

Embroidery [from O. Fr. *embroder*, deriv. of a subst. appearing in Ital. *bordo*, Fr. *bord*, border, hem, outer edge, a loan-word from Teutonic; cf. O. H. Germ. *bort*]: needle-work upon textile material, leather, or the like, with which are sometimes combined applied pieces of colored material, feathers, jewels, or even pieces of looking-glass. The object of embroidery is usually decoration, but names and initials are often worked upon articles of clothing, etc., for convenience, and heraldic bearings and other devices, whose purpose is only in a secondary sense decorative, have often been embroidered. In the nineteenth century embroidery has been much in use at times for women's garments, and at others almost wholly abandoned, except that done with linen thread on undergarments, which has never gone out of fashion altogether. The colored embroidery which has been used the most commonly and for the greatest length of time during the nineteenth century is that of India shawls, called Kashmir shawls, and often, erroneously, camels'-hair shawls. Apart from these, women of European race sometimes use embroidery in color on gowns or other outer garments of silk or other unwashable material, sometimes embroidery in crewels on cotton or linen, and sometimes white embroidery on white; but none of these fashions is lasting. At times it is considered elegant to have curtains embroidered, and even hangings for walls are occasionally decorated in this way. When such decoration is in fashion, besides the costly hand-embroidery, there is produced machine-made embroidery, which always has the fault of being mechanical in look, hard and formal. (See MACHINE WORK and DECORATIVE ART.) On the other hand, some attempt has been made to work with the needle decorative pictures of great richness, the subjects selected being those which allow of a somewhat close rendering of natural forms by needle-work. Thus on a blue silk ground, golden-yellow wheat ears below and flying bees above give an impression of summer, while the effect of the soft floss-silk upon the hard and smooth ground is exceedingly decorative. This work is also applied to women's garments, but not commonly; indeed it requires protection from wear, and often needs to be framed and glazed like a water-color drawing.

The decorative art of the past is very rich in the branch of embroidery, and Oriental nations kept the ancient traditions in force and continued to produce splendid work until the influence of European commerce destroyed or greatly injured and degraded those arts in the course of the nineteenth century. In antiquity the great simplicity of the dress of European nations caused embroidery to be less in use, but with the early Middle Ages it became a common adornment of costly dress throughout Europe. It is to be observed also that where the state of the industrial arts is low, embroidery is apt to develop more rapidly than weaving. Rich textile fabrics come only with some advance in general civilization. In this way it happens that the European Middle Ages are the time of the most general use of embroidery of many kinds. The dress of laymen and ecclesiastics and the decoration of church and domestic interiors called for it continually. England was especially the home of elaborate pictorial needle-work in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Some few of the special kinds of embroidery may be mentioned here. *Couching* is the laying down of threads, as of gold or silver or floss silk, side by side upon the surface to be adorned, and holding them fast there by stitches of finer and stronger thread which may not show at all. The larger and softer thread is not dragged through the material of the ground. *Appliqué embroidery* is that which is done by cutting out pieces of cloth, velvet, or other materials, sewing these pieces fast to the ground, and working the edges with stitches. Such patches of stuff may be cut to resemble leaves or flowers, and stitches on their face may express veins or shading. *Cut-cloth embroidery* is a variety of this, or merely another name for it. *Chain-stitch embroidery* is named from the stitch, in which a loop of thread is left on the surface of the stuff to be adorned, and the needle takes the thread through that loop before making another; this is the most generally used of all kinds of work, and is the very essence of the pictorial embroidery of the Middle Ages, English work being especially noted for the fineness of the chain-stitch, by means of which faces and hands, even of small size, were delicately rendered. *Crewel work* is done with worsted thread, usually on cotton or linen. For the various thread embroideries, cut-work, etc., see LACE.

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