, keys, grids – absolutely anything made of metal that will rest flat on the fabric.

Manufactured metal templates and stencils are very useful; a wide range of patterns and lettering is available in craft shops.

WIRE CUTTERS

These are used to cut metal grid.

HOT AIR TOOL

A hot air tool designed for craft purposes, which is hotter than a hair dryer, used to distort the surface of acrylic felt.

IRON

This is required for ironing Bondaweb (fusible webbing) to fabric.

SEWING MACHINE

A basic machine with straight and zigzag stitches, and the facility to drop or disengage the feed dogs to allow free-machine embroidery, is all that is required.

MACHINE NEEDLES

You should have a variety of machine needles, appropriate for the thread or fabric being used. These will include twin and jeans needles.

HAND SEWING NEEDLES

You may also wish to add hand stitching, in which case you will require a range of needles for hand stitching, including a medium-sized tapestry needle (also used for the reverse appliqué technique).

EMBROIDERY HOOPS

You may require hoops both for free-machine embroidery and for hand stitching. The inner hoop should be bound with tape to prevent the fabric from slipping.

Fabrics

SYNTHETIC FABRICS

These will melt with the heat of the soldering iron, so many of the methods in this book use small pieces of synthetic sheer fabric. Now is the time to use up all the bits and pieces that most embroiderers hoard and save to use someday. Look for interestingly textured synthetic fabric in charity shops or at jumble sales, bearing in mind that a dull-looking fabric can quite often be transformed when layered or mixed with a sheer fabric. The range of fabrics to look out for includes the following:

- Nylon organza (ideal for getting to grips with many of the techniques)
- Polyester
- Synthetic sheers, both plain and patterned
- Nylon chiffon scarves
- Nylon pearl organza
- Synthetic net or lace
- Foil-coated fabric
- Synthetic velvet
- PVC
- Lamé
- Glitzy fabrics

ACRYLIC FELT

Available in a wide variety of colours, acrylic felt is firm and compact. It does not have to be stretched in a frame, and its depth is ideal for mark-making.

NATURAL FABRICS

Natural fabrics will singe or burn; they will not melt. It is nevertheless useful to add some of the following types to your collection:

- Silks
- Silk organza
- Metallic fabrics
- Linen scrim
- Cotton velvet

Opposite page

Top: Acrylic felt and nylon organza.

Bottom: A selection of lightweight synthetic fabrics.

