

The Guild of Miniature Needle Arts

Getting started with miniature needlepoint.



Scale: if you look for realism and have the necessary skill, you need to know what true scale is. For example, the minimum for a stitched carpet in 12th scale is 60 count, the equivalent of 5hpi rug canvas. Embroidery for cushions and seat covers would need 120 count silk gauze to be strictly accurate and even then it would be very coarse at 10 hpi. When you get down to 24th scale, it becomes impossible to achieve true scale except for carpets - and they would have to be done on 120#. Of course there has to be compromise and the eye can be deceived by good design and crafty use of colour, but the purist will still want to get as near to reality as is possible. We use gauzes of 72# and 84# for 12th scale embroidery (and 112# and 140# occasionally). 84# is acceptable for 24th scale carpets - the equivalent of 3hpi rug canvas - and 112# is as near as it's practicable to get for embroidery.

Needles suitable for 54# or 60# are size 12 sharps but it's a good idea to blunt the tips to make it easier to go through the holes and avoid splitting the threads of the gauze. Beading needles size 13 are used for 72# and size 15 for 84# upwards. They have the advantage of long eyes for easy threading but are long and sharp so it pays to cut them down by about a third and resharpen them on a grindstone to a blunted tapestry point. Polishing the reformed point with silver polish greatly improves performance.

Always work in good light under a distortion-free magnifier, (unless you're lucky enough not to need one). Use a frame which leaves both your hands free. A small lap frame is ideal. This reduces the likelihood of getting the fine threads snarled on your fingers. A small piece of expensive silk gauze can be zig-zagged into a piece of waste fabric large enough to fit the frame. A plain dark cloth spread under your work shows up the holes better. A useful tip for avoiding snarled thread is to cut the fingers off disposable vinyl gloves as finger stalls. It's usually sufficient just to cover your thumbs, a most likely source of snagging.

Silk thread must be floss or twisted continuous filament, *not* spun, which is made up of short fibres and disintegrates if you try to split it. By gently spreading the filaments, it's possible to separate the "bundles" that make up the thread and take out as many as you need. Some threads, like Mulberry 140/3, comprise 3 distinct plies (each with 5 bundles) which slide effortlessly apart. 1ply is perfect for 112#, 2 ply for 72#, all 3 for 60#. For 84#, use one ply double with one of its 5 bundles removed. Thicker floss silks will all separate into plies and bundles with care, some more readily than others. Piper's 2/20 and 4/20 are fine enough to use without splitting on 112#, the 2/20 being used double, though the colour range is rather limited. Their 90 floss is perfect for 60/72#, splits easily and comes in an extensive range of colours.

Piper Silks, Chinnerys, Egremont Street, Glemsford, Suffolk. CO10 7SA. Phone: 01787 280920.
Contact: Susan Peck.

Mulberry Silks, Silkwood, 4 Park Close, Tetbury, Gloucs.. GL8 8HS Phone: 01666 503438.
Contact: Patricia Woods.

Both are mail order only and you may be able to get small amounts of each colour if you order enough and speak to them nicely.

SILK GAUZE & NEEDLES: Elizabeth Anderson, "Miniature Embroideries", Rosedale, Tall Elms Close, Bromley, Kent. BR2 0TT. Phone & Fax: 020 8460 1951

FINE COTTON & LINEN FABRICS: Willow Fabrics, 95 Town Lane, Mobberley, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 7HH. Freephone: 0800 567811 Fax: 01565 872239

(Old 90-100 count cotton/linen lawn hankies can sometimes be found in charity shops etc.)

KNITTING NEEDLES 20 - 24#: Mary Jane Doyle. Phone 0161 7977983 for details.

TRY A KIT FIRST? Nicola Mascall has lovely ones. 88 The Butts, Frome, Somerset, BA11 4AF
Email: nicolamascall@hotmail.com Phone 01373 454302

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