

HOW ABOUT?

with Louise Howland



This month, Louise finds her inspiration in beautiful blooms of all shapes and colours.

Are there any of us who haven't stitched a flower of some kind, whatever the style? My first attempt at embroidery was a whipped running stitch pony on purple linen, (of which for some unknown and unjustified reason I was inordinately proud) with a rose amongst maidenhair fern following shortly after. I have never stitched another pony, but flowers are a different story altogether.

Every possible shade, hue and tone, every shape, size and proportion occurs in flowers. With over 270,000 kinds of flowering plants in the world, the most avid needlework gardener will only ever create just a fraction of these. I imagine the embroidery design to be the landscaping and the fabric is the ground, both of which require careful choice and preparation. The thread box is rich and seething compost and our techniques are the labour.

It seems that for as long as people have taken up needle and thread, flowers have been the most popular of embroidered subjects. At Floriade last spring, a realisation struck me that, regardless of circumstance, flowers are able to bestow a moment with perfection, providing a feeling of utter contentment, of being in the moment and wanting for nothing more. Is this why we attempt to recreate them?

The day I first met my daughter,

we were in a taxi driving slowly through the crowded, sweltering streets of Kolkata. She commented to the driver, and when I asked for an interpretation, he told me that she was remarking on the beauty of the red flowering bush we had passed. Indeed port a pul (flower) was one of the first Bengali words I learnt. Rina and I smiled at the flowers and each other, and a little more of the trepidation passed.

Whether it be perky pomponette daisies, resourceful violets poking their way through cracks in the cement, sophisticated orchids gracefully arching, frilly petticoat-layered ranunculus, prettily nodding pansies, each is a wonder, a beauty and will rarely fail to improve our own bearing.

The Ancient Greeks believed that paradise was carpeted with flowers and the Chinese say that for every woman living in this world, a flower has bloomed in the next. Flowers are also our state and national emblems. They're also our personal symbols of love, sorrow, celebration, congratulation, apology, and a perfect gift to give when nothing else seems appropriate.

Do you hanker for satin-stitched flowers with overcast stitch stems on a muslin pincushion, stylised roses and buds in point russe, a spray of fuschia on a linen collar or a stumpwork orchid on a box? Perhaps pillowcases adorned with a



shadow trapunto posy, a bold appliqué of tulips, a field of Flanders poppies in cross stitch, beaded sprays of lilac, wreaths of goldworked honeysuckle and pomegranate or silk ribbon chrysanthemums? Whatever your choice, flowers are so often the reason we are happy to persevere with blending threads, combining colours, experimenting with stitches and combinations, unpicking and reworking, propagating and nurturing.

Until next month,

Louise