

Just Doodlin' Around

A few years back, I completed a design course offered through EGA on drawing and designing for needlework. One of the requirements for each lesson was to submit "doodle cloths" showing different aspects of the design process. At first, I thought these "doodles" were unnecessary; after all, I considered myself an experienced stitcher with literally decades of stitching under my belt. (I will leave the exact number of decades a mystery!) But I quickly changed my mind after working through a couple of assignments, and now I think that "doodle cloths" are wonderful things!

Just what is a "doodle cloth" (or "doodle canvas")? At its very basic level, it is simply a scrap of canvas where you can practice different stitches or techniques. For some people, using a blank area to the side of your painted design is sufficient. Others may keep a small piece of canvas framed up in their stitching bag. Still others may use a larger piece of canvas or simply collect smaller pieces together in a binder or a file. A doodle canvas helps to avoid that dreaded "rip it - rip it" session when you realize you don't like the color, stitch, or thread chosen for a particular area on your canvas. It avoids leaving large canvas holes where you've pulled out existing stitches, avoids inadvertently damaging other stitched areas, avoids the possibility of cutting the canvas, and avoids the thread residue (fuzz or dyes) left behind.

Here are a few ideas for using a doodle canvas:

If you are practicing a new stitch, work a few rows or a small square area on the doodle. This will allow you to get a feel for how the stitches relate to each other within the stitch pattern. On our website is an article titled "Deconstructing the Stitch" which explains how you can use the relationship between stitches in a pattern to help you execute the stitch and figure out compensation.

If you are working with a new thread, use your doodle to get a feel for how it behaves. Does it need a laying tool? What type of tension should you use with the thread? How many strands does it take to get the coverage you want?

Use your doodle to help figure out design challenges. Does the stitch recede to the background or does it move forward in the design? Does the thread match the stitch chosen? For example, basketweave done in a single strand silk or wool will look very different if done with a fuzzy or metallic thread.

Even though I learned about using doodle cloths a while back, there are still times when I skip this step and regret it later. I recently submitted a piece for judging where I did an area of Smyrna Cross in two colors. I wanted high contrast, so I picked a bright yellow and a deep green. I used the yellow to place the cross stitches and the green to place the upright cross stitches on top. The net effect was that the yellow "disappeared" and the green dominated. If I had taken the time to doodle, I might have chosen to switch the colors, use different colors, or pick a different stitch. Now whether I am designing for myself or for a stitch guide, I look back at my doodle canvases or work a few new ones. This is particularly important when writing a custom guide for a client, since I am not stitching the design beforehand. I take into account the types of threads and stitches the client prefers, but I also want their piece to have an overall pleasing design instead of just a bunch of stitches thrown together.

I hope you will give doodle stitching a try. It may just become your new best friend!