

## Chapter 5

### GENERAL TECHNIQUES

#### Handling the Working Frame

Metal thread work is two-handed embroidery. Firmly secure the working frame to a table with some type of clamp, or support the frame on a portable stand. Learn to work with either hand on top and be willing to move the angle of the frame frequently. Some embroiderers will have the best control over accuracy of stitch placement, angle, etc when working rows from right to left, others from left to right, while still others top to bottom or bottom to top. Therefore, always position the frame so that your best directional movement is possible, sometimes a slight movement of the frame being necessary with every few stitches. This takes a little extra time but does become a habit and is well worth the effort.

#### Handling the Couching Thread

Use all types of silk thread in single ply when attaching metals with them. Do not work with long lengths, 18" being the maximum suggested. Silk sewing thread and maltese silk must be rubbed over beeswax—2 times when attaching smooth metals and 3-4 times when attaching coarse, rough metals, such as twist, crinkle, and purl. Beeswax strengthens the thread, helps to keep it from being frayed by the metals, and keeps it from twisting and knotting. However, never wax silk filo-floss when using it to attached metals.

#### To Begin and End the Couching Thread

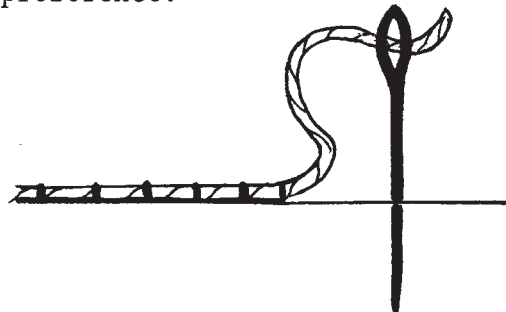
Use the waste-tail method on a design line or in any area which will subsequently be covered with embroidery. Beginning on the front of the work,

stitch through the fabrics leaving a short tail of the silk thread on the front. Stitch up and down 2 or 3 times with either tiny running or tiny back stitches. Check the security by giving the thread a gentle tug. Then bring the thread up in position to begin the couching and cut off the short tail. Do not use knots, for they can cause bumps which are noticeable when the embroidery is mounted. End the silk thread by taking 2 or 3 tiny stitches again, also in an area which will subsequently be covered with embroidery. Then bring the thread to the front of the work and cut it off flush to the fabric.

#### To Begin and End the Metal Threads

The cut ends of a strand of most metals must be plunged—i.e. taken to the back of the work. Begin, and then end, each row with 1" tails. The first couching stitch on the metal should be slightly beyond, and the last stitch slightly before, the place where the metal tail is to be plunged. Always plunge one strand at a time and never more than one strand in a given hole. The beginning tail may be plunged before the couching on the row is begun, or after the couching is completed at which time the ending tail is also plunged. This is a matter of personal preference.

To plunge, insert the proper size chenille needle about halfway through the fabrics at the exact location the row of metal is to begin or end. Insert a single strand of metal into the needle's eye, leaving a small loop as the metal comes up from the fabric. This loop is most important—if not used, the metal will be put under such strain as it first breaks through the fabrics that it will break or be otherwise damaged. One hand is kept on the front of the work to gently hold down the couched metal—some metals easily slide forward from under the couching stitches during the plunging action which can damage the metal, destroy a carefully planned line or the entire strand of metal could be pulled completely through the fabrics! From the back of the work, the other hand will gently pull the needle through the fabrics. Take care that a finger of this second hand doesn't get caught up in any other tails at the back of the work while the plunging is taking place. Then, carefully remove the needle from the tail of metal.



Some metals, such as large crinkle or cord, are difficult to plunge. Prepare the hole by taking the needle through the fabrics once or twice before the metal is threaded into the needle. Do not use pliers to assist in the pulling action, rather keep tugging on the needle until the hole in the fabrics is finally large enough to enable the metal to go through. Wrapping a small piece of rubber, such as a balloon, around the needle will provide some traction and help keep your fingers from sliding down the needle during this persistent tugging.

For a metal whose ends are to be plunged, do not pre-cut the metal to the desired length for a row. Once most metals, particularly Japanese metal, are plunged the tail cannot be pulled back to the front of the work. This action usually is damaging to the metal. When plunging the strand of metal before the couching is begun on a row, take care to put a finger down on the metal while a tail is being taken to the back of the work, or you can pull too much through the fabrics—and the excess cannot be pulled back to the front. Generally each row of metal should be plunged before the next row is begun.

Metal threads which are of a twisted nature, such as Japanese metal and twist, need to be slightly over-twisted before actually plunged through the fabrics. This is due to the fact that the plunging action often causes the metal's twist to relax which can be very noticeable on the front of the work. If overtwisted a little then the "relaxation" will only return the metal to its natural twisted state.

The tails of metal threads can be allowed to simply dangle on the back of the work until the embroidery is ready to be prepared for finishing. Or the tails can be permanently overcasted on the back. To do this, turn the working frame over, bend the tails—preferably this is done when you have more than a couple tails—back on themselves and overcast them with the couching thread for about 1/2". Then cut off any excess metal. The over-casting stitches are best worked under and around the back of the couching stitches. The backing fabric can periodically be caught up in a stitch but take care that no stitches show on the front of the work. It is important that the tails are spread out as flat as possible and that they are behind an embroidered area—or bumps will be created which will be very noticeable when the embroidery is mounted. If a large number of tails are to be secured down at one time a weaving action, rather than overcasting, is preferred in order to keep the tails side by side.

### Securing the Two Layers of Fabric

The two layers of fabric must be secured together before the embroidery with the metal threads is begun. This will keep the embroidery ground fabric from slipping around on the backing fabric which would create puckers. If dressmaker's carbon was used to transfer the design, this also will permanently define the design lines, some of which can rub off in the embroidery process. Using waxed silk sewing thread, the fabrics are fused by the use of small running stitches of 1/8" length with 1/8" spaces in between. These stitches are permanent so it is important that they are placed only on the design lines.

### Caring for the Metals

Since many metals are rather fragile they do require some special handling. Plated metals, being subject to tarnishing, should be stored in acid-free tissue paper or air-tight containers. Keep the soft purls in a separate container since the coils are easily sprung open when caught up on something. Do not store pieces of metallized kid with any materials which contain metal for acid was used to tan the hide and this will cause even aluminum to tarnish.

Japanese metal can be easily damaged if allowed to snarl and knot. When embroidering with this metal, it is preferred to have it wrapped on a soft roll, unwrapping only a few inches at a time. Make a roll out of a 6" by 9", or larger, piece of felt. The felt is rolled lengthwise, the raw edge secured with overcasting or a couple straight pins. The metal is attached to the roll, in single or double strand as required by the embroidery, with a straight pin. Turn the felt roll around and around to wrap up the metal—do not hold onto the metal and wrap it instead around the roll because this requires too much handling. The use of a felt roll is excellent for smooth passing thread also and, when you have considerable yardage, for such metals as twist, crinkle, and tubular braid.