

Appliqué Techniques
By The Renaissance Tailor
http://www.vertetsable.com/demos_appart.htm

The Art of Appliqué -

The word appliqué usually strikes enough terror into the hearts of many costumers that they never try this versatile and extremely period embellishment technique. Somehow, appliqué got the reputation of being advanced or difficult to master. It does require the mastery of a set of hand stitches but that's about it. If you can sew, you can appliqué. Read on, intrepid textile adventurer!

History

Appliqué comes from the French word 'appliqué' (pronounced 'ap-lee-kay'), which means "to put on or lay on" or to "apply". Essentially, to place a cutout decoration onto another larger piece of material and affix it to that material. There are many period appliqué techniques and modern equivalents that make appliqué a joy to work.

Historically, appliqué is often worked first and then used as a ground for embroidery and other types of embellishment. It is thought to have originated as both a means to artistically patch holes and as a means to use up scraps of precious fabric so that nothing went to waste.



Appliquéd and embroidered Rus gryphon, wool on wool and silk.

The Elizabethans used the appliqué technique extensively both by itself and in conjunction with quilting. In *Patterns of Fashion*, by Janet Arnold, there is a beautiful example of a pink satin doublet with an all-over appliqué of 'gilly' flowers in cream leather. Other examples, especially from fine leather, abound.

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, examples such as the gryphon above, as well as clothing, door hangings, saddles, rugs, bags and other household items all show heavy use of appliqué as a means of embellishment.

Techniques

The technique used depends on the textile used and the use of the finished product.

Wool, leather, and other non-raveling materials

Once woven wool is fulled, it usually does not unravel at the cut edge. Like wool felt, the fibers have matted together. This means that you don't have to turn the cut edges under when tacking them down. Likewise with leather.

Since you don't have to worry about the edge, you can simply cut out your shape and tack it to the ground fabric using whatever stitch suits you.

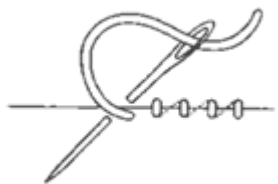
Silks, Linens, Cottons and other raveling materials

Any woven fabric except wool will need to have its edges treated in some fashion when used as appliqué material. You can approach this in one of two ways. First, you can leave the edge raw, tack the shape down and apply cording on top of the edge to hide it and prevent it from further fraying. This is a good method and a period one, provided you make sure your raw edge is tacked very securely down and won't slip out from under the cording applied on top of it.

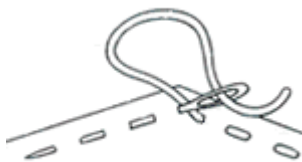
The other way of approaching the edge is to roll it under as you are tacking it down. This is a good method if the article is going to be washed quite a bit. Depending on how small the appliqué piece is, you might even be able to iron the edges over prior to stitching down, which will make things much easier. One problem you will face with this method is when you come to tight interior corners. You will need to clip your seam allowance to allow the fabric to fold around the curve without too much fuss.

If the fabric chosen wants to unravel the second you cut it, you might consider using an alternative fabric for appliqué. You will have a devil of a time working with it unless you use Fraycheck (a edge bonding agent) or the period equivalent of Fraycheck, Gum Arabic. There is ample evidence in period that Gum Arabic was used not only as a deterrent to ravel prone edges but also as a sizing bath. Fabrics such as velvet, velveteen and other slick or napped fabrics respond very well to Fraycheck. Fraycheck makes it possible to not have to roll the edges under which makes working with velvet/velveteen much easier.

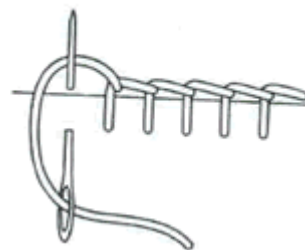
Types of stitches



Common tacking stitch



Running stitch

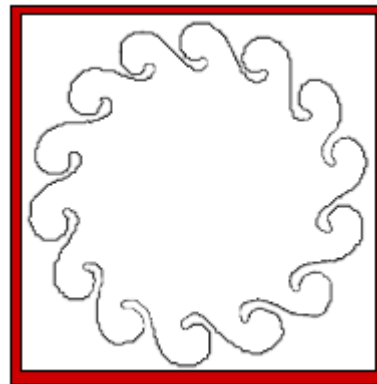
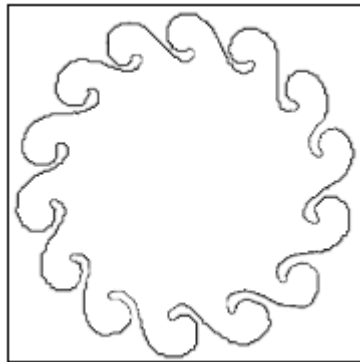


Blanket or Buttonhole stitch

The above three types of stitches are the ones most commonly used in period appliqué. The common tacking stitch is best used on a turned edge rather than a raw edge. The running stitch is good for both raw edges and turned edges. The blanket or button hole stitch, if worked very closely together is great for covering a raw edges. If worked loosely as above, it makes a nice embellishing stitch especially when done in a heavy thread.

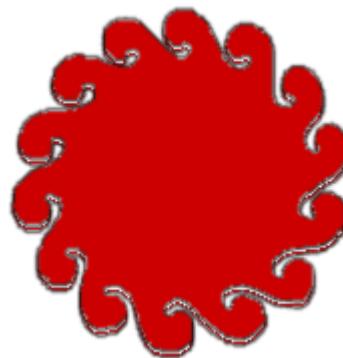
Fun with modern tools

In period, a piece of appliqué was usually held to the ground by some method during the stitch process. Various methods included simple pinning and actual use of weak glue. With this in mind, I use a product called Heat 'n' Bond Lite Low Temp at Jo-Ann's Fabric Store. It comes in sheets and rolls. Essentially it is a waxed paper coated on one side with a heat activated bonding agent. The 'Lite' denotes that it is for light weight fabrics - I use this even when working with wool, however. The 'low temp' is exactly that. It was developed for fabrics that couldn't take an extremely hot iron.



The first step is to develop the design. Once that is done, it can then be traced on to the Heat 'n' Bond paper (it's fairly transparent).

Place the design, 'sticky' side down on the wrong side of the fabric and iron it on. Note that this will give you a mirror image of your design.



Cut the design out of the fabric/Heat 'n' Bond sandwich.

Remove the paper backing. The design is now ready to be placed on the ground and ironed down.

If you are working with a fabric that needs to have its edges turned over, you can lightly tack the edges over using the tip of your iron and then iron in place as above.

Below are some of the different types of projects I've done in the past using appliqué techniques and various embellishment methods. Click on a picture for a larger view.



Appliqué and embroidery using wool and perl cotton.



Appliqué, embroidery and bead embellishment using wool felt and perl cotton.



Appliqué, couched cord and pearls using an edge treated velveteen.



Appliqué and quilting using wool and pearl cotton.



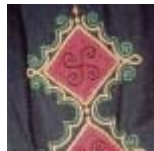
Appliqué and embroidery using wool and perl cotton.



Appliqué and embroidery using wool and perl cotton.



Appliqué, embroidery and beads using wool and perl cotton.



Appliqué and embroidery using cotton with the edges turned under and perl cotton.