



## Elizabethan Raised Embroidery By Lady Genevieve D' Valois



During the mid to late 16<sup>th</sup> century a new style of embroidery became all the rage in England. This style of embroidery is referred to today as Elizabethan Raised Embroidery. This type of embroidery had some unique features in its style and its use and became the second “golden age” of embroidery in England.

### Uses

We primarily see this style of embroidery used on personal effects. Items of clothing such as jackets and sleeves and accessories such as gloves, caps and bags were among the most popular choices. We also have examples of some furnishings decorated in this way, including pillow covers, cushions and wall hangings. It is rarely seen used outside of these applications.



### Materials

Silk satin and linen were the primary choices for ground fabric for this type of embroidery. The choice depended on the intended fineness of the finished piece as well as its use. The colored designs were always worked using silk floss. Gold and silver metallic threads, pearls, jewels and spangles were often used to add decorative flair.



## Stitches

Elizabethan Raised embroidery primarily used a detached buttonhole stitch. Each section is outlined with chain stitch and then worked free of the ground fabric, only attaching to the chain stitches. Once the section is nearing completion a small amount of cotton or wool is stuffed inside to give a raised effect. Then, the section is finished off by tacking the embroidery down to the outside row of chain stitch. This same stitch can also be worked in such a way that brings an element, such as a flower petal, up off the fabric which gives a stunning 3-D effect. There are extant examples of pieces done solely in this stitch as well as pieces done with a mixture of stitches. Other stitches include trellis stitch and feather stitch which were used on elements that didn't necessarily lend themselves to be padded. A perfect example of this would be a bird, which was frequently embroidered using a mixture of these two stitches. Additionally, satin stitch could be used. According to Virginia Churchill Bath in her book, *Embroidery Masterworks*, some of the very small details did not lend themselves to raised work so the standard practice for handling these was to outline and fill with satin stitch. Curling vines were primarily done in goldwork, but there are also some examples done in chain stitch.



## Design

Designs for Elizabethan Raised Embroidery tended to focus on nature. Flowers, fruits, birds, butterflies and caterpillars were some of the most popular motifs. These motifs were most frequently taken straight from the period herbal books. However, the designs were done with little or no consideration for the natural relationship of size. A perfect example would be pansies that are twice the size of the bird. Color choices were also made without regard to natural occurrence. According to W.B. Redfern in his book *Royal & Historic Gloves and shoes*, these items were embroidered in many colors of silks, chosen because they were aesthetically pleasing. According to Barbara Snook, "Scrolling stems enclose plant forms worked in colors chosen with slight regard to nature." It is also common to see the same style of flower worked in several different colors based on the whim of the embroiderer, sometimes even within the same piece, such as the carnations seen in the Cushion cover shown below. The Elizabethans valued a variety of colors in their embroidery and had at their disposal a multitude of color choices including bright reds, greens, blues, purples, yellows and orange as well as softer hues in pinks, greens, corals and blues.



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