



# ***Blackwork Journey*** ***Inspirations*** ***Thai Guardian***



## Thai Guardian – Creating a project!

Architecture has always fascinated me, especially the temples of the Far East including India and Thailand and I have long wanted to do a free style blackwork project incorporating some of the statues I have seen over the years.

When I visited Thailand in 2015 I took a whole series of photographs of the Grand Palace in Bangkok and filed them thinking that one day I would create a piece based round some of the figures which decorated the Palace.



*The Grand Palace in the heart of the bustling city of Bangkok*



*The Emerald Buddha*

The Grand Palace is Bangkok's most famous and sacred landmark. It is a 200 year old wonder that is perhaps the spiritual heart of the Thai Kingdom.



The Grand Palace is a massive complex that also houses the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (Wat Phra Kaew) perhaps the kingdom's most important temple. It houses an image of Buddha sculpted from a single block of Jade. So revered is this Buddha that only the King himself is permitted to change the robes of the Emerald Buddha, at least three times a year.



*Guardians of the Palace*

It was not the Buddha that caught my imagination, but the various statues guarding the Palace. There are a number of these ornate figures, inlaid with glittering stones on a gilded background. Fierce and intimidating, these guardians form a backdrop to a spectacular stupa or temple which houses a small Buddha carved in jade who sits on a throne, worshipped by the faithful and admired by the tourists.

The Palace's incredible architecture and intricate design continues to inspire, a testament to the brilliance and creativity of the Thai craftsmen who built it. Whilst it no longer serves any governmental role, the palace complex still hosts many official and religious ceremonies.



*The Guardians of Wat Phra Kaew Temple, Bangkok, Thailand*

Wat Phra Kaew, commonly known in English as the Temple of the Emerald Buddha and officially as Wat Phra Si Rattana Satsadaram, is regarded as the most sacred Buddhist temple in Thailand.

The scale of the building within the temple complex is hard to comprehend and the decoration is overwhelming, but the potential for the embroiderer is everywhere.

### **The final piece of the jigsaw**

After several years of thinking about the project I was ready to begin, but just needed a final push. Then in 2015 I was given a wonderful card from the Stratford Festival of Canada. The costumes were designed by Roger Kirk for the 2003 production of 'The King and I.' The character of Simon of Legree was played by Eric S. Robertson and this illustration set me thinking! Whilst his costume would make an interesting embroidery I felt I could add elements from the card into my Thai Guardian design.



*Contrast the costume of Simon of Legree with the Statue Guard of the Emerald Buddha*

I had thought about the design for several years and found a piece of heavy white material which was ideal for the project. I collected together a selection of different colour threads, beads and embellishments, metallic braids and threads then drew the design onto the material with a water-soluble pen and started stitching. I knew that the stitching would have to be very heavy and ornate if it was to represent the ornate figures which are so prevalent in the Palace.

### **Deciding on the colour scheme**

Whilst emerald and gold colours were originally in my thoughts, it was one particular photograph that caught my imagination and I decided to work with a turquoise and blue theme. Usually, I plan a design in detail in advance, but on this occasion I decided to start stitching and see how the design developed. I added, altered and changed as I progressed taking time to think about the patterns and stitches I wanted to use, but soon the project took on a life of its own.

All the embroidery was worked in a DMC 8 inch Round Plastic Flexi Hoop which was removed at the end of each session. The fabric needed to be drum tight and these hoops are easy to take on and off the fabric.

I used a selection of tapestry needles changing the size to suit the threads. Size No 24 was the one used most often.





*Some of the threads and equipment used in Thai Guardian*



Different techniques were to be included as the embroidery progressed, but as usual I started by embroidering the eyes. If the eyes are right, everything else falls into place.



The outline of the face was worked in back stitch whipped and then I moved on to the lower body to experiment with different blackwork filler patterns leaving the gold decoration to a later stage.

Blackwork filler patterns fall into three groups - light, medium and dark. Look carefully at the pattern to decide where these different areas would be. Do not put two heavy patterns together as it unbalances the design.



*Adding texture to the outlines using double knot stitch created areas to fill*

## Double knot stitch

This stitch looks like beads quite close together. Simple, textured and effective! Use 3 strands of floss or more.

- Worked downwards towards you. If necessary, draw a pencil line to practice. Pick up a small stitch either side of the line.
- Slide the needle under the stitch from RIGHT to LEFT.
- Pull gently to the left and you will see a small tail. Slide the needle downwards under the little stitch, wrap the thread round and pull gently!



## Working with beads

Usually the beads are added at the end of the embroidery, but in this instance I beaded as I worked through the design adding them as I stitched. Whilst this does cause some problems with threads tangling round the beads I wanted to see the impact they made as I worked.



The beading on the upper body was very heavy, but subtle beading worked well in the blackwork patterns on the legs.

The heavier blackwork patterns on the legs balanced the three central patterns.

## Rainbow Gallery Petit Treasure Braid PB01

I collected different makes, weights and thickness of gold thread for couching and stitching. Each thread creates a different effect on the fabric and the guardians of the temple were heavily decorated with gold.



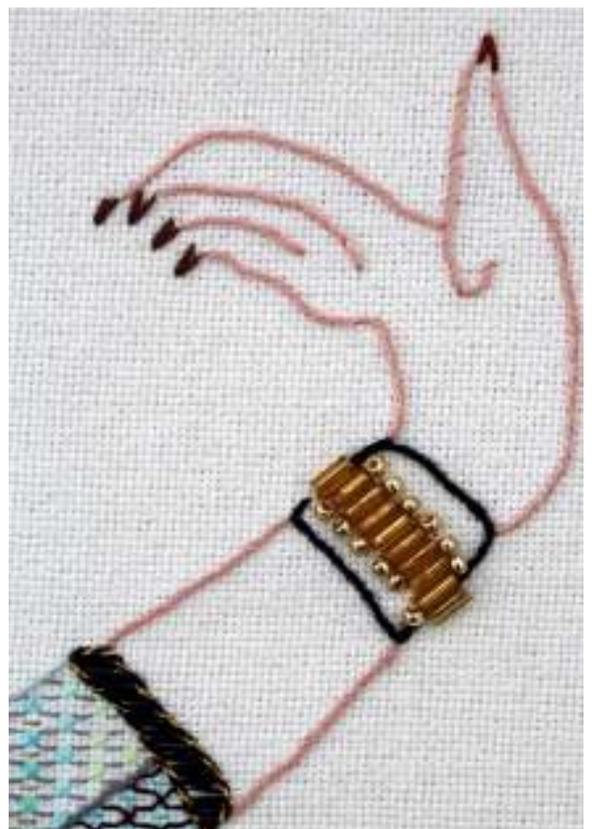
## Adding texture

I increased the weight of the design in three ways:

- By increasing the density of the stitches. This is achieved by putting the stitches closer together, not by increasing the number of strands of floss.
- By adding beads of different sizes and weights.
- By creating fringes using the same floss as the embroidery and adding a heavy motif in the waist to focus the eye and bring the different elements together.



The feet arms and hands were stitched next keeping them lighter in weight and using a flesh colour to contrast with the mask effect of the face.



*The outline of the hands and feet were worked in backstitch (two strands) and whipped with two strands to create a cord effect.*



I kept the stitching on the arms lighter to contrast with the heavy gold couching and the four-sided stitch 'wings' which framed his face. I needed to 'frame' the face with embroidery that did not detract from the face and headdress.

Once I had completed the body, the final stitching was added to create the hair and the headpiece. Heavy beading with round and bugle beads on a gold diamond mesh, a fan shaped earring and gold tassel completed the main feature, leaving just the whip which was worked in a raised chain band stitch and then beaded along its length. This is a composite stitch. Two embroidery stitches are put together to make the raised chain - the simple straight stitch which forms the bars on which you stitch the chain stitch.

I washed the water-soluble blue pen drawing away in cold water, placed it face down on a soft towel and pressed lightly.



*Thai Guardian complete!*

I hope you have enjoyed following my Guardian from sketch to finished embroidery. I framed it with fabric to become a wall hanging which I could take to my classes. I enjoyed thinking the project through, the challenges it presented and stitching the design.

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