SECTION 3

# backgrounds

This section provides instructions on how to create backgrounds for embroidery. As it is the first project recommended as a starting point the instructions are specific to 'making a background of overlapped and layered fabrics'. Even though they are similar to those in Section 2 'Creating a project' it is recommended that both instructions be used in conjunction with this and all projects.

# green & blue 1 collage with stitched edges

The aim of this project is to create a collage of overlapped and layered fabric as a background for embroidery and a vocabulary of stitches to secure, decorate and enhance raw, frayed, turned and selvedge edges.

## finished size of collage
**25 x 24 cm (9 ⅞ x 9 ½ in)**

## materials

- Indian muslin for lining 30 x 20 cm (11 ¾ x 7 ⅞ in); use 1, 2 or more layers depending on the weight of the muslin and your preference; zigzag stitch or overlock the edges of the layers together before attaching to a frame (first layer/lining)
- Silk dupion and/or other rich fabrics: various widths of strips 2.5 to 7.5 cm (1 to 3 in) (instructions below for preparing strips of fabric)
- Silk or other ribbons or yarns
- Organza, transparent or semi transparent: strips of torn organza or purchased organza ribbons
- Embroidery threads and yarns such as stranded cotton, perle 8 or 12, stranded or perle silk and rayon in colours to match or contrast the fabrics
- Sewing cotton or 1 strand embroidery cotton for tacking
- Embroidery frame 30.5 cm (12 in) or Embroidery hoop 15–18 cm (6–7 in)
- Pins
- Needles: embroidery, assorted sizes 1 to 9 or larger as needed

## making a background of overlapped and layered fabrics

Make the collage before stitching in the hoop, OR on the framed lining.

### preparing strips of fabric

Allow 2 cm (¾ in) extra on the width of each strip for overlapping of 1 cm (⅜ in) on each side.

• **Tearing strips** Attractive edges are made by tearing silk dupion along the grain after first cutting the edge for 6–12 mm (½ or 1 in). Remove fabric threads from the edges to create fringing.

• **Cutting strips** With sharp scissors cut strips of fabrics that cannot be torn, or for a different effect from tearing.

### lining and layering the background

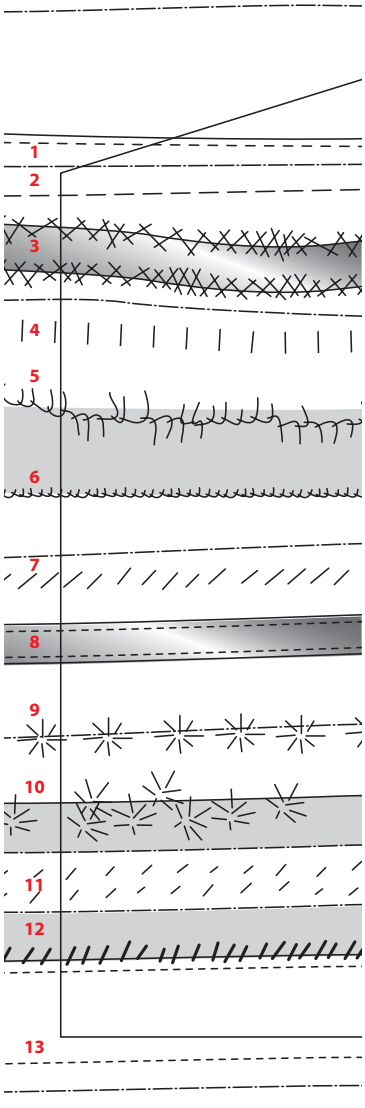
• **First layer/lining** Lay one or two layers of cotton muslin on a flat surface (for hoop) or mount it in a frame.

• **Second layer (layering)** Lay cut or torn strips of silk or other rich fabrics of

varying widths on top of the first layer (lining) overlapping the edges 1 cm (⅜ in). Refer to the diagram with the following project, showing the width of the strips. Vary the width of the strips for interest, between 2–7.5 cm (¾–3 in) wide, for example 2, 3, 4.5, 5, 6 and 7.5 cm (¾, 1 3/16, 1 ¾, 2, 2 ⅜, and 3 in). Press the strips before applying to the lining.

• **Third layer (added layers)** of cut or torn strips of organza and/or ribbons or ribbon-like yarns may be placed across middle or over the edges of silk strips to create more variations of colours and texture,

When you are happy with the result, pin and tack them all together with sewing cotton or 1 strand cotton in a closely matching colour. Make the tacking stitches 3 mm (⅛ in) long on the front and 2.5cm (1 in) at the back to minimise their impact on the colour scheme. If they blend well there is no need to remove them as the work progresses.




*A harmonious colour scheme of green and blue is made from different widths of raw, frayed, turned and selvedge edges of silk fabrics layered with overlapped edges, added ribbons and organza, and edges secured and decorated with stitches as follows:*

***1*** *Running stitch with 1 strand silk equal to perle 8*

***2*** *Running stitch with 1 strand cotton*

***3*** *Herringbone stitch on both sides of a silk ribbon with 1 strand cotton*

***4*** *Straight stitch, vertical with rayon perle equal to perle 8*

***5*** *Blanket stitch, up and down, with 1 strand space-dyed silk*

***6*** *Blanket stitch with rayon perle equal to perle 8*

***7*** *Straight stitch, diagonal with silk equal to perle 5*

***8*** *Running stitches with 1 strand cotton on edges of silk ribbon*

***9*** *Straight stitch eyelets with 1 strand cotton*

***10*** *Straight stitch eyelets with 1 strand cotton, in random sizes and spaces*

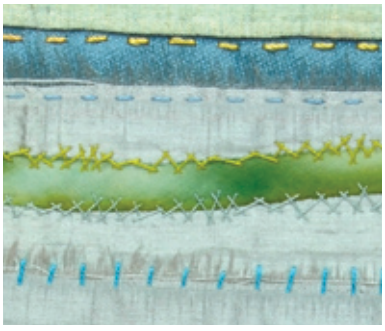
***11*** *Straight stitch, diagonal, 2 rows on a ribbon yarn with rayon perle equal to perle 8*

***12*** *Straight stitch, diagonal over a folded edge of organza (worked with edge held away), the left-hand section with rayon cord equal to perle 3, the middle section with cotton perle 8 and the right-hand section with 3 strands cotton*

***13*** *Running stitch with rayon perle equal to perle 8*

PROJECT 1

## green & blue 1



### stitches for edges

Decorate the edges using the stitches as described in the stitch illustration. Different patterns are made by each stitch. Running stitch is the most subtle, followed by herringbone stitch which is more textured, while buttonhole stitch is even more textured and noticeable. The characteristics and impact of each stitch are clearly seen on the diagram. Horizontal stitches are more restful, vertical are neutral, diagonal and eyelets create more movement and herringbone, up and down blanket and random eyelets give more texture.

PROJECT 2

## green & blue 2 stitched & beaded bag

This project shows how to embellish a collaged and stitched background with beads and make it into a bag with a wrapped and beaded cord.

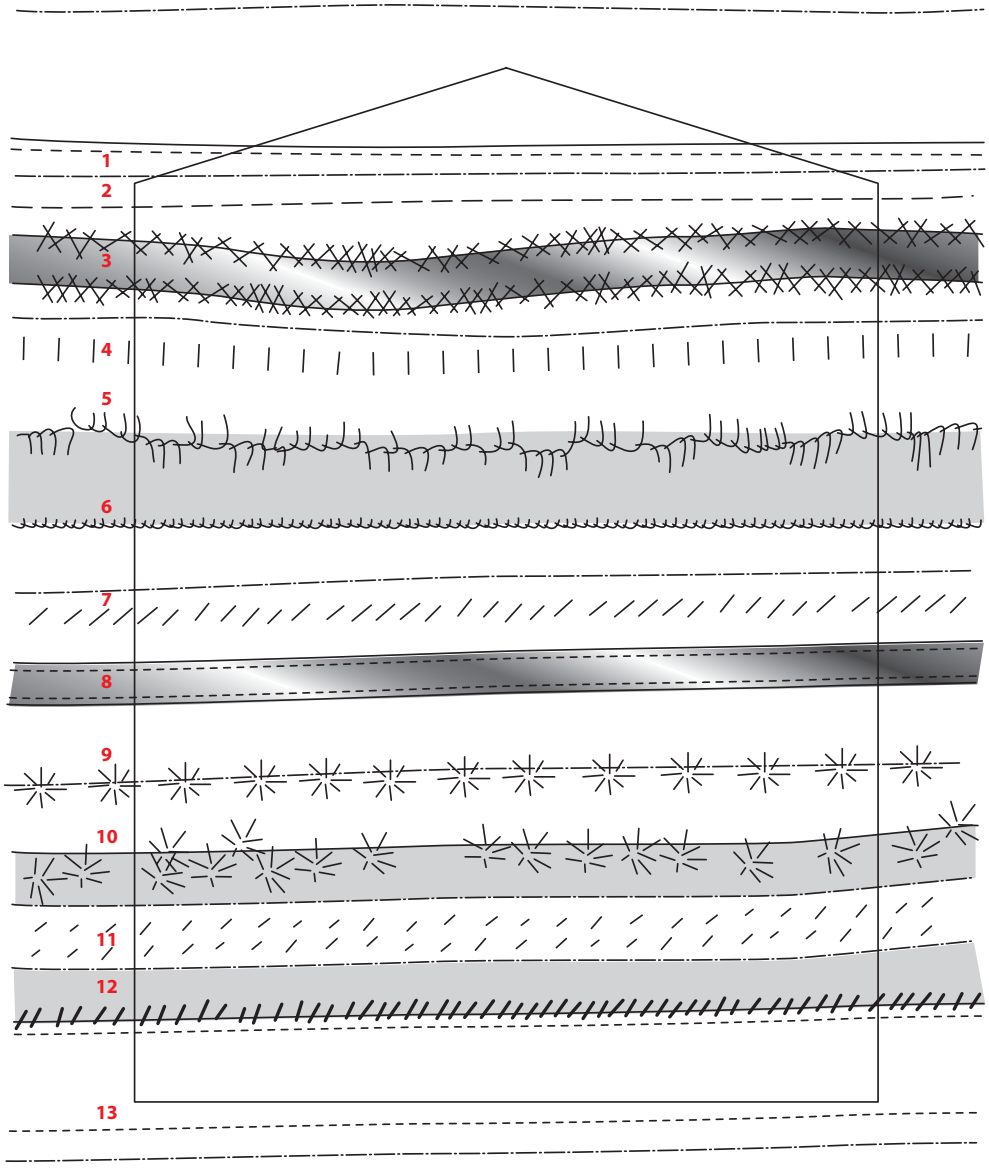
***pattern for green & blue bag***

silk ribbon (Rows 3 and 8)

organza (Rows 6 and 10-12 and row 11, with ribbon applied to top of organza)

edges of fabric, including fraying

enlarge or reduce diagram to suit



The background collage of this bag is shown on the diagram for project 1 as it is the same. Reduce or enlarge the pattern to suit your purpose and tack the outline of the bag onto the background.

Embellish the background with bead patterns.
See Section 6, Stitch and bead patterns.

Make up the bag following directions in Section 7, Finishing and making up.

Attach a bought cord or make a wrapped and beaded cord. See Section 5, Cords for embellishment and trimming. The wrapped and beaded cords in the photo consist of two cords 90 cm (35 ½ in) long, one made in DMC 6 stranded cotton colour 597, the other in colour 733. The core and wrapping are made from 8 lengths of 6-stranded cotton and a string of blue and green beads. Trim the threads at each end of the cords to make a tassel and tie an overhand knot at each end. The two cords are folded in half and looped together at the midway point at the top of the bag and attached double to the sides of the bag with slip stitch in 1 strand of the same colour.

PROJECT 3

# blue & orange

## running stitch patterns for merging & blending backgrounds

### materials

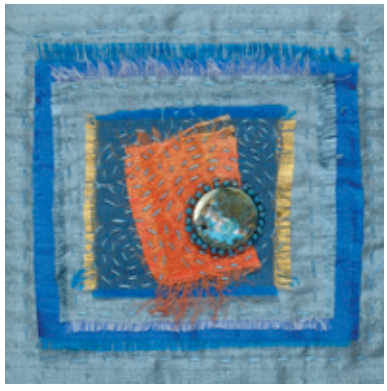
- Indian muslin for the first layer (lining), 36 x 30 cm (14 1/8 x 11 ¾ in): 1, 2 or more layers depending on the weight of the muslin and your preference; zigzag stitch or overlock the edges of all layers together before attaching to the frame (first layer/ lining)
- Silk dupion or other suitable fabric 35 x 26 cm (13 ¾ x 10 ¼ in) for the background (second layer)
- 12 squares silk dupion or other suitable fabric, each 5.5 cm (2 ⅛ in) square, lightly frayed edges (third layer)
- Silk, organza and/or ribbons or flat yarns (fourth layer)
- Embroidery threads: stranded cotton or silk, perle 8
- Sewing cotton or one strand cotton embroidery cotton for tacking
- Beads
- Beading needle
- Beading thread (or size 50 sewing cotton pulled through beeswax)
- Embroidery frame, 30.5 cm (12 in)
- Pins
- Needles; embroidery, assorted sizes 3 to 9 or larger as needed

Running stitch is a versatile basic stitch and many patterns and textures can be made by:

- Changing the way the fabric is held, in a frame, a hoop or in the hand
- Varying the tension at which the stitch is pulled or tightened
- Varying the evenness or lengths of stitches
- Varying the spaces between the stitches
- Varying the thickness of thread: one strand of embroidery cotton in a size 7 embroidery needle gives a very subtle background, while 2 strands of cotton,

perle or rayon threads together in a larger embroidery needle make a much stronger impact.

Different effects can be achieved by:
• Stitching with the fabric held taut in a frame or hoop, which results in a smooth surface of stitch pattern as shown in the photo for this project
• Stitching while holding the fabric in the hand produces undulations in the fabric created by the patterns of the stitch, as shown here in the detail from 'Spirals, shells and beads' (a project not included in this book).



*Detail from 'Spirals, shells and beads': running stitch, medium tension*

• Stitching while holding the fabric in the hand and pulling stitches tighter creates more prominent waves and undulations in the patterns of the stitch, as shown in here in the detail of a long yellow strip with running stitch.

The background for this project consists of four layers:
• The first layer (lining) is of one or more pieces of muslin, 36 x 30 cm (14 1/8 x 11 ¾ in)
• The second layer is the background fabric, a rectangle of silk, 35 x 26 cm (13 ¾ x 10 ¼ in)
• The third layer is twelve squares of silk fabric, each 5.5 cm (2 1/8 in) square, in colours to match or contrast with the background, edges lightly frayed, spaced 6 mm (1/2 in) apart.
• The fourth layer is small pieces of fabric on top of each square.

Each square is stitched with different patterns and sizes of running stitch. The impact made by the colour and thickness of threads illustrates the different effects achieved by using threads which are thick or thin, light or dark, warm or cool. The colour scheme in this project is a complementary contrast of blue and orange with the addition of scraps of light yellow fabrics in rows 1, 3 and 4 which pick up and reflect the colour of the warp or weft of the fringed fabric squares applied in the third layer.

## preparing the background

**First layer** Mount the muslin onto a frame, refer to page 16.

**Second layer** Lay silk 35 x 26 (13 ¾ x 10 ¼ in) on top.

**Third layer** Pin the 12 squares onto the background fabric in four rows of three, approximately 6 mm (¼ in) apart.
Tack these three layers together.

**Fourth layer** Pin scraps of silk and/or organza onto each square. They are only pinned on at this stage as their position may alter as stitching progresses.